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# LEADERSHIP STYLES AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE : A STUDY WITHIN AN ERITREAN CONTEXT OF EASTERN AFRICA

**Berhane Aradom Tedla**

Department of educational administration, University of Asmara, Ohio, USA

**Dr. Ephrem Habtemichael Redda**

Associate Professor, School of Management Sciences, North-West University, South Africa

**Dr. Gaikar Vilas B**

Vice-Principal & Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Smt. CHM. College, University of Mumbai, India

## ABSTRACT

**Context/literature:** *The present research paper highlights about, Principals employ a range of leadership styles that directly or indirectly impact school performance. However, there is always a debate among scholars about which leadership style is the most effective for school performance.*

**Purposes:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze the relationship between different leadership styles of principals and school performance in Eritrean secondary schools.*

**Research method:** *The study followed a descriptive research design, and it employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to establish a relationship between leadership styles and school performance. Using non-probability sampling, a sample (N = 375) comprising 30 schools/principals, 250 teachers, 50 students, and 45 parents participated in the study.*

**Findings:** *The study explored and analyzed the relationship between the two variables, namely leadership styles of principals and school performance. The study found that principals' leadership styles do influence school performance either positively or negatively, and it has become clear that no single leadership style is appropriate at all times. The study found that democratic and situational leadership styles have a positive impact on school performance; while autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles were found to have negative impacts on school performance.*

**Conclusion & recommendations:** *It can be concluded that no single leadership style is appropriate at all times, because no leadership style is right at all times. Based on empirical findings, contrary to established norms in the Eritrean school system, the study recommends that school principals should opt to implement principles of*

*democratic and situational leadership for better school performance. Among other things, the study recommends that school principals should receive professional development to upgrade their leadership capacity in order to improve overall school performance and student attainment.*

**Key words:** Foreign Direct Investment, Economic Growth, Gross Domestic Product, VAR.

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## 1. BACKGROUND AND COUNTRY CONTEXT

Eritrea is located in the horn of Africa; with Asmara as its capital city. It adjoins Ethiopia to the south, Sudan to the west and Djibouti to the southeast. The country has a total area of land of 125 000kms square and stretches approximately 1 200kms coastline along the Red Sea (Ministry of Land, Water & Environment, 2001). The country is a heterogeneous society of five million people with nine ethno-linguistic groups, and the majority of the population believes in Christianity followed by Islam denomination. Economically, Eritrea is one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2014). Eritrean nationalism is strong, but the country has been a totalitarian one-party dictatorship, in which presidential elections have never been held since independence in 1991 from Ethiopia.

Education, in Eritrea, is the biggest investment for modernization, civilization and the betterment of human life (Ministry of Education, 2009). A comprehensive and caliber formal education accompanied by powerful leadership help realize that investment (Drewziecka & Roczniowska, 2018). It is a well-known fact that educating all citizens remains the most challenging matter in developing countries (Rena & Tedla, 2017). Several studies about human capital development have explained that the development of human resources of a particular country is determined not by its capital or natural resources, but by its quality of education buttressed by effective school leadership (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke, 2016). The importance of formal education, in Eritrea, is evident and in a process of gradual development, and it is based on five years of compulsory primary education, three years of junior secondary, four years of senior secondary school and four/five years of university level. Boarding schools, higher colleges and institutions offer vocational, technical and other tertiary courses and training. Basically, education is free of charge from primary to university (undergraduate) level (Mengesha & Tessema, 2019).

The Ministry of Education centrally manages the educational system, and invariably endeavors to develop the educational system (MoE, 2011). In 2005, for instance, the Ministry of Education transformed the traditional curriculum from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered and interactive pedagogy (MoE, 2013). Regardless of the transformation, the quality of education still remains largely deficient. The problem is partly attributed to ineffective school leadership and unqualified principals (Mengesha & Tessema, 2019). Several secondary schools still fall short in performance, not only because of fund deficiency or inadequate resources, but also poor leadership (Namirembe, 2005; Wahab, Rahmat, Yosuf & Mohamed, 2015). Without effective leadership, situations become out of control and performance cannot be achieved in schools (Maicibi, 2003). Leadership is the legitimate authority to run and transform an organization by directing human resources, and articulating the vision and mission (Armstrong, 2004). However, to conduct such legitimate authority,

principals need to know how, when and where to apply leadership styles in order to achieve a desired outcome. Eritrean school principals have leadership responsibilities to build a positive learning culture. In doing so, however, principals may need to apply leadership styles appropriately.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Although it is the policy of the Ministry Education to improve the quality of education, school performance remains poor. Curriculum developers, policymakers and school managers endeavor to improve school performance by providing instructional materials and other school facilities (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014), but their effort is not satisfactory without principals' leadership training (Odubuker, 2007). Besides, no venture has ever been done, in Eritrea, to analyze the impact of leadership on school performance. It is evident that school leadership is the nerve cell to school performance; without it, all efforts are in vain. Principals' knowledge to practice leadership styles wisely is the panacea to low school performance (Wahab, Rahmat, Yosuf & Mohamed, 2015).

