

Impact of Leadership Style of District Education Officer towards Primary Schools Academic Performance: The Case of Misungwi District

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Abstract— Leadership plays an important role in improving the quality of education and students' academic performance through effective management, motivation, supervision, coordination, and guidance of education personnel. This study examines the influence of the District Education Officer's (DEO) leadership style on Standard Seven students' academic performance in primary schools in Misungwi District, Tanzania. The study employed a convergent research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership style and academic performance. The study involved 165 respondents, comprising 150 teachers and 15 headteachers, who were selected using sampling procedures described in the study. Primary data were collected from teachers and headteachers, while students' academic performance data were obtained from school performance records. The findings revealed that transformational leadership was the most frequently applied leadership style by the DEO, as reported by 60.0% of teachers and 53.3% of headteachers. Democratic leadership was also identified as an important leadership approach. The findings further indicated an improvement in students' academic performance, with the proportion of students who performed increasing from 68.57% in 2022 to 89.70% in 2025, while the proportion of students who failed declined from 31.43% to 10.30% over the same period. The study concludes that transformational and democratic leadership practices, particularly those emphasizing motivation, participation, collaboration, communication, and shared responsibility, are important in creating an environment that supports improved academic performance. The study recommends that the District Education Office should strengthen transformational and democratic leadership practices, promote participatory decision-making, provide professional support to teachers and headteachers, and use school performance data to guide educational interventions.

I. INTRODUCTION

District education officers play an important role in the administration and quality assurance of primary education in Tanzania. The education system requires effective coordination, supervision, monitoring of educational standards, and provision of professional support to schools in order to promote quality teaching and learning. The Ministry responsible for education in Tanzania has, among its functions, the responsibility to provide professional support and academic leadership for primary education, coordinate quality development, oversee learning assessment, and ensure compliance with established educational standards and regulations (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2026). Effective educational leadership is therefore an important component of improving the quality of education and students' academic outcomes. Research on educational leadership has similarly demonstrated that leadership practices can influence school effectiveness, teacher commitment, school climate and students' academic achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008).

The Government of Tanzania has implemented various interventions aimed at improving access to and quality of education. These include capitation grants, provision of teaching and learning materials, teacher recruitment and development, school feeding initiatives, and other measures designed to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Capitation grants, for example, are intended to support school operational activities and the acquisition of textbooks and other educational requirements (National Audit Office of Tanzania [NAOT], 2026). However, the availability of educational resources alone may not guarantee improved academic outcomes because the effectiveness of educational interventions also depends on how resources are managed and how teachers and other school stakeholders are guided and motivated. Consequently, school leadership has increasingly been recognized as an important factor in explaining variations in school effectiveness and students' academic performance (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008).

In Tanzania, evidence from studies conducted in different educational contexts indicates that leadership practices are associated with students' academic achievement. For example, Jumbe and Amos (2024), in their study of public primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, found that educational leadership styles were significant in relation to pupils' academic achievement. Similarly, Mosoria and Luhamyaa (2025) reported that transformational leadership practices contributed to improved students' academic

performance in public secondary schools in Arusha District Council. These findings suggest that the way educational leaders communicate, motivate teachers, encourage participation and provide professional support can contribute to the creation of a school environment that facilitates improved academic performance.

Against this background, students' academic performance in Misungwi District has shown notable changes in recent years. The performance records presented in this study indicate an increase in the proportion of students performing from 68.57% in 2022 to 69.03% in 2023, followed by a substantial increase to 88.41% in 2024 and 89.70% in 2025. At the same time, the proportion of students who failed declined from 31.43% in 2022 to 10.30% in 2025. These changes provide an important basis for examining factors that may have contributed to the improvement in academic performance.

Despite the observed improvement in academic performance, limited attention has been given to the leadership style applied by the District Education Officer and its possible contribution to changes in primary school performance in Misungwi District. Much of the existing literature focuses on leadership at school level, particularly the leadership of headteachers and principals, while relatively less attention has been directed towards leadership exercised at the district education administration level. This creates a contextual gap regarding how the leadership practices of the DEO may influence teachers, headteachers and ultimately students' academic outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to assess the leadership style applied by the District Education Officer in Misungwi District and its contribution to improving primary school and students' academic performance.

