

The Head Teachers' Leadership Styles on Learners' Academic Performance: An Exploratory Study of Catholic Grant-Aided Secondary Schools in Lusaka and Central Provinces

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Abstract: *The study focuses on the influence of the congregation of the religious sisters' head teachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance: an exploratory study of Catholic grant-aided schools in Lusaka and Central Province at the Grade 12 level. The study interrogated the influence of the sisters' leadership styles on learners' academic performance in selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools in Lusaka and Central Provinces. The focus was on grade 12 results from 2019 to 2023 in the selected schools where the study was conducted. The target population consisted of 513 individuals, and the sample size was 143, comprising three head teachers, 10 teachers, 25 parents, and 105 learners from the selected schools. In-depth interviews were conducted with the head teachers, teachers, and parents, and focus group discussions and class observations were conducted with the learners. Document review was employed to understand learners' previous academic performance. Data was collected and analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Method. Data revealed the famous and infamous leadership styles utilised by the head teachers of the Handmaid Sisters. These findings suggest that employing multiple leadership styles and revising specific school policies are necessary to contribute to the institute's full growth.*

Keywords: *Leadership styles, Catholic grant-aided, Learner academic performance, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).*

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Moved by the charism of “Mary’s spirit of childlike Simplicity, Humility and Charity in the service to humanity and the church, especially women and children according to the word of the Lord” (Safe Guarding policy, 2024 P. 6), the HBVM have taken a keen interest in establishing schools and train sisters that have contributed in the field of education. The congregation of the religious sisters was founded by Cardinal Adam Kozłowiecki, a member of the Society of Jesus (S.J.), also known as the Jesuits, in 1961 within the Archdiocese of Lusaka. Their mission primarily involves teaching and nursing in Lusaka, Central, Southern and Western Provinces. The Constitution (1991) stated, “We understand the importance of education in schools for the future of the church and society.” They operate in various grant-aided, private, and community schools. MOE (1996) stated that a grant-aided institution received a grant of 75% of the capital costs of approved projects from the government, as well as an annual grant to support running costs. According to Kelly (2015), missionary schools are referred to as grant-aided, where the government provides funding for salaries and operational expenses.

The study examined the influence of head teachers’ leadership styles on learners’ academic performance in selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools for five years at the grade 12 level. Therefore, the researcher discussed leadership styles disseminated by the head teacher, such as those presented by Bryant (2022) and Cheery (2022), who stated that a leadership style refers to a leader’s methods, characteristics, and behaviour when directing, motivating, and managing their teams. According to Kochhar (2015), successful management enables the achievement of desired educational objectives within a particular community. The University of St. Augustine (2024) argued that a leader’s influence can be reflected in employee happiness, a healthy bottom line, a culture of innovation, positive social change, and other benefits in the workplace. For example, data shows that 70% of workforce engagement, defined as the level of commitment and connection an employee has with their workplace, is influenced by managers (ibid). Hambulo (2016) mentioned that in Zambia, almost everyone associates high standard and quality education with Catholic education because of aspects such as high

teacher motivation, good leadership, high-quality students, high learning achievement, desired curriculum, good infrastructure, total development of the learners (intellectual, moral and spiritual), good learning environment and other evidence in Catholic schools. Nsubuga (2008) argued that even if an institution has all the financial resources to excel, it may fail if the leadership does not motivate others to accomplish their tasks effectively.

Table 1 presents the results of the National Examinations for St. Mary's Secondary, Stephen Luwisha Secondary, and Mpunde Secondary Schools from 2019 to 2023, covering five years.

