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HEADTEACHERS' LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECT ON TEACHER PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED SCHOOLS OF LUSAKA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of headteachers' leadership practices on teacher performance within selected schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. Grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the research applies a qualitative exploratory descriptive approach, utilizing interviews and focus group discussions. The study aims to identify the most commonly practiced leadership styles—democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire—and to explore how these styles influence teachers' motivation, professional engagement, and overall instructional effectiveness. The findings suggest a strong correlation between democratic leadership and enhanced teacher performance, highlighting the importance of participatory decision-making, recognition, and effective delegation. In contrast, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership approaches yielded mixed or negative outcomes. The study concludes that effective leadership must balance structure and empowerment, and it recommends leadership capacity-building programs, participatory school governance, and continuous performance evaluations. This research contributes valuable insights into school leadership in Zambia, offering practical guidance for educational policymakers, training institutions, and headteachers striving to enhance school and teacher effectiveness.

Keywords: *Educational Leadership, Teacher Performance, School Administration, Teacher Motivation, Qualitative Research, Zambia Education System*

Introduction

Effective leadership in educational institutions has been widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of high-performing schools. In Zambia, persistent concerns about declining

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academic standards and low teacher morale have prompted renewed focus on the role of school leadership. Headteachers, as the senior-most personnel in primary and secondary schools, play a pivotal role in shaping the school climate and influencing both student outcomes and teacher behavior. The Ministry of General Education (MoGE) has acknowledged this critical role by initiating training and development programs for headteachers. However, despite these efforts, the practical impact of headteachers' leadership styles on teacher performance remains insufficiently understood. Some school leaders adopt democratic leadership practices that encourage teacher input and foster teamwork, while others resort to autocratic or laissez-faire approaches, which may diminish morale and hinder instructional effectiveness. This research focuses on selected schools in Lusaka District, aiming to explore how different leadership styles influence the motivation, behavior, and performance of teachers. The core research questions include: What leadership styles are most commonly employed by headteachers in Lusaka? How do these leadership styles affect teacher performance? And how do teachers perceive the leadership practices of their headteachers? The importance of addressing these questions lies in the direct relationship between leadership and classroom dynamics. Teacher performance is not only about knowledge and technical skills it is also closely linked to emotional well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction. By identifying which leadership practices foster better performance, this study seeks to offer strategic insights that can guide leadership training, recruitment, and policy development in Zambian schools.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study is Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding employee motivation and performance. Herzberg distinguished between hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors such as salary, job security, and working conditions—do not motivate employees directly, but their absence can lead to dissatisfaction. In contrast, motivators—such as recognition, responsibility, achievement, and opportunities for growth—lead to higher job satisfaction and improved performance. In the school context, hygiene factors could include adequate classroom resources, safe working conditions, and reasonable workloads.

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Motivators might involve being trusted with decision-making responsibilities, receiving professional recognition, or having opportunities for career development. According to Herzberg, addressing hygiene factors can prevent teacher dissatisfaction, but only motivational factors can truly enhance teacher performance. Leadership styles significantly influence both sets of factors. A democratic leader who encourages participation and provides recognition enhances intrinsic motivation. Conversely, an autocratic leader might ensure compliance but fails to satisfy deeper psychological needs. Laissez-faire leaders, through lack of engagement, may neglect both hygiene and motivational elements, leading to widespread disengagement. By applying this theory, the study analyzes how leadership practices either support or hinder teacher motivation and performance. The alignment of leadership styles with Herzberg's factors offers a structured way to interpret the observed effects of leadership practices in Lusaka's schools. Ultimately, the theory not only explains performance outcomes but also provides guidance on how to improve teacher motivation through targeted leadership interventions.

Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research paradigm rooted in social constructivism. This perspective posits that individuals construct knowledge through interaction with their social environment, making it an ideal approach for exploring leadership dynamics in school settings. A qualitative exploratory descriptive design was adopted to capture rich, detailed insights from participants.

Population and Sampling: The study targeted teachers, senior teachers, deputy headteachers, and one District Education Standards Officer (DESO) from three government schools in Lusaka District. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure a diverse yet relevant representation. The final sample consisted of 27 participants: 21 teachers, 3 senior teachers or heads of departments, 3 deputy headteachers, and 1 DESO.