### **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to investigate and examine the relationship between principals' leadership styles and school performance, and offer possible recommendations to improve school leadership in Eritrea.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In support of the main purpose of the study, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What is the best leadership style for an improved school performance?
- When and how do principals apply leadership styles?
- Do leadership styles have an influence on school performance within Eritrean schools' context? Or does the choice of leadership style of a principal influence school performance in Eritrea?
- What training or professional development do principals partake prior to an actual appointment to the position?
- What vision and mission statements do school principals have?
- How is parent participation in schools?
- Is there a difference between boarding and day schools in terms of school performance?
- What do teachers, parents and students say about principals' leadership styles?

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of principal-ship was highly transformative rather than distributive. During the 1930s, the role of a principal was merely as a scientific manager. In the 1940s, the role shifted to a democratic leader. In the 1970s, a principal was a humanistic facilitator, and later, in the 1980s, the role shifted to instructional leader (Beck & Murphy, 1993). However, instructional leadership enjoyed great popularity during the 1980s, but it was introduced to practice so late. In this section, the authors discussed the definition of leadership, educational leadership and management, relationship between leadership style and school performance, and theories of leadership related to the study.

## 2.1 Defining Leadership

Leadership has evolved over time and has taken different forms over the years, from the traditional approach to the modern perspective. Trait, behavioral and situational styles have been categorized under the traditional leadership approach, while transformational and charismatic approaches are under the new perspective (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Leadership is a daunting concept.

The concept 'leadership' has many definitions, but there is no universally accepted definition (Yukl, 2006). However, there are three common definitions: Firstly, leadership is based on organizational improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005); secondly, leaders are within a particular organization to improve the organization; and thirdly, leadership is about setting a direction (Jacobs & Jaques, 1990). Similarly, it can be defined as a process of directing, organizing and weaving relationships (Kotter, 1990; Burns, 1978; Depgree & Gardner, 1990). It involves a number of followers' interactions in different types of organizations and environments (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

## 2.2. Educational Leadership and Management in Schools

When the concept of educational leadership evolved, the research about its impact on school performance has been developed to a great extent. Outstanding educational leadership has often appeared as a cornerstone characteristic of outstanding schools (Beare, Caldwell & Milliken, 1989). Both leadership and management are indispensable for a successful school development. Leadership is a larger concept than management. Leadership focuses on vision, motivation and teams in a school. More specifically, leadership helps schools set academic standards, goals and modes of behavior in the entire school community, whereas management provides systems and processes to plan, budget, evaluate and implement daily activities (Coyle, 2012). Management and leadership may overlap at times, but management is a special kind of leadership that helps schools maintain an order, direction and eventually achieve anticipated goals (Gyasi, Xi & Owusu-Ampomah, 2016).

## 2.3 Instructional Leadership and Leadership Styles

Instructional leadership has become the most powerful approach to bring about school performance or student outcomes (Bush, 2020). Instructional leaders influence the performance of students' achievement, especially in low achieving schools (Andrews & Soder, 1987). The nature of instructional leadership is, however, a top-down communication process, because principals are primary sources of educational expertise and school goals (Hallinger, 1992). In addition to that, a school principal is responsible for managing a school and improving classroom instructions (Leithwood, 1994). While principals play their instructional responsibilities, they employ different leadership styles. School leadership is a process whereby a school leader is employed to supervise staff, evaluate situations and apply leadership styles to control and adjust situations (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014). The term 'style' is a reference to a leader's behavior or practice to influence subordinates (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1996), whereas a leadership style is a structure and qualification of a leader to lead an organization successfully (Adeyemi & Bolarinwa, 2013).

