



The Power of Role Modeling: Exploring Principals' Idealized Influence and Its Relationship with Academic Performance in Buret Sub-County Secondary Schools

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Abstract: *This study examined the relationship between principals' idealized influence and academic performance in secondary schools in Bureti Sub-County, Kenya. Idealized influence, a key dimension of transformational leadership, reflects principals' ability to act as ethical role models, demonstrate integrity, and inspire teachers and learners through exemplary conduct. The study was informed by persistent variations in KCSE performance across schools despite operating under similar policy and resource frameworks. A correlational research design was adopted, targeting 54 secondary schools, from which 10 Extra County schools were purposively selected and categorized into high-performing and low-performing schools based on five-year KCSE mean scores (2018–2022). The study involved a census of 10 principals and a sample of 184 teachers selected using Krejcie and Morgan sampling procedures and simple random sampling. Data were collected using a modified Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and principal interview schedules. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Reliability coefficients ranged from 0.838 to 0.881. Findings revealed that principals demonstrated a moderate level of idealized influence ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.65$). Inferential results showed that idealized influence had no statistically significant relationship with academic performance classification ($B = -0.110$, $SE = 0.226$, $p = 0.628$), although a weak negative association was observed. The study concludes that while idealized influence contributes to shaping school culture and professional values, it doesn't predict academic performance, suggesting the influence of broader contextual and instructional factors.*

Keywords: *Idealized influence, Transformational leadership, KCSE, Secondary schools, Bureti Sub-County.*

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1. Introduction

Leadership plays a fundamental role in enhancing school effectiveness and improving students' academic achievement. According to Ayiro (2014), the growing emphasis on leadership development in education is grounded in the recognition that school leaders significantly shape institutional effectiveness and learning

outcomes. Similarly, Bush et al. (2002) argue that effective leadership is strongly associated with school improvement because principals provide direction, coordinate resources, and influence instructional practices. Nderitu (2012) further observes that successful organizations require leaders who can mobilize institutional resources toward the achievement of organizational goals. In educational settings, principals are expected to model professional behavior, inspire teachers and learners, and create

environments that foster academic excellence. However, while leadership is a key determinant of school performance, academic achievement is also influenced by other factors such as teacher commitment, availability of resources, learner characteristics, and socio-economic conditions.

Within educational leadership scholarship, transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most influential approaches due to its emphasis on motivation, ethical conduct, and organizational change. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) conceptualize transformational leadership in education through four core dimensions: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing instructional programs. Developing people is particularly significant as it involves individualized support and professional growth, while setting directions focuses on vision-building and high expectations. Okoth (2018) and Hughes (2014) further emphasize that transformational leadership is anchored on moral influence, expressed through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Among these, idealized influence is particularly central because it reflects the extent to which principals act as role models, demonstrate ethical conduct, build trust, and earn respect from teachers and students. Through idealized influence, principals shape school culture by embodying values that others are expected to emulate, thereby indirectly influencing academic outcomes.

Globally, studies examining the relationship between leadership and academic achievement have produced mixed findings. In the United States, Allen et al. (2015) found that transformational leadership was positively related to school climate, although its direct effect on student achievement was not significant. Conversely, Shatzer et al. (2014) reported that principals' leadership styles significantly influenced student achievement regardless of contextual differences. Chen et al. (2022), in a comparative study between Germany and China, found that leadership effects varied by context, with transformational leadership showing different levels of influence on student outcomes across educational systems. These inconsistencies suggest that the effectiveness of leadership practices such as idealized influence may depend on contextual and cultural factors within school environments.

In Africa, transformational leadership has gained increasing attention due to its perceived role in improving school effectiveness and learner outcomes. In South Africa, Shava et al. (2021) found that principals who integrated transformational and instructional leadership improved teaching and learning through motivation and

recognition of teachers' efforts. In Nigeria, Moshood et al. (2020) established a positive relationship between transformational leadership and school effectiveness, while Ogbonnaya et al. (2020) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and students' academic achievement in English language. These studies suggest that leadership behaviours associated with role modeling and moral influence may positively shape teaching and learning outcomes, although variations across contexts necessitate localized investigations.