Data Collection Methods: Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews with school leaders and the DESO provided

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insights into institutional leadership strategies, while FGDs with teachers illuminated their experiences and perceptions of those practices.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to process qualitative data. Interview transcripts and FGD notes were coded manually, and themes were derived through iterative reading. Key themes included communication practices, delegation strategies, teacher involvement in decision-making, and perceived fairness and recognition.

Ethical Considerations: All participants gave informed consent, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. No personal identifiers were used in the analysis or reporting of data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the study without consequence. The research design enabled an in-depth exploration of the complex and context-dependent nature of leadership practices and their effect on teacher performance. By focusing on participants' lived experiences, the study captured nuances often missed by quantitative approaches.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed three dominant leadership styles across the sampled schools: democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. Each style had distinct effects on teacher motivation and performance.

Democratic Leadership: This was the most prevalent and positively received leadership style. Headteachers who involved teachers in decision-making, provided constructive feedback, and encouraged professional development created a supportive work environment. Teachers under such leadership reported high morale, consistent lesson preparation, active participation in co-curricular activities, and collaborative planning. This aligns with Herzberg's motivators such as recognition and responsibility.

Autocratic Leadership: Although less common, autocratic leadership appeared in certain schools. This style was characterized by top-down communication and limited teacher

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autonomy. While it ensured order and punctuality, it often led to emotional disengagement. Teachers in these environments complied with school rules but reported low satisfaction and creativity. Hygiene factors were partially addressed, but motivators were lacking.

Laissez-faire Leadership: This style was least prevalent and was associated with poor performance. Teachers in laissez-faire environments cited lack of direction, insufficient support, and minimal accountability. Without clear leadership, teachers felt isolated, unmotivated, and less effective in their roles. Both hygiene and motivation factors were neglected under this style.

Teacher Perceptions: Across the board, teachers preferred leaders who were approachable, communicative, and fair. They valued clear guidance combined with the freedom to innovate. Many expressed frustration with inconsistent leadership and a lack of recognition for their efforts. The results support international findings that democratic and transformational leadership styles foster better educational outcomes. However, context matters. In resource-constrained settings like Zambia, headteachers must sometimes adopt a flexible approach, blending democratic and directive elements to meet institutional challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations:

1. **Leadership Training:** Introduce targeted leadership development programs for headteachers that emphasize participatory management, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. Training should highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation and how leadership practices influence it.
2. **Policy Reforms:** The Ministry of Education should institutionalize regular appraisals of leadership effectiveness. These evaluations should include feedback from teachers to promote transparency and accountability.
3. **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Schools should establish formal platforms such as teacher advisory committees to involve staff in school planning. This enhances ownership, innovation, and morale.

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4. **Mentorship Systems:** Pair less experienced headteachers with veteran mentors to facilitate the transfer of successful leadership practices. Peer learning can reduce isolation and promote continuous professional growth.
5. **Context-Aware Leadership:** Encourage leaders to adapt their style to the specific needs of their school, recognizing that flexibility rather than strict adherence to one model can often yield the best outcomes.
6.

Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that headteachers' leadership practices significantly affect teacher performance in schools. Democratic leadership emerged as the most effective style, promoting collaboration, recognition, and responsibility—key drivers of intrinsic motivation. In contrast, autocratic leadership ensured structure but lacked emotional engagement, while laissez-faire approaches led to systemic disengagement and low accountability. By applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study elucidates the mechanisms through which leadership styles influence teacher motivation and effectiveness. Addressing only extrinsic needs (hygiene factors) is insufficient; true performance enhancement requires fulfilling intrinsic needs through recognition, autonomy, and meaningful involvement. The study underscores the importance of leadership training, participatory governance, and context-sensitive approaches. If Zambia is to achieve higher educational standards and meet its Vision 2030 goals, it must prioritize school leadership as a strategic lever for reform. By empowering headteachers with the knowledge and tools to lead effectively, the education system can nurture motivated teachers and, consequently, successful learners.

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