In education, leadership style emanates from scientific management theory (Gyasi, Xi & Owusu-Ampomah, 2016). There are a number of leadership styles, namely autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, participative and situational styles (Mosadeghrad, 2004). Autocratic leadership is a task-oriented style (Dubrin, 1998) and it is a kind of leadership style where a principal lacks confidence and never trusts subordinates (Gyasi, Xi & Owusu-Ampomah, 2016). He or she imposes decisions, motivates school stakeholders by threat, never delegates, and there are little communication and teamwork. Psychologists believe that autocratic

leadership style stems from fear or insecurity (Afful-Broni & Nanyele, 2012). However, authoritative instructional leadership, in certain instances, such as low-income communities, is believed to play a crucial role in establishing order and instill discipline (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004). On the other hand, democratic leadership style features decentralization of authority, participator planning and mutual communication as its main components for empowerment, teamwork and collaboration (Dubrin, 1998), and it happens when a principal exhibits trust, confidence and motivational reward (Adeyemi & Bolarinwa, 2013). In extreme situations, a principal who practices the laissez-faire leadership style, permits subordinates to do what they want, and avoids decision-making and setting goals. The principal never interferes, but works well only when employees are qualified, experienced and well-motivated (Dubrin, 1998). The laissez-faire leadership style could lead to apathy or anarchy (Gyasi, Xi & Owusu-Ampomah, 2016) if those qualities do not exist.

It is often argued that democratic leadership style is a better alternative for creating a conducive learning environment than autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles (Valesky, 1992). Nevertheless, there is no single leadership style that is ideal or applicable all the time for all situations, and because of this, situational leadership style came into existence for practice (Rad & Yarmuhammadian, 2006). The fundamental principle of situational leadership style is that effective leadership is task-relevant, and that successful principals are those who adapt their leadership style contingently as the situation requires based on task, job, function or situation (Drewziecka & Roczniowska, 2018).

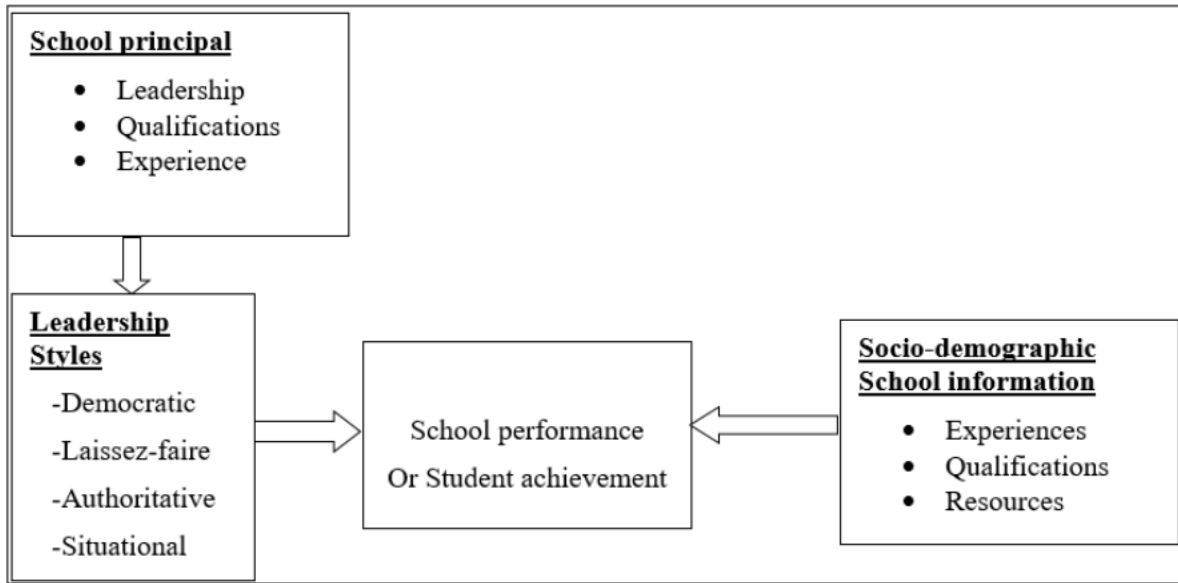
## **2.4 Relationship Between Leadership Styles and School Performance**

A leadership style that is practiced by a school principal is very critical to students' achievement (Murphy, 1998). Leadership styles do influence school performance indirectly either positively or negatively (Hallinger, 1996). It has been shown that the relationship between leadership styles of principals and student achievement is more complex and subtle (Heck, Larsen & Marcoulides, 1990). The relationship between leadership styles and student achievement was explored for almost a decade and a half (1980-1995), and it has been found that leaders have an indirect influence, but measurable effect on how well students achieve (Hallinger, 1998). Some researchers also analyzed the relationship between principals' leadership traits and student achievement and found that principals in high performing schools have stronger sentimental traits and cognitive analytical skills than their counterparts in low performing schools do (Huffs, Lake & Schaalman, 1982).

