

## **A Conceptual Paper on the Contribution of Individual Leadership Attributes towards Students' Academic Performance in Arusha City Public Primary Schools, Tanzania**

**Abstract-**Leadership attributes are among the fundamental aspects for the any organization success. Students' academic performance in particular, greatly depends on individual leadership characteristics of their head teachers. School leaders have been persistently, applying personal leadership attributes in promoting and enhancing positive students' attitude toward school, increasing student engagement, and ultimately targeting at increasing their students' academic performance. This paper aims at examining the contribution of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance. It covers eleven individual leadership attributes as paramount antecedents. These are: dependable, straight forward, fair-minded, inspirational, forward thinking, competency, honesty, creativity, supportive, intelligent and broad minded. The study will adopt the Trait and Skills theories of leadership introduced by Thomas Carlyle in 1800s and Mumford et al. in 2000 respectively. Mixed methods research approach will be employed. The paper incorporates the eleven individual leadership attributes in order to provide a comprehensive representation of the proposed influences of the contribution of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance.

**Keywords:** *Contribution, Leadership, Leadership Attributes, Students' Academic Performance, Public Primary Schools*

### **I. Introduction**

This research is centered on analyzing the contribution of individual leadership attributes to students' academic performance in Arusha City public primary schools, Tanzania

### **II. Background to the Study**

It is a universal truth that leadership attributes are one among the instrumental aspects in any organization's performance. According to Adan (2015) the success of students in schools highly relies on the managerial and leadership attributes of head teachers<sup>1</sup>. This implies that school head leadership attributes are critical to success of a school as an organization as well as students' academic performance. School leaders, in particular head teachers are the 'DNA' of the entire school as a system. It is the head teacher who enables and engages all the educational inputs such as teachers, teaching and learning resources, facilities, and key

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the terminologies "head teachers", "school heads" and "school principals have been used interchangeably.

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stakeholders for the school system to perform effectively (DeLucia, 2011). Significantly, John & Mkulu (2011) are of the view that in an educational organization, just like in any other organizations, the role of leadership is very crucial. A good leader should make sure that they initiate stakeholder inclusively in all key issues and in making decisions. In some situations, leader's informed views may be pushed through in what may seem as force, especially when subordinates seem not interested or committed enough. An effective school leadership leads to good school productivity that is good performance of students in national examinations. This is to say that school heads' leadership, in particular the leadership attributes are at the centre for the school as an organization to give the desired educational outcomes for both teachers and academic performance of students (John & Mkulu, 2011).

Mofuga (2020) establishes that a number of researchers such as (Gurr, 2015, Wasonga, 2014, Yaakob and Tubin, 2014) have shown that most of the academically successful schools in developed and developing countries are those whose leaders demonstrate high levels of leadership skills and leadership. That is, a good school leader should possess key leadership attributes such as trusting others, honesty, empathy and motivating staff toward achieving the desired organisational goals. Moreover, a good leader has knowledge, experience and skills in planning, organising, controlling and directing. The important role of school leaders is to strengthen the human resource functions such recruitment, training, motivation, retention, leadership attributes and responsibility of teachers (Ngithi, 2013). Quality education, recruitment and training of school leaders and teachers are strategic priority towards achieving improved students' academic performance. Therefore, all those considered for leadership must display firm abilities in leading and fulfilling the defined requirements. Thus, the trait and charismatic theories of leadership are used to explain leadership attributes tenable for school leaders (Mofuga, 2020).

According to King (2002), one of the greatest challenges school administrators face is providing a school environment that is conducive to professional growth of faculty for sustaining collaborative school cultures and for improving student achievement. Instructional leadership is not only defined actions to improve teaching and learning but also actions principals take to develop a productive and satisfying work environment for teachers with desirable learning outcomes for students (Greenfield, 1987 as cited by McCann, 2011). Additionally, McCann seconds, although principals may have preconceived perceptions about their role as school leaders, their success depends on teachers' support and how teachers perceive their administrator. Therefore, it is necessary to identify important leadership characteristics of successful middle school principals as perceived by supporting teachers (McCann, 2011). Therefore, this study aims at examining the contribution of individual leadership attributes to students' academic performance in Arusha City public primary schools, Tanzania.

