

Influence of principals' leadership styles on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kikuyu district in Kenya

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence of leadership styles of principals on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kikuyu District. Five research objectives were formulated to guide the study. Research objective one sought to establish the extent to which authoritarian leadership style influences students' discipline; research objective two aimed at determining the extent to which democratic leadership style influences students' discipline; establish the extent to which laissez faire leadership style influences students' discipline; research objective three sought to determine the students perceptions of their head teachers leadership styles while research objective five aimed at establishing whether head teachers' characteristics such as age, gender qualification and experience influence the principal's leadership style. The study employed a descriptive survey design. The sample consisted of 24 head teachers, 148 teachers and 360 students. The researcher used questionnaires to solicit data from the respondents. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. To analyse the influence of various leadership styles authoritative, democratic and laissez faire (research questions 2, 3 and 4), Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used, while to analyse the influence of head teachers demographic variables in research question 5, chi square was used. Findings revealed that head teachers use of autocratic leadership negatively influence (-0.65) students discipline. This implied that the more autocratic styles are used, the poorer the student discipline. Findings further revealed that there was very strong negative (-0.66) relationship between laissez-faire leadership and student discipline in secondary schools. Laissez-faire leadership style was not suited for use by head teachers because complete delegation without follow-up mechanisms created student discipline problems. The findings also revealed that there was no significant relationship between head teachers age gender and their leadership (X^2 value = 5.267, $df = 10$, $Sig = 0.691$). A Chi square results (X^2 value = 7.384, $df = 10$, $Sig = 0.882$) revealed that there was no significant relationship between head teachers' experience and their leadership styles. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that head teachers use of autocratic leadership negatively influenced students' discipline. The head teachers adopted harsh leadership styles which are widely detested by the teachers and students alike. This finding implied that the more autocratic styles are used, the poorer the student discipline. Head teachers who use strict control measures are likely to face student and teacher resistance and an increase in indiscipline because the teachers and students tend to protest against dictatorial measures used. The study also concluded that there was a strong negative relationship between laissez-faire leadership and student discipline in secondary schools. The study therefore concluded that laissez-faire leadership style was not suited for use by head teachers because complete delegation without follow-up mechanisms creates student discipline problems. The study also concluded that students had a positive attitude towards the leadership style of their

teachers. Students were of the opinion that their head teacher were friendly and easy to talk to, they encourage them to express their feeling frankly. All the students indicated that their head teachers encouraged them to their best; they accepted that they were capable of making mistakes while the head teachers got their approval on important matters touching them before implementing them. The study also concluded that age did not affect head teachers' leadership style. The study concluded that head teachers who were 50 years generally balanced their leadership styles. They used much of the situational leadership approach, because their rich experience has taught them that the situation around the school affects the leadership style of the head teachers. It was also concluded that there was no significant relationship head teachers' gender and their leadership styles. The researcher also established that female head teachers were more liked especially in mixed and girls schools. In terms of whether experience had an influence on the principal's leadership style, chi square results revealed that there was no significant relationship between head teachers experience and their leadership styles. The results showed that many of the teachers with more than 10 years experience were in support of the democratic leadership style, while many of those who have less than 10 years experience are in support of the autocratic leadership style. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that head teachers in the schools should detest any use of autocratic leadership since it negatively influenced students' discipline. The study also recommended that head teachers should use more of democratic leadership since it positively influences students' discipline and lastly that head teachers should also not use laissez-faire leadership style since it has a very strong negative influence on student discipline. Taking the limitations and delimitations of the study, it was suggested that a study on effect of teachers demographics on students discipline should be conducted. A study on effect of students' characteristics on their discipline should be conducted while a study on how parental involvement on students' school life affects their discipline should also be conducted.