Principals indirectly influence student achievement by setting school-wide goals, setting high expectations, allocating resources, organizing classrooms, creating an orderly environment and communicating with parents and community members, training teachers in instruction, visiting classrooms and frequent teacher supervision and evaluation (Griffith, 1999). A principal's influence on student achievement also emanates from principal-teacher interactions. The interaction may include identifying objectives, sparing time in classroom instructions, providing support and guidance (Eberts & Stone, 1988).

School performance is a broad term, but it reflects in students as achievement of instruction, knowledge, intellectual stimulation, vision, situational awareness, relationship, affirmation, culture, order, visibility, communication and discipline (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004; Jafari, Bourouni & Amiri, 2009). More specifically, school performance is interpreted as a yearly adequate progress of successful school activities, such as learning, productivity, working conditions, staff satisfaction, parent satisfaction and teachers' morale (Wahab *et al.*, 2015). As elucidated above, school performance entirely depends on the type of leadership style a leader executes. This is primarily because the type of leadership style a leader demonstrates is

considered to an important factor in improving organizational performance (Drewziecka & Roczniwska, 2018).



**Figure 2** Conceptual framework adopted from the literature review

## 2.5 Hypotheses

In keeping with literature review elucidated above, the following alternative hypotheses are formulated:

Ha1: There will be a significant negative relationship between autocratic leadership style and school performance.

Ha2: There will be a significant positive relationship between democratic leadership style and school performance.

Ha3: There will be a significant negative relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and school performance.

Ha4: There will be a significant positive relationship between situational leadership style and school performance.

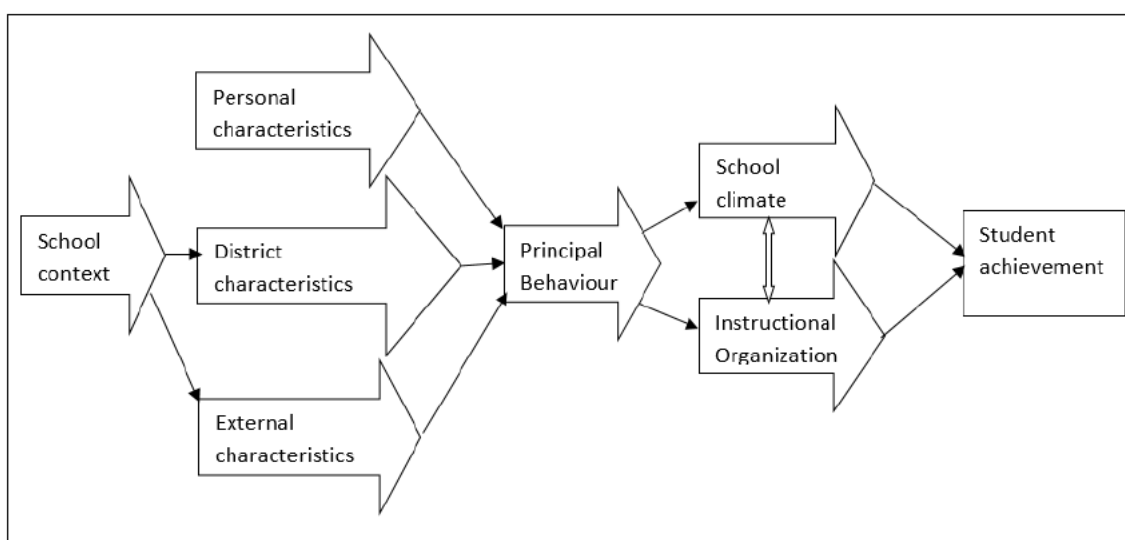
## 2.6 Theories and Models of Leadership

Researchers developed theoretical frameworks that serve to depict a school principal as an instructional leader (Bossert, Dwyer, Lee & Roman, 1983). For the purpose of this study, the authors opted to use Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy, Bossert’s model of 1982 and McGregor’s theory X and theory Y (1960).

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a popular motivational theory that impacted the study of leadership by focusing more on the human aspect to meet the need of employees. Educational organizations employ it as a psychological empowerment (Humphrey, 2005). The theory emphasizes that needs are the most important factors in determining behavior and performance (Tubarik & Baskan, 2015). School principals do not need to focus on physiological needs unless otherwise teachers’ salary is nominal, but a great deal of work is needed from principals to make sure that teachers are accepted (safety), included (social), trusted (esteem) and empowered (self-actualization). School leaders, nowadays, employs Maslow’s leadership theory of motivation when they focus more on building teachers’ sense belonging to their

schools, recognition for achievement, access of sources, promotion and empowerment (Jogulu, 2010).