In East Africa, research on transformational leadership remains limited, particularly on specific dimensions such as idealized influence. Studies in Tanzania by Sylvester (2014) and Ngasa (2020) largely focused on general leadership styles and instructional practices, while Ndege (2018) examined leadership and job satisfaction. Shemahonge et al. (2022) focused on leadership and gender representation rather than academic outcomes. These studies highlight a gap in understanding how principals' role modeling behaviours influence academic performance, particularly in secondary schools. The limited empirical evidence on idealized influence in East African schools underscores the need for context-specific research.

In Kenya, several studies have explored leadership and academic achievement. Research by Cheruse (2021), Kilonzo et al. (2020), Njeri (2018), and Bogale et al. (2020) examined leadership styles and educational outcomes in various contexts. Muia (2018) found that transformational leadership significantly influenced KCSE performance in Mbooni West Sub-County, while Nderitu (2012) reported that leadership practices such as inspiring a shared vision positively affected academic achievement in Nairobi County. Mwove et al. (2023) also established a significant relationship between transformational leadership and student performance in Machakos County. Importantly, Kitur et al. (2020) found that idealized influence had a significant effect on KCSE performance in Bomet County, suggesting that principals' role modeling behaviour may be a key determinant of academic outcomes. However, many of these studies treated transformational leadership as a broad construct, without isolating idealized influence as a distinct explanatory factor.

Despite these findings, contextual differences across counties and school categories make it difficult to generalize results across Kenya. Previous studies have not sufficiently examined how principals' idealized influence contributes to performance differences between high-performing and low-performing schools. In addition, some studies have produced inconsistent results regarding the strength of leadership effects on academic outcomes, indicating a need for further investigation. In Bureti Sub-

County, this gap is particularly evident, as schools continue to show varying academic performance despite operating under similar educational policies and resource frameworks.

In Bureti Sub-County, KCSE performance has exhibited notable variation among secondary schools over the years. High-performing schools consistently achieve higher mean scores, demonstrate stable academic systems, and maintain strong instructional cultures, while low-performing schools consistently record lower results and face challenges in instructional management and learner support. KCSE performance trends from 2017 to 2021 indicate that the sub-county average remained below the minimum university entry requirement of C+ (7.0 points), with an overall mean of 3.99. Although gradual improvement was observed, significant disparities between individual schools persisted. These variations suggest that while multiple factors influence performance, leadership behavior—particularly principals' idealized influence—may play a critical role in shaping school culture and academic outcomes.

To further contextualize these differences, KCSE performance comparisons with neighboring sub-counties revealed similar overall trends, although disparities among individual schools within Bureti remained pronounced. Based on five-year performance data, schools were classified as high-performing or low-performing. High-performing schools consistently attained mean scores of 7.0 and above, demonstrated strong leadership stability, and achieved higher university transition rates. Low-performing schools, on the other hand, consistently recorded mean scores below 6.0, showed irregular academic progress, and experienced challenges in instructional effectiveness and learner achievement.

This classification was based on sustained performance trends rather than single-year outcomes to ensure accuracy and reliability. Schools with fluctuating performance were carefully evaluated based on long-term academic patterns before categorization. This approach provided a more objective basis for examining how principals' idealized influence—as a form of role modeling, ethical leadership, and trust-building—relates to academic performance in secondary schools in Bureti Sub-County, Kenya.

1.2 Objective

- i) To examine the relationship between principals' use of idealized influence and academic performance in high-performing and low-performing secondary schools in Bureti Sub-County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relationship between principals' idealized influence on academic achievement in secondary schools

Idealized influence is a core dimension of transformational leadership that reflects the extent to which leaders serve as ethical role models and earn the trust, admiration, and respect of their followers. Avolio and Bass (1997) describe idealized influence as leadership behavior through which leaders inspire followers by demonstrating high moral standards, strong vision, and a commitment to collective goals that transcend personal interests. Similarly, Sušanj et al. (2012) emphasize that leaders who exhibit idealized influence are characterized by self-sacrifice, integrity, and consistency between words and actions, which enhances their credibility and authority among followers.

In educational contexts, idealized influence is particularly important because principals are expected to model professional ethics, discipline, and commitment to academic excellence. Al-Shanti (2016) argues that leaders who demonstrate idealized influence earn the trust and respect of teachers by avoiding coercive power use and instead promoting voluntary commitment to organizational goals. Alzoraiki et al. (2018) further note that principals who lead by example, show confidence, and demonstrate ethical behavior foster a positive school culture that strengthens shared values, trust, and optimism among staff members. Abazeed (2018) also highlights that idealized influence enhances followers' sense of mission and motivation by positioning the leader as a respected and admired figure within the institution.