Table 1

Schools	Years				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
St. Mary's Secondary School	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Stephen Luwisha Secondary School	99%	100%	98.9%	100%	100%
Mpunde Secondary School	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

ECZ Extract G12 results (2024)

As indicated above, the researcher intends to analyse the influence of the Handmaid's head teachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance for five years. The table confirmed the good performance in these schools, although this does not come without leadership challenges. The research also aims to identify the factors behind the sustained excellent performance in the schools. University of Zambia (2022) stated that teachers from grant-aided schools attributed their schools' good learners' academic performance to their head teachers' leadership styles, which are exhibited through rewarding performing teachers and pupils, supervising teachers' activities, interacting freely with teachers and prioritising the buying of teaching and learning material for the school. Therefore, the researcher outlined the leadership styles of head teachers that influence learners' academic performance at the grade 12 level, coupled with their lacunae.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Although numerous factors exist, there is a lack of literature on the influence of the religious head teachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance in selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools in Lusaka and Central provinces. Yet, the head teachers' leadership styles generally have been documented as having a significant input on student achievement in national examinations (University of Zambia, 2022). However, most studies on the influence of the head teachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance were comparative studies that gave differing results, and very few agreed on their findings.

Any leadership style has advantages and disadvantages; however, compelled motivation can significantly contribute to achieving positive results. A leader's job is to ensure that everyone in the team and the organisation is motivated and inspired to perform better than their best (Monte Carlo Analysis, 2024). At the same time, Monte Carlo Analysis (2024) argued that this is neither quick nor easy, but in the long term, the gains derived from happy employees far outweigh the time and effort spent in motivating them.

The University of St. Augustine (2024) noted that a leader's influence in the workplace can be reflected in employee satisfaction, a healthy bottom line, a culture of innovation, positive social change, and other key indicators. For example, data shows that 70% of workforce engagement, defined as the level of commitment and connection an employee has with their workplace, is influenced by managers (Ibid).

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the motivation theory of behavioural learning, specifically operant and classical conditioning. According to Monte Carlo Analysis (2024), motivation is the state of mind that drives all human beings to perform to their highest potential, with a positive attitude and good spirits. Reeve *et al.* (2016) suggested that theories are typically employed to inform the design of a research question, guide the selection of relevant data, facilitate data interpretation, and propose explanations for the underlying causes or influences of observed phenomena. Qualitative researchers also rely heavily on social and humanities theories to guide their research process and illuminate their findings (Ibid). There are two important types of motivation theories: content and process. Martin and Fellenz (2010) stated that content models of

motivation focus on what people need in their lives (i.e., what motivates them), and they comprise Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Clayton Alderfer's existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory, and Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory. Process theories that examine psychological and behavioural processes affecting an individual's motivation include Skinner's operant conditioning, expectancy, equity, and goal-setting theories (Sands, 2023). Athina (2023) stated that by studying this, you can learn what actions motivate people to work harder or care more about something, whether through a reward or another factor. The researcher utilised operant conditioning (Skinner) and classical conditioning (Ivan Pavlov) theories to examine how learning occurs. Brau, Fox and Robinson (2020) stated that classical conditioning stimuli cause responses and that the brain can associate stimuli to learn new responses.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The research design employed in this study was a phenomenological design, which describes particular phenomena or the appearance of things as they are, as experienced by the participants. According to Prime (2024), the phenomenological research design is a qualitative approach that focuses on exploring and describing the lived experiences of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon. In this research, the qualitative research method aims to uncover the importance of the participants' experiences by examining their perceptions, feelings, and interpretations. Lester (2024) stated that the phenomenological approach seeks to illuminate the specific and identify phenomena through how the actors perceive them. In the human sphere, this typically translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods, such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation, and representing them from the perspective of the research participant(s) (Ibid). Prime (2024) confirmed that, rooted in philosophy, phenomenological research design seeks to set aside preconceptions and biases to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of those who have directly experienced it, thereby adopting a qualitative approach. Therefore, the qualitative approach was critical to this study because it was necessary to develop deeper insights and understanding of the Handmaids' head teachers' leadership styles that influence the learners' academic performance. The target population of 513 and the sample size of 143 consisted of the three head teachers, 10 teachers, 25 parents, and 105 learners from St. Mary's, Stephen Luwisha and Mpunde Girls Secondary Schools.

2.2. Sampling Procedures

This study established the sample size using purposive sampling, with a quota sample of 10 teachers teaching grade 12 learners, 25 parents, and 105 learners selected from the sampled schools. They responded to the in-depth interview guide to analyse the influence of the religious head teachers' leadership style on learners' academic performance in a study in selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools in Lusaka and Central Provinces.