Douglas McGregor’s theory X and theory Y are also important theories that would help understand the relationship between leadership styles and school performance. This theory has two extreme assumptions based on human nature’s productivity (Gyasi, Xi & Ampomah, 2016). Theory X-oriented managers take a pessimistic approach and tend to assume that human nature is unwilling to work unless being ordered, supervised or monitored to achieve organizational goals, while theory Y-oriented managers take an optimistic approach and believe that employees are willing and ready to work on their own if they are motivated rightly (Lin, 1999). As of this, school principals who believe in theory X tend to exhibit authoritarian leadership style, whereas school principals who believe in theory Y tend to implement a democratic leadership style. Some school principals, however, might employ a mixture of theories X and Y contextually. On the other hand, Bossert’s model of 1982 depicts that a principal’s practice and behaviors in a learning community are shaped by a school context and personal characteristics, which, in turn, directly affect the school environment and instructional organization, and eventually school performance.



**Figure 2** Bossert’s model of 1982

From Bossert’s model of 1982, a principal’s managerial behavior is both a dependent and an independent variable at the same time. It is dependent on personal, district and external characteristics, whereas it is an independent variable when it is related to school performance.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The study followed a descriptive research design. In this study, there are two variables: the principal’s leadership styles as an independent variable and school performance or student achievement as a dependent variable. The study considered all leadership styles at conceptual level; however, a decision was made to select leadership styles that are most widely mentioned within educational contexts, namely authoritative, democratic, laissez fair and situational leadership styles; previously validated scales for the four leadership styles were used. Similarly, school performance was measured using semester pass marks and annual grade progression after considering other possible options such as learning, productivity and working conditions. To analyze the relationship between leadership styles and school performance, the researchers use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study utilized a survey questionnaire, an interview, a focus group discussion and observational visits to schools. The

quantitative data were analyzed statistically by SPSS, while the qualitative data were content analyzed.

### **3.1 Population and Sampling**

The population of the study comprises public secondary schools in Eritrea. The study was conducted in three of the six traditional regions of Eritrea. The sampling technique included purposive and convenience sampling techniques that are examples of the non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample based on previous experience or prior knowledge (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Principals were selected because of their leadership roles in the schools, and teachers, parents and students were selected based on their knowledge and experience to corroborate the leadership styles employed in the schools. The three regions of the country were selected because of their proximity to the researcher's home town for convenience purposes. There was a high level of cooperation from the side of school administration; therefore, a sufficient number of principals, teachers, students and parents participated successfully. The final tally (N = 375) of the research participants includes 30 schools/principals, 250 teachers, 50 students, and 45 parents.

### **3.2 Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and observational visits to schools. Semi-structured interviews were administered to principals, while questionnaires (open- & closed-ended) were administered to teachers, students and parents. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted for 35 minutes with 10 students who were randomly selected from the same sample size (50 students) of the same schools. For the purpose of observation, the researchers requested documents such as principals' meetings with teachers, students and parents, and therefore ten school meetings (one meeting from each school) were observed. The purpose was to get additional information in practice.

### **3.3 Trustworthiness, Reliability and Validity**

To ensure trustworthiness, reliability and validity, the researchers employed the data triangulation method, and took the role of an observer while visiting, moderating and facilitating the focus group discussions and interviews. Interviews and discussions were planned, moderated, recorded and transcribed by the primary researchers to ensure accurate data transcription. Experienced and qualified academics were consulted to give their input on the framing and wording of the questions to ensure face validity of the questionnaire. Credibility of research results relies on appropriate data collection processes, through felicitous selection of participants and techniques of analyzing and interpretation of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

### **3.4. Ethical Consideration**

The researchers did obtain permission and clearance from relevant authorities and consent from participants (principals, teachers, students and parents) to conduct the study and collect data. The study does conform to the ethical standard expected of academic research.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 presents a sample description of the study. Of the sample who participated in the study, 80% of the sampled teachers were younger than 40 years of age, while 85% of the sample principals were above 45 years of age. The age of sample parents during the study ranges from 38 to 70 years age, and more than 73% of them were illiterate.