The study is guided by Transformational Leadership Theory, originally developed by Burns (1978) and subsequently developed into a more comprehensive model by Bass (1985). Transformational leadership emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire followers, develop a shared vision, stimulate commitment and encourage followers to work towards collective organizational goals. Bass (1985) argues that transformational leaders motivate followers to transcend immediate self-interest and work towards higher levels of performance. In the context of this study, the DEO's leadership can be understood in terms of the extent to which the officer inspires and motivates headteachers and teachers, encourages their participation in decision-making, provides professional support, communicates educational goals and promotes commitment towards improved school performance.

The relevance of transformational leadership to this study is further supported by Bass and Riggio (2006), who explain that transformational leadership involves idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. These dimensions are relevant to district educational leadership because the DEO can influence school personnel by communicating a clear educational vision, encouraging innovative approaches to teaching and management, recognizing teachers' contributions, and providing support according to the needs of individual schools and education personnel. Such practices can strengthen teachers' motivation and commitment and create conditions that are conducive to improved academic performance.

The study is also grounded in Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (1986). Social Cognitive Theory explains human behaviour as resulting from the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behaviour and environmental influences. Bandura (1986) emphasizes that individuals are not simply passive recipients of environmental influences; rather, they actively interact with and influence their social environments. This perspective is relevant to the present study because the leadership behaviour of the DEO forms part of the organizational environment in which headteachers and teachers work. Leadership practices may influence teachers' attitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, behaviour and commitment, while teachers' responses and performance may, in turn, influence the school environment.

The application of Social Cognitive Theory therefore provides a basis for understanding how leadership may indirectly influence students' academic performance. When the DEO creates an environment characterized by encouragement, professional support, participation, positive communication and shared responsibility, teachers and headteachers may develop stronger motivation and confidence in carrying out their responsibilities. Their resulting behaviours and teaching practices may subsequently contribute to improved student learning outcomes. Bandura's (1986) theoretical position is particularly relevant because it recognizes the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environment rather than attributing performance outcomes to one factor alone.

Consequently, the combination of Transformational Leadership Theory and Social Cognitive Theory provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining the relationship between the leadership style of the DEO and students' academic performance in Misungwi District. Transformational Leadership Theory explains how the

DEO may motivate, inspire and influence teachers and headteachers, while Social Cognitive Theory helps explain how such leadership practices interact with individual behaviour and the school environment to influence educational outcomes.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The target populations were teachers and headteachers. Multi-stage sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed. The sample size involved 150 teachers and 15 headteachers from the Misungwi District. The study used primary data from the field and secondary data from performance statistics. Both descriptive and quantitative analyses were employed. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS ver. 20, IBM, USA) and Microsoft Excel was used to statistical data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership style of DEO primary school

The study cross-examined the leadership styles applied by DEO in primary school in refining the school and students' academic performance in Misungwi District. The respondent's response on the subject matter remarked as follows;

Table 1: Leadership Style of Primary School DEO

	Headteachers		Teacher's	
	N=15	%	N=150	%
Democratic	4	26.7	35	23.3
Visionary	2	13.3	10	6.7
Transformational	8	53.3	90	60
Servant	1	6.7	9	6
Autocratic	0	0	2	1.3
Distributed	0	0	4	2.7

The Table 1 shows that out of 15 interviewed headteachers 12(80.0%) revealed that democratic and transformational leadership style were the main styles that primary school DEO employed to improve schools and students' academic performance. On the other side out of 150 interviewed teachers 90(60.0%) supported the subject matter that, transformational leadership style as the main style used by the DEO to ensure schools and students' academic performance. The findings indicate that transformational leadership and democratic leadership styles gives a chance for supporters who are teachers and headteachers to coherent themselves and motivate to go beyond their immediate self-centeredness in order to advance corporate

objectives of schools and students' academic performance. The findings therefore suggest that the DEO mainly relied on leadership practices that emphasized motivation, participation, cooperation, communication and shared responsibility in improving school and students' academic performance.