Table 2

No	Schools	Head Teachers	Teachers	Parents	Class Observation	Total
1	St. Mary's Secondary School-Lusaka	1	4	10	40	55
2	Stephen Luwisha Secondary School, Kabwe	1	3	8	35	47
3	Mpunde Secondary School, Kapiri Mposhi	1	3	7	30	41
	Total	3	10	25	105	143

2.2.1. Sampling Techniques

Selvam (2017) discussed the research sampling approach, which involves selecting respondents to form a study sample. The researcher in this study utilised non-probability sampling procedures. Walliman (2018) stated that non-probability is based on selection by non-random means. Non-probability sampling encompasses various techniques, including accidental, quota, and snowball sampling. For this study, purposive sampling and quota sampling were utilised to select the respondents to gather in-depth information on issues related to the head teachers, teachers, parents and learners' experiences in analysing the influence of the religious sisters' head teachers' leadership styles on learners' academic

performance in selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools in Lusaka and Central Provinces at grade 12 level.

2.3. Data Collection Method

The study comprises 38 semi-structured interviews of the three head teachers, 10 teachers, 25 parents, three focus group interviews consisting of 6 participants each, 3 class observations coupled with documentary analysis of each school's students' record of assessment known as mark schedules, schemes and records of work, as well as school policies of learner academic performance. The researcher employed systematic procedures in phenomenology, like the semi-structured and focus-group interviews, supplemented by documentary analysis. This process, known as triangulation of methods, enabled the collection of individual participants' views in their own language (Noble and Heale, 2019). Triangulation of methods involves using multiple data collection instruments to use the strengths of particular approaches to explore a phenomenon from several viewpoints (Haamoonga, 2018).

2.4. Reliability of the Study Findings

The researcher decided to triangulate the data collection methods and sources, including those from head teachers, teachers, parents, and learners, to enhance the credibility of the findings. To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, the researcher employed methodological triangulation, which enabled the collection of data through interviews, Focus Group discussions (FGDs), class observations, and document analysis. Focus Group Discussions and document analysis enhanced the confidence in the data. Bhandari (2022) stated that methodological triangulation is essential for validating, corroborating, and ascertaining the truthfulness of certain statements from different sources of evidence consulted. Therefore, the researcher employed methodological triangulation to mitigate the flaws and bias of relying on a single research technique.

2.5. Document analysis

According to Lumivero (2023), document analysis is the systematic review or evaluation of printed and electronic documents. Like many other qualitative research methods, it involves examining and interpreting data to uncover meaning, gain insight, and draw conclusions. The researcher employed triangulation to validate claims about the phenomenon being studied, utilising document analysis that drew on multiple sources and other research-gathering methods.

The schemes of work, work records for teachers, Mark schedules that revealed learners' academic performance, a programme on continuing professional development (CPD), and a policy on learner performance, as analysed in this study, allowed the researcher to capture various human behaviours. They gained insight into learners' academic performance in the selected sites. Lumivero (2023) posited that document analysis helped researchers analyse and interpret recorded information to comprehend human behaviour. Haamoonga (2017) argued that documents are created by a specific group of people seeking to convey their perspective, and they typically provide a defence or explanation regarding a particular situation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Each participant was given a consent form, allowing them to accept or decline to participate in the study. The consent form explicitly stated that all information provided by the participants would be kept confidential and that participants' names would not be disclosed in the research report. Participant Information sheets were provided to each respondent to ensure complete understanding of the research, including its benefits and risks. At each interview with the participant and during focus group discussion, issues of consent, confidentiality and anonymity were explained to them. Overall, ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, as this study required informed consent, ensured privacy and anonymity, and reported research results accurately and honestly. Therefore, the researcher adhered to the seven principles of ethical considerations: informed consent, freedom to withdraw, no deception, protection from physical and psychological harm, confidentiality and anonymity, minimal influence on the observations, and academic integrity. For the sake of anonymity and privacy, pseudonyms were used.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The head teachers utilised democratic, participative, inclusive, transformational, and autocratic leadership styles. However, through a shared vision, they employed physical monitoring by regularly reviewing teaching files, conducting class observations, and monitoring schedules, including schemes of work, lesson plans, and the syllabus. Additionally, they checked on teaching in the school. The head teachers in the selected schools stated that they consulted and involved the teachers in decision-making.