**Table 1** Sample description

Participants	Age	Qualification/undergraduate degree		Experience/year
		Regular subjects	Educational administration	
<b>Principals</b>	45-56	83%	17%	5-11
<b>Teachers</b>	>40	100%	0	5-16
<b>Parents</b>	38-70	0	0	0

#### 4.1 Principals' Training and Professional Development

The principals were asked whether training was provided prior to the appointment of the principal-ship and the majority (83%) of principals reported that they were trained as teachers; not as leaders. What is surprising is that they did not even receive an induction before their actual appointment as school principals. A similar situation does exist in other parts of Africa. For example, Wahab *et al.* (2015) found that there exists a gap in leadership training to prepare principals for school leadership in Lesotho. Given the educational change, innovation and challenge, educational leadership is greatly becoming a huge worry. As a result, schools are experiencing serious challenges to deal with leadership issues in such a fast-paced changing environment. Therefore, continuous professional development for principals is a matter of urgency, if schools are to improve performance and function effectively.

#### 4.2 Boarding and Day Schools

The researchers attempted to discover whether there is a difference between boarding and day schools, but there are no significant differences in terms of administration. It was discovered that boarding school students enjoy a controlled environment, ample time, free food service and high passing rate to a next grade than students from day schools, simply because day school students are vulnerable to social environmental factors: food shortages, lack of parental control, lack of study discipline and other social ills that result in low performance and high dropouts.

#### 4.3. Vision and Mission

In the modern education system, clearly established and articulated vision and mission statements characterize effective schools. However, without visionary leadership, the vision and mission are empty slogans (Smith & Piele, 2006). The principals were asked to share and explain the vision and mission statements of their respective schools. From the principals' interviews, the researchers discovered that the majority of the principals do not have clearly established and articulated visions and missions. In addition, 97% of the principals were found not to have any strategic plan. One of the greatest functions of principal is to establish and articulate a mission and to provide a direction.

#### 4.4 Parent Involvement

Parents' role in school performance in general and student learning in particular is instrumental, but the study discovered that 98% of the sample parents are not involved in school activities and are unaware to what extent they should be involved and contribute. The parents indicated that they only show up whenever teachers call them about their children's discipline issues. In terms of school performance, parents reported: "We are not satisfied by the performance of our children, our children hardly pass the national leaving matriculation exam for university entrance."

If parents are not participating in or are not involved in schools, principals are not using democratic leadership style. Parents play a significant role in the school system by motivating and supporting their children to study (Amason & Sapienza, 1997). Similarly, it is observed

that school performance relies on more parent input than leadership role (Amburgey & Rao, 1996). In Eritrea, there are parent-teacher associations in schools, but it is more symbolic than reality. From the research findings and observations, parents are more interested in and committed to being involved if principals open their doors for participation. Therefore, the kind of principals' leadership style could determine their future participation.

#### 4.5 The Relationship Between Principals' Leadership Styles and School Performance

Table 2 reports the Pearson correlation coefficient between school performance and the various leadership styles. All the coefficients were significant at 0.05 level of statistical significance.

**Table 2** Correlation coefficient between school performance and leadership styles

Leadership styles	School performance
Autocratic leadership style	-0.680
Democratic leadership style	0.512
Laissez-Faire leadership style	-0.730
Situational leadership style	0.351
Overall principals' leadership styles	0.645

#### 4.6 Autocratic Leadership Style and School Performance

As indicated in Table 1, a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.68 at  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance was obtained. The result confirms hypothesis 1, which was postulated as "There is a strong negative relationship between autocratic leadership style and school performance." This implies that there is a strong negative relationship between autocratic leadership style and school performance. In practical terms, the result suggests that the more the principal is autocratic, the poorer the school performance becomes. In autocratic leadership style, principals employ coercive force and oftentimes motivate teachers by threat in order to create a sense of obedience, but it results in resentment, humiliation, intimidation and eventually poor student achievement. In nature, the autocratic leadership style is not participatory and limited in scope. This means that a principal does not seek an input and participation from other stakeholders.

From the qualitative side of the study, one principal, who confesses to implement autocratic leadership style, explained, 'I would love to exercise democratic leadership style, but the situation does not welcome it. The school implements an imposed curriculum, which is developed by the national curriculum department and receives rules from the ministry of education. I therefore exercise autocratic leadership style to implement the curriculum and remind the staff the rules and duties.' Similarly, a unique teacher reported that principals should be autocratic if the curriculum is going to be implemented successfully. Besides, the teacher added, nowadays teachers' welfare and morale are not good; most teachers have a second job outside of the school to improve their income. Consequently, unless the school follows an autocratic leadership style, perhaps none of the teachers would come to teach.

#### 4.7 Democratic Leadership Style and School Performance

As is evident from Table 1, hypothesis 2, which was stated as "There is a positive relationship between democratic leadership style and school performance", is accepted with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.512 at  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance. The result implies that the more the principal applies the principle of democratic leadership style, the better the school performance becomes. The study revealed that 47% of the sample principals sometimes employ a democratic leadership style to involve school stakeholders for their ideas and

contributions to make school-wide decisions. The rest (53%) of the sample principals oftentimes uses other leadership styles, such as autocratic, laissez-faire and situational leadership styles. This finding was confirmed further through the interviews.