The finding that transformational leadership was the dominant leadership style is supported by Mosoria and Luhamyaa (2025), whose study in public secondary schools in Arusha District Council found that transformational leadership practices positively influenced students' academic performance. Their findings particularly emphasized teacher and student motivation, open communication, involvement, quality feedback and the creation of a supportive learning environment as important mechanisms through which transformational leadership contributes to learning outcomes. This is consistent with the present study because the dominance of transformational leadership in Misungwi suggests that the DEO's emphasis on motivating and involving teachers and headteachers may have contributed to creating a working environment supportive of improved academic outcomes.

The findings are also supported by Shahin et al. (2024), who observed that educational leaders have an important role in shaping the educational community and that leadership practices influence the school environment, teaching effectiveness, learning outcomes and students' achievement. The authors further emphasize the importance of positive relationships, professional development, resource allocation and adapting leadership approaches to the needs of the educational environment. These observations support the current findings because transformational leadership exercised by the DEO may have influenced teachers and headteachers not merely through administrative supervision but through motivation, professional support and positive working relationships.

The current finding concerning democratic leadership is similarly supported by Jumbe and Amos (2024), who investigated educational leadership styles and pupils'

academic achievement in public primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. Their study found that effective leadership styles significantly influenced academic performance and particularly highlighted visionary, supportive and collaborative leadership approaches. The study further reported that clear communication, collaboration and support created a positive school culture that motivated members of the school community and contributed to improved academic outcomes. The similarity between the two studies is important because both were conducted in Tanzanian primary education settings and emphasize participation, collaboration and supportive leadership as important conditions for improving pupils' academic achievement.

The finding is further consistent with Masudi, Muhammad and Rahim (2023), who reviewed the relationship between school leadership and students' academic performance. Their review concluded that school leadership is an important factor influencing students' academic outcomes. They also reported evidence from Tanzania showing a strong positive relationship between democratic leadership and students' academic performance. This provides additional support for the present study's finding that democratic leadership was one of the major leadership approaches employed by the DEO in Misungwi District.

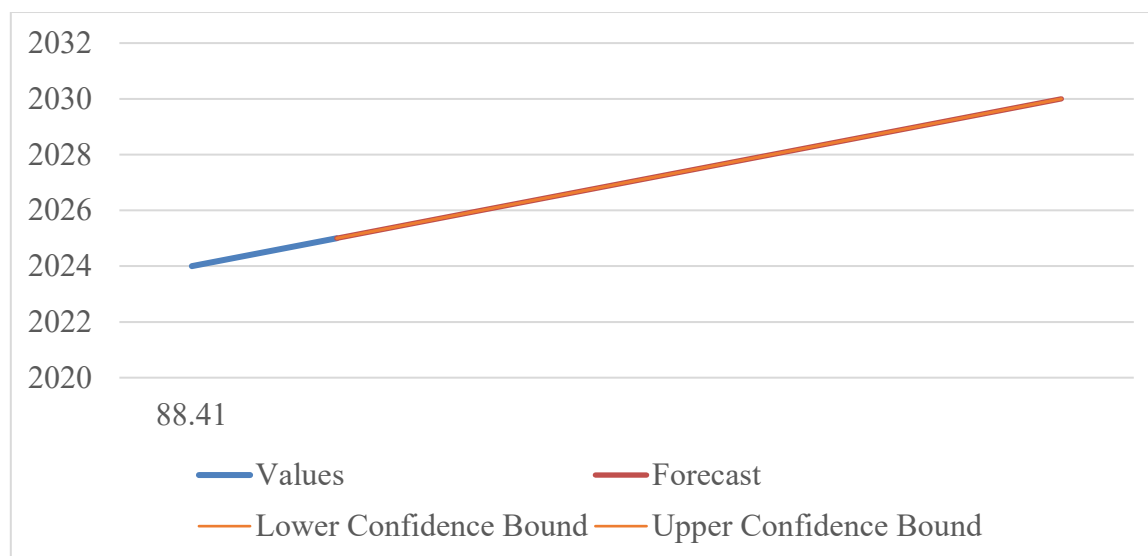
Students Performance Trend from 2022 to 2025

The study findings revealed that students' performance trend increased from 2024 to 2025 by 38% which approximate to 40 percent compared to two years back 2022 to 2023 the performance increased by 1% which is poor incremental rate (Table 2). The performance changed due to the arrival of new DEO which applied transformational and democratic leadership style to improve academic performance since headteachers and teachers prove the statement in table 1 above. The improvement therefore coincided with the period in which transformational and democratic leadership approaches were reported to be dominant.