The head teacher from Mutende School stated that consultation and staff involvement let people take ownership of the decisions. I saw this working very well, especially in disciplinary cases such as the suspension or expulsion of a learner. The decision made by the disciplinary committee was binding, and the staff defended it because they were responsible for it. However, in the long run, with democratic rule, staff feel they must be consulted at all times, and when a decision is made contrary to their opinion, they often feel offended.

Mwandila head teacher stated that I consistently motivate learners by applying the moral, spiritual, and academic excellence model to incorporate moral uprightness with academic achievement. This training appears challenging and is often appreciated later in life, as individuals join the corporate world. At the same time, they realise the discipline instilled in them makes them stand out wherever they are.

The three head teachers acknowledged incorporating the model of moral, spiritual, and academic excellence in their leadership. The learners are encouraged to discuss their issues, and the prefect body presents the solution to the administration. They are allowed to exercise their rights to quality learning, which the head teacher determines after weighing the situation. Moral and spiritual matters are crucial in forming upright, well-rounded learners who can make meaningful contributions to society.

Summarising the interview, the three head teachers stated that I sometimes use autocratic reasoning to conclude a matter after listening to the discussion. It is a way of giving directives to the teachers and learners. Autocratic thinking is utilised to meet the deadline for what needs to be accomplished: everyone has to follow, and it's non-negotiable. Autocracy provides guidance or commands on what to do, especially to less competent subordinates at lower levels, and it is result-oriented.

3.1. Teacher Interviews

The head teachers' leadership styles influence learners' academic performance in selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools in Lusaka and Central Provinces.

According to the teachers, the above head teachers utilised various leadership styles, such as democratic, by allowing individuals to participate in school activities. Autocratic leadership styles are used depending on the situation, such as making final decisions based on what they feel would be in the school's best interest. These leaders hold most of the control over their staff and prefer to motivate them through restrictions and punishments. This type of leadership can lead to tasks being completed quickly and efficiently. However, it can also lead to lower staff motivation, decreased employee satisfaction, and ultimately, higher turnover.

Charismatic leadership styles were also employed to influence teachers and learners while inspiring staff through personal qualities. These leaders can positively impact staff, encouraging them to participate more often in their initiatives. However, this leadership style can harm the institute if it is not balanced.

In Sekela School, teachers mentioned using bureaucratic leadership styles. Bureaucratic leaders thrive when they can report to stakeholders and board members, such as the PTC and the school board, to facilitate their needs.

A teacher from Sekela School reported that leadership styles are effective because they yield the desired results. For bureaucracy, we follow protocol when reporting to the head teacher, such as disciplinary cases of the learners. However, sometimes, we discuss misconduct during teachers' briefings and staff meetings. As teachers, we are accountable for the learners' performance, particularly the final results at grade 12, which are reported to parents during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held annually.

Teachers reported having had good experiences working in Catholic grant-aided secondary schools, which encouraged them to take their work seriously and ensure that 100% of learners achieve academic success. At the same time, teachers have inculcated a spirit of hard work in them, and they will exhibit that wherever the government posts them.

Thematically, analysed after saturation, it was summed up as follows:

"I have gained insight into various leadership styles through my experience in this environment. At the same time, I realised how I could best work independently to influence learners' academic performance by having the privilege of being at this school. Grant-aided schools are like training schools that prepare you for higher positions, although I would prefer to continue working here."

Another teacher from Sekela School stated that I have learnt to work hard and be committed to my job with less supervision. When work is delegated to me, I strive to produce high-quality results and report them to the head teacher.