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### III. Statement of the Problem

School leaders, particularly head teacher's leadership, is at the heart of ensuring desired students' academic performance. (Cruickshank, 2017; Day & Samsons, 2016; Fedha Flora, Wambugu, & Bett, 2016; Brisbane Catholic Education, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004). In Tanzania, particularly, in the government schools head teachers play instrumental role in ensuring school success. All school leaders are equally prepared and possess the required qualifications necessary to effectively manage and lead schools that are proportionately supported by the government. Given that all schools receive the uniform necessary operational support, and all operate in a similar education administrative system, one would expect desired academic performance of students among these government schools. But the observation shows unequal educational performance among government primary schools. For instance, there has been a noticeable difference in students' academic performance in the recent Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results in Tanzanian public primary schools, where some schools performed very high while others performed with an average and low results (NECTA, 2017; NECTA, 2018 & NECTA, 2019).

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Regardless of many factors that make students academically perform well, the differences in public primary schools' academic performance indicate that individual leadership attributes of a school head may directly or indirectly be linked with students' academic performance. Thus, this is to say that there is a person who possesses certain attributes that contribute to students' academic performance, and we do not seem to look at these individual leadership attributes when selecting school heads. Therefore, this research is centered at examining the contribution of individual leadership attributes to students' academic performance in Arusha City public primary schools, Tanzania.

### IV. Objectives of the Study

The study will specifically be guided by the following objectives;

- To examine the perceptions of teachers on the individual leadership attributes of their school heads.
- To assess the impact of school head teachers' leadership attributes on students' academic performance.

### V. Significance of the Study

The findings of this research on the analysis of individual leadership attributes of a school head teacher that contribute to performance in public primary schools in Tanzania is important, because the study will contribute more evidence to a limited existing empirical evidence in this area. The results of the study will add a new pool of applicable knowledge in the field and provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena to the educational policy makers and planners on mechanisms of identifying the individual leadership attributes among school leaders to improve leadership effectiveness and academic performance in Tanzanian primary schools and across the world. The robust findings of the study will inform the pre -and in-service teachers training providers to prepare and offer training programs that equip teachers with the strong leadership attributes, skills/ competencies and knowledge necessary to effectively manage schools.

The data will provide practical insights to the various key actors in the education sector, like the education officers and school quality assurers at national, regional, district and ward levels, on the understanding of individual leadership attributes and its identification mechanisms for effective leadership at school level.

The outcome of this research will also influence more researchers to investigate the topic in (societal question) question; and this will, finally, contribute to new knowledge and broaden our understanding on individual leadership attributes of school heads in relation to leadership effectiveness and school success. On a theoretical level, the results will expand what is known about the applicability of the theory (ies) that will be deployed to guide the undertaking of this study.

## **VI. Literature Review**

This part discusses the empirical literature review and theoretical literature review as related to the study. The theoretical literature review deals with the description of the theory and its relevance to the study while the empirical literature review focuses on previous studies relating to this study.

### ***Theoretical Literature Review***

The foundation of this research rests on the two selected leadership theories that will be used religiously to guide the undertaking of this study. The Trait and Skills theories of leadership were carefully studied and selected as per the objectives of this research.

#### ***The Trait Theory (developed by Carlyle in 1800s)***

The Trait Theory argues that great leaders have certain traits such as: Physiological (appearance, height and weight), demographic (age, education and socioeconomic background), personality, self-confidence, and aggressiveness, intellective (intelligence, decisiveness, judgement and knowledge), task related traits such as achievement drive, initiative and persistence. Carlyle believed that “history is shaped by extraordinary leaders, and that the ability to lead was something they inherited at birth and not something that could be developed” (Spector, 2016; Pyke, 2018 as cited in Mofuga, 2020). Carlyle's theory of leadership was based on the rationale that people are "born" with leadership traits. Thus, most early researchers considered leaders traits to be permanent properties that were present at the birth of a future leader and they grow these traits are realized (Zaccaro, 2007). It views leadership solely from the perspective of the individual leader. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that traits produce patterns of behaviour that are consistent across situations. That is, leadership traits are considered to be enduring characteristics that people are born with and that remain relatively stable over time (Fleenor, 2006). The Trait Theory is the best theory for this study as it offers qualities a leader must possess, therefore makes it easier to identify individuals that will make right fit in different leadership positions. In support, Germain (2008) pines, the trait approach is concerned with what traits exhibit and who has those traits. This implies, it does not lay out a set of hypotheses or principles about what kind of leader is needed in a certain situation or what a leader should do, given a particular set of

circumstances. The theory focuses on the difference between leaders and followers assuming that leaders would display more personality traits than the subordinates (Kanodia and Sacher, 2016). According to Cherry (2019), leadership traits are the consistent and habitual patterns of thoughts, feelings, behaviour, emotions or actions of the leader that distinguish the leader from the follower (Cherry, 2019). Leadership traits are not fixed but remain stable throughout a leader's life span. Rather, this approach emphasizes that having a leader with a certain set of traits is crucial to having effective leadership. It is the leader and their personality that are central to the leadership process apart from other circumstances that may prevail.