The findings from teachers and students clearly indicate that democratic leadership style is very important for a school to perform well, allowing teachers to feel a sense of ownership and an opportunity for potential release; it also helps bring changes, innovation and build two-way communication, trust, respect and commitment among stakeholders. In the group discussion with the students, it was highlighted that students should involve and select their representatives to participate in school decision matters, such as teaching methodology, syllabus, sports and student discipline issues. In the study, it was found that none of the sample schools have a student union. The students are not aware of the importance of student unions. The result from teachers clearly indicated that although teachers sometimes enjoy a democratic style of leadership in some schools, they do not participate in curriculum development programs. The majority of their views could be summarized as follows: “the ministry of education should permit teachers to participate in curriculum development in their respective areas of specialization and allow principals to exercise autonomous leadership styles for a better school performance.”

In the boarding schools, students reported, “We enjoy good and secure environment because the principals and teachers do care a lot about us. The principals oftentimes try to be around us even during night. Besides, we enjoy good food and good studying time.” This kind of conducive environment is a by-product of effective leadership style and leads to improved school performance. Students enjoy an atmosphere of caring culture and as a result build a sense of confidence and ownership. School leadership is responsible for connecting and building relationships between schools and communities where parents and community members learn the way to engage in schools and work collaboratively. One teacher reported that school-community relationships are immensely important for school performance. We often invite parents and community members to become involved in the school activities for the betterment of improved instruction. Similarly, some students have this to say, “every semester we get an invitation to our parents from the school teachers to attend school seminars, participate on school decisions, generate instructional resources and check students’ results.” However, the researchers discovered that parents do not attend lessons to make an input into the teaching and learning process.

Most teachers, i.e. 87%, reported that the more democratic the leadership style is, the more school performance improves. The study also revealed that schools that use dispersed or distributed leadership are associated with a high sense of ownership among teachers and school performance.

#### **4.8 Laissez-Faire Leadership Style and School Performance**

A negative correlation between laissez-faire leadership style and school performance with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.73 at  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance was observed, providing support for hypothesis 3 (There is a significant negative relationship between laissez-faire style and school performance). The result implies that the more the principal applies the principle of laissez-faire leadership style, the worse the school’s performance becomes. Autocratic leadership style is far better than laissez-faire, because in the study, the correlation coefficient of autocratic leadership style was found to be -0.68 at  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance. Laissez-faire leadership style lacks rigorous supervision; it only delegates tasks, jobs or activities without follow-up. Consequently, some staff members may lack responsibility and the necessary skills or knowledge to execute tasks, and this may lead to a declining school

performance. Some principals explained that laissez-faire leadership style engenders high absence rates, delinquency, irresponsibility and poor performance.

The findings from the qualitative study also paint a similar picture. Teachers reported that whenever principals want to exercise laissez-faire leadership style, they should be sure of the knowledge and responsibility of teachers, because principals are accountable for the end result; otherwise, laissez-faire leadership style could be effective to improve school performance. One of the principals reported that laissez-faire leadership style depends on the subordinates' responsibility. If responsibility does not exist, nothing may work. Sometimes, he uses laissez-faire leadership style, but he finds tasks undone and even worse, he added.

#### **4.9 Situational Leadership Style and School Performance**

The study found that there is a positive and medium association relationship between situational leadership style and school performance with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.351 at  $p < 0.05$  level of statistical significance. Hypothesis 4, which stated that "there will be a significant positive relationship between situational leadership style and school performance", is therefore supported. The result implies that the more the principal applies situational leadership style, the better the school performance becomes.

However, it is not like that of the democratic leadership style. The study further revealed that autocratic leadership style is more prevalent than democratic and laissez-faire. However, principals should not depend on one particular leadership style all the time. For instance, when students are unruly, violent or unpunctual, the principals may exercise the autocratic leadership style; when teachers and students are responsible and accountable, a principal may exercise the democratic and laissez-faire styles, accordingly. Situational leadership style helps principals to catch up with changes and regulate a situation because situational leadership theory does not only involve individual traits and behavioral approaches, but it also emphasizes a situation (Chandan, 2004).