Table 2: Student Performance Trend

Year	Number of Students			Students Performed				Students Failed			
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	%	Boys	Girls	Total	%
2022	8270	9289	17559	5584	6456	12040	68.57	2716	2803	5519	31.43
2023	7614	9095	16709	5050	6484	11534	69.03	2564	2611	5175	30.97
2024	5343	6729	12072	4634	6039	10673	88.41	709	690	1399	11.59
2025	5026	6499	11525	4587	5751	10338	89.7	439	748	1187	10.3

Performance Forecast Trend



By using forecast method in education planning from 2024 to 2030 the findings reveal that (Figure 1), the students' academic performance in Misungwi District will continue to increase from target of 88.41 to more than 95% by 2030 will definitely be achieved as on average the rate of performance will decrease from 10.3% as the performance rate shown in table 2.

This improvement is supported by Mosoria and Luhamyaa (2025), who found that transformational leadership practices were associated with improved learning outcomes and emphasized motivation, communication, involvement and supportive learning environments as important factors. The agreement suggests that leadership can influence academic performance indirectly by improving teachers' commitment, cooperation and working conditions, which subsequently create better conditions for teaching and learning.

Similarly, Jumbe and Amos (2024) found that effective leadership styles significantly influenced pupils' academic achievement in Tanzanian public primary schools. Their study emphasized that supportive and collaborative leadership, together with effective communication, contributes to positive school environments and improved academic outcomes. This finding strengthens the interpretation of the present study because the Misungwi results demonstrate a similar relationship between leadership practices and improved academic performance within the Tanzanian primary school context.

Shahin et al. (2024) further explain that leadership affects students' achievement through a range of organizational processes, including teaching effectiveness, faculty development, mentoring, resource allocation and the creation of positive relationships within the educational community. This supports the argument that the

improvement observed in Misungwi District should not be interpreted as the direct result of leadership style alone. Rather, leadership may operate through several intermediate mechanisms, such as teacher motivation, professional support, collaboration, supervision and effective management of school resources.

The findings are also consistent with the assumptions of Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational leadership emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire followers, develop commitment to shared goals, encourage participation and motivate individuals to move beyond individual interests towards collective objectives. In the present study, the DEO's transformational approach appears to have encouraged teachers and headteachers to work collectively towards improving school and students' academic performance. The high proportion of respondents identifying transformational leadership as the dominant leadership style therefore provides empirical support for the theoretical proposition that inspirational and participatory leadership can influence organizational commitment and performance.

Furthermore, the findings can be interpreted using Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individuals, their behaviour and their environment. The leadership environment created by the DEO may influence teachers' and headteachers' attitudes, motivation and behaviour, which can subsequently affect teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. Thus, the improvement in academic performance may partly reflect the interaction between leadership behaviour and the school environment rather than leadership style operating independently.

However, although the findings demonstrate a clear temporal association between the application of

transformational and democratic leadership approaches and improved academic performance, the study should not conclude that leadership style alone caused the observed increase. Academic achievement is a multidimensional outcome that may also be affected by teacher competence and motivation, availability of teaching and learning materials, student attendance, parental involvement, school infrastructure, government interventions and socioeconomic conditions. This interpretation is consistent with Shahin et al. (2024), who describe students' achievement as being shaped by several interacting educational and organizational factors.