#### ***Skills Model (by Mumford et al., 2000)***

Skills model which is also known as capability model likewise will be used in the undertaking of this research. Skills model was introduced by Mumford et al in 2000, it takes a skill and knowledge based approach to describe leaders' performance. Just like Trait Theory, this skill model is also a leader-centered approach as it concentrates on the key attributes/qualities of leaders which make effective leadership possible. That is to say, individual leaders have attributes which need to be put into place for certain realizations and effects to arise. The model proposes four components which describes personal qualities of a leader. These include: general cognitive ability to process perceptions and information, creative and divergent thinking and memory skills of a leader; also, intellectual ability to learn and acquire knowledge and experience overtime. Another aspect is willingness and motivation to lead, solve complex problems, express dominance and communicate to the social good of the organization. Additionally, personality as an individual attribute of a leader helps people to adapt with complex organizational problems and set them effective leadership performance.

#### ***Empirical Literature***

##### ***Teachers' Perceptions on the individual leadership attributes of their school heads***

Turan&Bektas (2013) propose that there is a "positive and significant relationship between primary school teachers' perceptions and the leadership practices of school principals". These scholars demonstrate that how teachers perceive school leaders' attributes can affect the culture of the school (Aypay et al., 2012; Velsco et al., 2012; Whitaker, 2012).

Leadership in organisations is fundamentally an influencing process, which depends on how leaders interact with their subordinates (Bush, 2008; & Yukl, 2002). Thus, a number of leadership scholars have opined that leadership can be considered to be a process of 'being perceived as a leader' (e.g. Hall and Lord, 1995 as cited in Lee & Nie, 2015), which is largely a cognitive process such that the effectiveness of a leader's behaviours may be contingent upon how the subordinates perceive and interpret the authenticity of the leader's qualities (Randolph & Kemery, 2011). As such, in teacher empowerment research, this also highlights the importance of understanding not only how school leaders may empower teachers but that a more accurate assessment of the effectiveness of collective school leadership would likely depend on how teachers may perceive and interpret their school leaders' behaviours at different levels of management (Lee & Nie, 2015). *Therefore, it is paramount to tackle some*

*individual leadership attributes school heads possess and show teachers' perceptions towards these attributes as revealed hereunder:*

**Supportive relationships:** School heads who work collaboratively with teachers, by taking time to find out what a person needs to move forward, solicit their input, include them in decision-making processes, encourage open communication, and create a positive school culture maintain supportive relationships with teachers. As a result of these strong relationships, schools yield greater student achievement. Moreover, school leaders indirectly affect student learning through the practices by which they lead teachers and create the organizational climate of the school (Lezotte & McKee, 2006). Therefore, the need to implement teacher-supportive leadership practices is paramount to the success of students' learning and must remain as an imperative concern of instructional leaders (Shepherd-Jones, n.d).

**Competency:** the school heads who competent about the current curriculum & instruction, strong understanding of how schools work; are highly encouraged, that is, teachers love working together with them to ensure that all students are united and working together to achieve the school's goals that lead to good and positive outcomes. This entails, individual trait of an effective leader of the school (Rahman et al., 2019). According to Alias et al. (2018) among the elements in leadership is that the headmaster should be capable to lead and mobilize the entire school towards attaining the vision and mission, with a clear school policy to achieve the expected outcomes.

**Consideration:** this involves demonstrating concern and respect for subordinates, showing appreciation and support, and looking out for subordinates' welfare (Otieno, 2020 cites Bass, 1990). Likewise, Otieno (ibid) seconds, with this type of behaviour, the leader-subordinate relations are one of mutual trust and two-way communication. Consideration focuses on the charismatic and affective elements of leadership, and it is concerned with values, ethics, emotions, standards, and long-term goals (Northouse, 2004). Noticeably, leader's consideration stresses on the need to assess followers' motives, satisfy their needs, and treat them as human beings; it relies on the strong influence of visionary, charismatic leaders who move followers to accomplish objectives above and beyond what is usually expected (Northouse, ibid). The outcome of this attribute is that it builds teachers' trust in the head teacher's ideology, a similarity in belief systems among the stakeholders, acceptance of the head teacher, expression of warmth, obedience, and identification, emotional involvement with goals, and stakeholder confidence in goal achievement (Otieno, 2020).