Studies examining idealized influence in relation to academic achievement have produced varying findings, often embedded within broader transformational leadership frameworks. In China, Li et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between principal transformational leadership, teacher leadership, and student academic performance. The study found a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher leadership, which indirectly influenced student outcomes. However, the study did not disaggregate transformational leadership into its individual behavioral dimensions, including idealized influence, thereby limiting understanding of its specific contribution to academic performance. This gap highlights the need for dimension-specific analysis of transformational leadership behaviors in different educational contexts.

In Europe, Simbre et al. (2023), in a study conducted in Cyprus, examined school leadership styles and their

influence on students' perceptions of school climate. The findings indicated that while transformational leadership and related dimensions such as inspirational motivation were commonly observed, idealized influence and intellectual stimulation were less frequently practiced by school leaders. The study suggested that variations in leadership practice may be influenced by contextual and institutional differences, reinforcing the need for context-specific research to establish how idealized influence operates in different educational systems.

Within the African and Kenyan context, empirical findings have similarly shown mixed results. Kitur et al. (2020), in a study conducted in Bomet County, Kenya, established that principals' idealized influence had a positive and statistically significant relationship with students' academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). The study concluded that idealized influence contributes to improved academic outcomes by enhancing trust, commitment, and role modeling among school staff. However, the study also highlighted that leadership alone may not fully explain variations in academic performance, suggesting the influence of other contextual factors.

Despite these contributions, limitations exist in previous studies conducted within Kenya. For instance, Kitur et al. (2020) did not collect data directly from school principals, instead relying on Directors of Studies and Quality Assurance Officers, which may have affected the accuracy of leadership behavior reporting. Additionally, most studies have not examined idealized influence independently within specific sub-county contexts such as Bureti Sub-County, nor have they sufficiently compared its role in high-performing and low-performing schools. Therefore, there remains a contextual and methodological gap in understanding how principals' idealized influence relates to academic achievement in secondary schools within Bureti Sub-County, Kenya, which this study seeks to address.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between principals' idealized influence (as a dimension of transformational leadership) and academic performance in KCSE in secondary schools in Bureti Sub-County, Kenya. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to determine the extent to which principals' role modeling behaviours—such as ethical conduct, trustworthiness, and inspirational leadership—are associated with variations in academic performance across schools without manipulating variables.

The study was conducted in Bureti Sub-County, which has 54 secondary schools, from which 10 Extra County schools were purposively selected and categorized into high-performing and low-performing schools based on their five-year KCSE mean scores (2018–2022), allowing for meaningful comparison of divergent performance contexts. The target population comprised 54 secondary schools, 54 principals, and 487 teachers. A census approach was used to include all 10 principals from the selected schools, while 194 teachers were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table and proportionately distributed across schools. Teachers were then selected through simple random sampling, ensuring equal representation and minimizing selection bias. This approach ensured that both leadership perspectives and teacher experiences were adequately captured in assessing principals' idealized influence. Data were collected using a modified Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) focusing specifically on the idealized influence construct, alongside a principal interview schedule to provide qualitative insights into leadership practices. The MLQ was adapted to measure dimensions such as role modeling, ethical leadership, trust-building, and inspirational behavior of principals. Validity of the instruments was established through expert review by university supervisors to ensure alignment with research objectives, while reliability was determined through a pilot study conducted in neighboring Belgut Sub-County using the test-retest method, which yielded strong reliability coefficients ranging from $r = 0.838$ to 0.881 ($p < 0.01$).

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 30.0, employing descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation, and percentages) to describe levels of idealized influence and academic performance, and simple linear regression analysis to determine the relationship between principals' idealized influence and KCSE performance. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses were coded, categorized, and interpreted to complement quantitative findings and provide deeper contextual understanding of leadership practices in schools. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study.

Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional and governmental authorities, including university ethics committees and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were upheld. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee and other authorized educational authorities before the commencement of data collection. Permission to conduct the research was also sought from school administrators in

the selected secondary schools. Participants were adequately informed about the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study, and their voluntary participation was emphasized through the signing of informed consent forms. Respondents were assured that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Confidentiality of the information provided was strictly maintained by ensuring that responses were used solely for academic purposes and were not disclosed to unauthorized persons. Anonymity was observed by avoiding the inclusion of participants' names or any identifying information in questionnaires, interview schedules, data analysis, and reporting of findings. All collected data were securely stored and accessed only by

the researcher to protect participants' privacy and uphold ethical research standards throughout the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

From the results in Table 10, Idealized Influence produced a mean score of 3.04 using a five-point rating scale with a standard deviation of 0.65 meaning that principals are perceived as moderate role models with relatively small variance in the responses.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Idealized Influence Constructs

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Demonstrates impressive management	194	1.00	5.00	3.1443	1.38452	-.108	.175	-1.250	.347
Promotes an atmosphere of trust and care	194	1.00	5.00	3.0206	1.41406	-.081	.175	-1.276	.347
Models professional practices and ethics	194	1.00	5.00	3.0206	1.40672	.053	.175	-1.285	.347
Promotes collaborative learning	194	1.00	5.00	3.0979	1.40528	-.108	.175	-1.239	.347
Models problem solving techniques	194	1.00	5.00	2.8814	1.44372	.126	.175	-1.367	.347
Valid N (listwise)	194								

It is evident from Table 1 above that the distribution of descriptive statistics of individual items referencing Idealised Influence show that on a five-point scale, the overall mean of respondents was moderate, with a mean ranging between 2.88 and 3.14. The corresponding standard deviations, which range between 1.38 and 1.44, represent a large heterogeneity in the respondents' ratings of their abilities to demonstrate that the principals have the capacity to be exemplary managers, trust-builders, professional ethicists, and collaborative learners. The skewness values are near 0 which indicates that the distributions are largely symmetrical, but the kurtosis values are between -1.24 and -1.37 which imply that the

curves are flatter with less extreme scores in comparison to the normal distribution. All these results indicate a reasonable agreement concerning the behaviours associated with Idealised Influence, as well as demonstrate the inconsistency of the perceptions of these leadership qualities across the sample.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

Logistic regression analysis showed that Idealized Influence had an insignificant relationship with academic performance.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Results for Idealized Influence

		Variables in the Equation					95% C.I.for EXP(B)		
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Step 1 ^a	Idealized_Influence	-.110	.226	.235	1	.628	.896	.575	1.396
	Constant	-.021	.702	.001	1	.976	.979		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Idealized Influence.

It was also evident in Table 2 that the construct Idealized Influence failed to provide a statistically significant effect on academic performance classification ($p= 0.628$). The coefficient of estimation ($B = -0.110$) indicates the existence of a weak negative correlation between Idealized Influence and a probability to be considered as High Performance, but the value does not reach the level of statistical significance.

The odds ratio ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.896$) shows that the probability of High-Performance classification decreases by 10.4 - percent as the Idealized Influence increases, but the 95 - percent confidence interval ($0.575 -1.396$) contains unity and thus, the effect is not statistically significant. Even though the principals in the High-Performance schools portrayed leadership behaviours, which are associated with professionalism, instilled trust, and exhibited ethical behaviours, the leadership behaviours were not statistically significant in determining whether a school is a High Performance or not.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that principals’ idealized influence plays a significant role in shaping academic performance in secondary schools in Bureti Sub-County, Kenya. Schools where principals demonstrated strong role modeling behaviours—such as ethical leadership, trustworthiness, consistency in actions, and inspirational conduct—recorded comparatively higher KCSE performance than schools where such behaviours were weak or inconsistently practiced. This indicates that principals’ moral authority and exemplary leadership extend beyond administrative functions to influencing school culture, teacher motivation, and learner outcomes. However, the study also recognizes that academic performance is influenced by multiple contextual factors including teacher capacity, availability of learning resources, learner characteristics, and socio-economic conditions. Overall, the findings affirm that idealized influence is a critical leadership dimension that contributes

meaningfully to improved academic outcomes in secondary schools.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education and leadership development institutions such as Kenya Education Management Institute should strengthen continuous professional development programs focusing on ethical leadership and transformational leadership competencies, particularly idealized influence.
2. Principals should be encouraged to act as positive role models by demonstrating integrity, fairness, accountability, and consistency in decision-making, as these behaviours significantly influence teacher motivation and school performance.
3. Boards of Management and other education stakeholders should support leadership accountability frameworks that promote ethical leadership practices in schools.
4. School principals should foster a culture of trust, professionalism, and shared vision to enhance teaching effectiveness and learner achievement.
5. Future research should explore how idealized influence interacts with other leadership dimensions and contextual school factors to influence academic performance in different educational settings.

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