Overall, the findings of this study are strongly supported by previous empirical evidence, particularly studies conducted within Tanzania. The evidence from Misungwi District, Arusha District Council and Morogoro Municipality collectively indicates that transformational, democratic, supportive and collaborative leadership practices can contribute to improved educational outcomes. The present study therefore adds to the existing evidence by demonstrating that leadership at the district education level, particularly the leadership of the DEO, may play an important role in creating conditions that support improved academic performance in primary schools.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the leadership style employed by the District Education Officer (DEO) has an important influence on the academic performance of primary school students in Misungwi District. The findings demonstrate that leadership is not only concerned with administrative supervision and enforcement of educational policies, but also plays an important role in motivating teachers and headteachers, strengthening collaboration, improving commitment, and creating an environment that supports the achievement of educational objectives. The study established that transformational leadership was the most commonly applied leadership style by the DEO in Misungwi District. Democratic leadership was also reported as an important leadership approach, particularly by headteachers. The dominance of transformational and democratic leadership suggests that the DEO promotes participation, motivation, cooperation, communication, and shared responsibility among education stakeholders. Such leadership practices appear to encourage teachers and headteachers to work beyond their individual interests and focus on improving school and student academic outcomes.

The study further concludes that the improvement in students' academic performance coincided with the

application of transformational and democratic leadership approaches. Student performance increased and at the same time, the proportion of students who failed declined. This substantial improvement suggests that effective educational leadership, particularly leadership that emphasizes participation, motivation, shared vision, and support for teachers and headteachers, can contribute to improved academic performance. The findings are also consistent with the assumptions of Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes inspiring followers, developing commitment, encouraging participation, and motivating individuals to achieve collective goals. The findings further support the principles of Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the view that behaviour and performance are influenced by interactions between individuals and their environment. In this context, the leadership environment created by the DEO can influence the attitudes, motivation, behaviour, and commitment of headteachers and teachers, which may subsequently contribute to better student academic outcomes.

However, the study does not imply that leadership style is the only factor responsible for the observed improvement in academic performance. Student achievement is influenced by several interacting factors, including teacher competence and motivation, availability of teaching and learning materials, parental involvement, student attendance, school infrastructure, government educational interventions, and socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, the improvement observed in Misungwi District should be understood within the broader educational context.

Overall, the study concludes that transformational and democratic leadership approaches are valuable leadership practices for improving primary school academic performance. Maintaining participatory decision-making, motivating education personnel, providing professional support, communicating a clear educational vision, and strengthening accountability can contribute to the sustainability of academic improvements in Misungwi District.

V. RECOMMENDATION

The District Education Office should continue strengthening transformational leadership practices because the findings identified this as the dominant leadership style associated with improved school and student performance. The DEO should continue inspiring teachers and headteachers through a clear shared vision, recognition of achievements, professional support, motivation, and encouragement to develop innovative approaches to teaching and school management. The DEO should strengthen democratic and participatory decision-

making by involving headteachers, teachers, school committees, and other relevant stakeholders in decisions concerning academic performance. Participation can increase ownership of decisions, commitment to implementation, and collective responsibility for improving student achievement. The District Education Office should organize regular leadership and management training for headteachers and other education leaders. Training should focus on transformational leadership, communication skills, conflict management, teacher motivation, instructional supervision, performance management, and evidence-based decision-making. This would help ensure that effective leadership practices are implemented consistently across primary schools.

The DEO should establish mechanisms for recognizing and supporting teachers who demonstrate outstanding commitment and improvement in student academic performance. Motivation may include recognition, professional development opportunities, constructive feedback, and improved working relationships. Teachers should also be provided with opportunities to express challenges affecting teaching and learning and to participate in developing solutions. The District Education Office should maintain regular monitoring of schools while avoiding excessive control that may discourage teacher and headteacher initiative. School visits should focus on identifying challenges, providing professional guidance, monitoring implementation of academic plans, and supporting schools to develop appropriate interventions for students with low achievement. The DEO and headteachers should regularly analyse examination and school performance data to identify trends, gaps, and schools requiring additional support. Data should be disaggregated by factors such as gender, subject, school, and student performance level. This would allow educational leaders to target interventions more effectively.

The District Education Office should strengthen cooperation among teachers, headteachers, parents, school committees, local government authorities, and other educational stakeholders. Improving collaboration can create a supportive environment in which stakeholders jointly address factors affecting students' academic performance. Although both boys and girls recorded improvements in academic performance, the performance data indicate differences between the two groups in some years. The DEO should therefore monitor gender-disaggregated performance data and introduce targeted interventions where persistent disparities are identified.

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