**Initiating structure:** on the other hand, is oriented toward facilitating goal attainment. It involves the extent to which the leader initiates, organizes, and defines his/her role and the roles of subordinates, structuring the work to be completed and how it is to be completed. These behaviours pertain to how leaders behave towards subordinates in the group in general, rather than specific dyad-level relationships. Basically, head teachers who employ autocratic methods of management do not work harmoniously with their staff members. When a teacher perceives the head teacher as commanding and not giving them opportunity to participate in decision making, the teacher is likely to treat the pupils in derogatory ways and becomes

more cynical towards them. Cautionary, Northouse as cited in Otieno, 2020) states that if leadership is vital to the schools, preparation of those leaders is very serious business indeed, and graduate programmes must move beyond the training of efficient managers to the preparation of visionary, moral, and considerate leaders.

Inspirational Motivation school leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning to teachers and students' work. Indicators of this leadership practice that this study focused on included the practices of building and sharing vision with subordinates, demonstrating a sense of confidence in the followers, committing to high standards at the workplace, and encouraging team work (Asare, 2016; Osagie & Inspirational Motivation school leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning to teachers and students' work. Indicators of this leadership practice that this study focused on included the practices of building and sharing vision with subordinates, demonstrating a sense of confidence in the followers, committing to high standards at the workplace, and encouraging team work (Asare, 2016; Osagie &

**Inspirational motivation:** The school head's acts tap the interests of teachers and inspire them to do their job creatively and lead new and challenging innovations/ things to reach great heights of performance. Leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning to teachers. Indicators of this leadership include the practices of building and sharing vision with subordinates, demonstrating a sense of confidence in the followers, committing to high standards at the workplace, and encouraging team work. This assists to sustain behaviours that focus on improvement (Gyansah et al., 2020). As an outcome of this kind of motivation, Northouse (2016) comments that teachers feel motivated to teach when the school head maintains an enabling environment for learning, shares and develops the vision of the school with teachers and students, encourages team spirit, shows appreciation to good works done by followers, demonstrates confidence in the capacity of followers to perform, and initiates organizational change.

### *The impact of school head teachers' leadership attributes on students' academic performance*

**Competence:** Anwer et al. (2018) are of the opinion that improved results in the school are attributed to the dispositions and competencies of head teachers. After the analysis of head teachers' leadership competencies and their relationship with school results, it was realized that there is strong relationship between leadership competencies of the school head and students' academic performance. Hence, it is deeply realized that effective leadership is of fundamental importance in a school's development. Harris (2005) looks at competence as an integrated aspect to school improvement as a distinct approach to educational changes that enhances student's outcome; raising students' achievement focusing on teaching –learning process and conditions that support it. The term competency means, an observable, measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, or characteristics of an individual, needs

for better performance in a job. However, incompetent head teachers fail to employ needed strategies in academic, so learners perform poorly.

**Visionary leadership:** good students' academic performance depends very much on the school vision that expresses what should be done, how it should be done, where and when to accomplish the main objective which is to provide knowledge, skills and attitudes to students. The vision should identify the long, medium and short-term objectives. A school head that analyses and plans for future needs, usually secures effective teaching and learning process that leads to improvement of students' academic performance. On the contrary, lack of vision in a school, make the teaching and learning process in effective because each member would not know what is the intended outcome, how, when and where to accomplish his/her responsibilities.

**Collaboration:** a school that is collaborative (Anwer et al., 2018 cites Hargreaves, 1998) is more supportive towards enhancing school improvement. Bredeson (2003) proposes that the staff development is used as a lever for school improvement, it has to be included as part of the overall direction of the school. It should connect to the day-to-day work in schools and be linked to teachers' collective learning and growth, in order to support pupils' learning (Bredeson, 2003).

**Systematic supervision of teaching/learning process:** The school head has to gather information systematically, which can be used to create possibilities for a further improvement in a schools' academic performance. Both inputs and outputs should be keenly analyzed so as to achieve the determined objectives (Mpondo, 2005). Essentially, it is added, it is the responsibility of the school head to make sure that relevant educational inputs which are of importance to the teaching of any subject in the school curriculum such as pictures, post cards, diagrams, maps, filmstrips and models are available; these enhance the teaching and learning process to go smoothly (Jekanyifa, n.d).