Furthermore, the results of the quantitative study revealed that there is a strong relationship between overall leadership styles and school performance. A Pearson correlation coefficient, ( $r$ ) = 0.645 at  $p < 0.05$  statistical significance level was obtained. The result indicates that there is a strong positive linear correlation between leadership style and school performance. This implies that school performance could be explained by the existence of a particular leadership style employed by a principal. Other variables that may impact school performance may include attributes of good teachers, availability of academic facilities, parent participation and comfortable learning culture.

### **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Both the literature review and research findings revealed that leadership styles have a strong impact on school performance. As explained, educational leadership is an essential ingredient in improving school performance. However, the study established that some leadership styles have a negative impact on Eritrean secondary schools. Democratic and situational leadership styles have a positive impact on school performance; while leadership styles such as autocratic and laissez-faire have negative impacts because their very nature does not fit the situation in Eritrea. Culturally, the study found that the principals do exercise autocratic leadership styles in Eritrean schools. Principals tend to be more autocratic to young teachers; the younger the age of teachers in the school, the more principals become autocratic. In the meantime, it was proved that teachers and principals do not participate in curriculum development program issues and in important decisions that affect the school culture. Apart from this, principals are not trained as leaders for a principal-ship position; they learn and acquire leadership skills and knowledge through experience, as well as trial and error. The sample principals are thirstier for

workshops, conferences, seminars and training to boost their leadership knowledge, skills and experiences. Providing training is imperative as school principals were never trained as leaders or school leaders; they only received teachers' training.

The study revealed that principals have no strategic plan and do not invite teachers to important school matters in establishing mission statements and school wide decisions that greatly affect the teaching-learning process. This may lead to poor teacher morale and lack of ownership feelings. Teachers improve classroom instruction, build confidence and feel a sense of ownership when principals and district offices invite them to participate in important school and community matters. The study also found that although parents are interested in participation, their participation is still very minimal. This implies that principals are autocratic and avoid participatory leadership styles. On the contrary, teachers seem to be more welcoming to promote parent participation than principals do.

Educational leadership is a nerve cell to schools and helps them to function well and achieve more. Its impact is significant for school performance. Therefore, principals need to change and adopt a viable leadership style. Leaders influence people's behaviors and thoughts and mobilize resources wisely. If there is no one to influence and mobilize, situations could take over control and things may go wrong. It is through leadership that both human and material resources find their way for utilization and realization of talents; without effective school leadership, all details of plans go astray or wrong. Of course, there are other factors that influence school performance significantly, but not as leadership does. The impact of leadership is far beyond instructional facilities, funds, community participation and other related factors. Therefore, using different leadership styles according to situations has a pivotal impact on the overall school culture, because it is claimed that leadership has a huge impact not only on students' achievement, but also on the array of school situations (Raj, 2012).

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers wish to offer the following recommendations:

- No single leadership style is appropriate at all times; because no leadership style is right all the time; sometimes it is more efficient and progressive, while sometimes it is deficient or inadequate. Therefore, principals should employ situational leadership styles accordingly. This might help the school to meet challenges, catch up with the motion of change and function well.
- Any school comprises enormous human and material resources. Man-power is one of the greatest potential energies and has the capacity to expand and be realized. Therefore, principals should be visionary leaders, good motivators and wise users of resources. This could help a school to have the right material at the right place for a use, and the right person on the right position.
- Principals are experienced teachers, not trained leaders. They can teach, but cannot lead. They need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills of leadership. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should arrange specialized leadership training in higher institutions, such as colleges and universities.
- The essence of leadership is what we call 'dynamic in process'. Its dynamism highly affects the vision, mission and goals of a school. Principals need to learn its dynamism. Therefore, the district central offices should offer continuous professional development workshops, seminars, conferences and journals to enhance school leadership.
- School performance does not merely depend on leadership. There are also very important independent variables, such as parent and community involvement and participation. Therefore, principals should invite parents and communities to participate

in important school matters so that they may feel a sense of ownership to contribute to school performance.

- All stakeholders in a school are leaders. School performance is not only the function of one principal; it involves all the stakeholders mentioned above. Therefore, principals should move from headship to distributed leadership.
- Principals and teachers are implementers of an imposed curriculum for implementation. Therefore, the national curriculum department should seek ways to involve them in development issues.

### 5.1 Limitation of the Study

It is true that there is no research that is free of any limitation. In this research, some limitations were met due to time and inadequacy of resources. Only 10 schools were selected for the study; some more schools could have been included to attain a broader understanding and generalizations. The sample size for the qualitative analysis, however, is more than sufficient. A second obvious limitation was the shortage of literature review on the impact of leadership styles on school performance within the Eritrean context. All the reviewed literatures were from other countries, mainly from the West and other African countries.

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