Supporting the above idea (Ndyali, 2013) asserts, good students' academic performance can be realized if there is good supervision of the teaching process. The school head would secure and sustain effective teaching throughout the school by monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and standards of students' achievements. He or she should organize the implementation of the school curriculum by insisting high learning time, variety of teaching strategies, frequent homework, assessment and feedback. On the other hand, lack of teaching supervision leads into poor quality of teaching and low standard of students' academic performance. Good relationship between schools with the community creates the favourable environment for teaching and learning process, which results into good students' academic performance (Ndyali, 2013).

## **VII. Research Methodology**

The study will adopt the Trait and Skills theories of leadership introduced by Thomas Carlyle in 1800s and Mumford et al. in 2000 respectively. Mixed methods research approach will be employed. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques will be employed giving the total sample size of 57 respondents. The explanatory cross-sectional survey research design will be used whereby the researcher anticipates incorporating quantitative and qualitative data in a single study and analyzing the two components independently; and then interpreting the results together. Quantitative data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 21), while qualitative data will be analysed using open coding to get categories- themes. Documentary review, questionnaire and interview will be the methods for data collection.

#### *Participants & Recruitment Methods*

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#### *Data Collection*

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#### *Data Analysis with Tables*

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### **Specification of propositions**

Yaakob and Tubin, (2014) have shown that most of the academically successful schools in developed and developing countries are those whose leaders demonstrate high levels of leadership skills and leadership. That is, a good school leader should possess key leadership attributes such as trusting others, honesty, empathy and motivating staff toward achieving the desired organisational goals. Moreover, a good leader has knowledge, experience and skills in planning, organising, controlling and directing. Therefore, all those considered for leadership must display firm abilities in leading and fulfilling the defined requirements (Mofuga, 2020). Goolamally & Ahmed (2014) put that studies on effective schools have found that the ability of an individual to move ahead in the path towards excellence was influenced by his traits, behaviour and actions (Goolamally & Ahmed, 2014 as cites Davis & Thomas, 1989). Second, even though a principal may be able to implement and combine diverse leadership styles in the administration and management of a school in order to achieve excellence, they require personal qualities or traits which make them more stable and resilient (Norlia & Jamil, 2007). A school principal may practise various leadership styles such as educational leadership, transformational leadership and transactional leadership but the practice and enculturation of these leadership styles require a principal to possess these basic qualities – courageous in facing risks and problems as well as in making decisions; has a high level of resilience; and is spirited, trustworthy, empathetic and sympathetic (Smith, 1996 as cited in Goolamally & Ahmed, 2014). Thus, the leadership efficiency of a principal is determined by his traits and behaviour. The importance of selecting an effective principal with good personal traits or qualities should be a priority and main focus of education in order to ensure that the nation's school system functions effectively (Goolamally & Ahmed, 2014). Thus, this discussion suggests that poor individual leadership attributes will lead to poor students' academic performance as individual leadership qualities play part to students' performance.

### **VIII. Discussion**

This paper specifies eleven personal leadership traits towards students' academic performance. These traits are: dependable, straight forward, fair-minded, inspirational, forward thinking, competency, honesty, creativity, supportive, intelligent and broad minded. Thus, the overall theoretical perspective emerging from the eleven traits specified in this paper reflects on the contribution of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance. These eleven qualities represent an inclusive set of relationships between individual leadership attributes and students' academic performance. Through the specification of these relationships, it addresses an important gap in the existing literature. This paper for that reason, suggests certain directions for future research. First, future researchers can carry out empirical studies to examine individual leadership attributes variations and their impact on students' academic performance. Also, this paper focuses only on the contribution of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance. Future researchers can carry out further conceptual work to specify other categories of antecedents. For example, to evaluate policies and guidelines positions on personal leadership attributes and its identification mechanisms for effective management at school level. On the other hand, this paper has some limitations. Firstly, it focuses only on aspect, the contribution of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance. It does not incorporate other categories of antecedents like consequences of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance. Thus, a partial explanation will be provided on the contribution of individual leadership attributes. This limitation can be dealt with by future research that can address the consequences of individual leadership attributes on students' academic performance.

#### IX. Closing paragraph

This paper points out that the existing studies have indicated that there is a need for examining the contribution of individual leadership attributes towards students' academic performance. To suffice this need, the paper chooses to address the contribution of individual leadership attributes as vital aspects in students' academic performance. The paper will be centred at eleven individual leadership attributes; each will be treated in relation to students' academic performance. These eleven traits will render a comprehensive representation of the contribution of individual leadership attributes as vital aspects in students' academic performance.

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