Candidates were selected based on merit, taking into account the school's cut-off points. Learners who choose the school in grade 7 are given priority, which remains in effect through grade 12. Once in school, learners' progression is tracked continuously from the outset and is usually smooth. The three schools have a repeat a grade policy for the learners whose performance was not impressive. Therefore, there is no automatic promotion, and a repeat grading policy encourages learners to work extra hard. To avoid repeating a grade, teachers monitor learners by checking their exercise books and through continuous assessments, such as monthly, mid-term, and end-of-term tests. For good performance, discipline is paramount, and they are strict. Good behaviour is associated with good academic performance among learners. However, there are occasional cases of indiscipline. In the three schools, enrollment ranges from 35 to 40 students per class, facilitating teacher-learner interaction and making classroom movements easier when marking learners' work.

A teacher from Mwadila School stated that learners' academic performance depends on their discipline. Unruly learners are punished and counselled depending on the offence. The head teacher is involved when a complicated case affects the parents. A high standard of discipline yields good learner performance. Due to the high standard of discipline, the school has consistently achieved good results over the past five years, with scores ranging from 98% to 100%.

Another teacher from Mwadila school stated that the selection of learners is based on merit. Therefore, performance is good. Learners struggling with academics are supported through remedial classes and tuition, enabling every learner to achieve good results. If this is not done, the repeat policy is applied.

3.2. Parents Interviews

Parents stated that the religious sisters employ transformational, participative, autocratic, and charismatic leadership styles; others expressed uncertainty about the leadership styles used in the school. However, they said that the leadership styles incorporated moral, spiritual, and academic excellence, as the learners focused on being responsible and hardworking both at school and home, where Parents tell their children that they can solve the challenges that come their way. Their leadership styles motivate learners and inspire them to work hard and remain focused.

One parent from Mutende School stated that the leadership styles used were transformational, democratic and autocratic. Transformational, as new ideas are introduced following the changes brought about by the Ministry of Education. Democratic or participatory, they are open to suggestions from parents during the Annual General Meeting and board and executive meetings, which are held occasionally. Autocratic, as they are extremely strict with school rules and sometimes inform students about decisions already made. Once a decision is made about your child, there can be no compromise, such as repeating a grade or expulsion from school. However, autocracy is sometimes beneficial because it fosters discipline and is non-negotiable when displaying unruly behaviour.

A Sekela School parent stated, "I'm not sure of the leadership styles used, but I feel it incorporates the school motto of moral and academic excellence, as our children are trained holistically." Their behaviour is shaped to become morally upright, and they focus on educational performance to achieve good results at the end of their academic year.

A parent from Mwadila School stated that he was unsure of the leadership style used, but it should be a hands-on approach. The discipline is excellent because the head teacher and staff are firm in ensuring that learners achieve academic performance.

3.3. Focus Group Discussion

The Grade 12 learners are in their fifth year at the three schools, and one school reported that the head teachers' leadership style was autocratic. This method of leadership is effective in situations that require quick decision-making.

In the three schools, learners stated that their head teacher used a democratic, transformational, pacesetter leadership model. This was seen in the monitoring of learning in the school, and to materialise the team's shared vision, the head teacher encouraged teachers to work together.

During FGDs, Mutende School mentioned that after each period, the teacher on duty checked all the classes in the school to ensure that the subject teachers were in class teaching. However, the head teachers, deputy head teachers, and HODs regularly check on the teachers who attend classes. Sometimes, the head teacher would stand outside to make sure teachers went to their respective classes to teach. All this was done because the head teacher focused on the future results that we would obtain as we wrote the final examination.

On the democratic leadership model, learners from Sekela narrated that:

She is a democratic leader who allows and encourages everyone, including teachers and learners, to participate in school activities as needed. We also suggest things that concern us, such as the best way to improve our academic performance and the points are taken.

The grade 12 learners in one school stated that learning monitoring was excellent. Every lesson is monitored by the deputy head teacher, who circulates the school to ensure that teaching and learning occur at all times. On education and knowledge in the school, learners said at Mutende School.

Teaching and learning are fair since some teachers are good at what they do while others have poor teaching methods and techniques in their presentation of lessons, especially teachers of science. The deputy head teachers see teaching and learning take place all the time.

However, learners felt that the school environment motivated them, as it provided daily security and ensured their safety. The silence during prep motivated them to study and focus on schoolwork. The clean, green surroundings and sanitary facilities motivated them to consistently maintain and participate in keeping the school clean.

Still, at Mutende School, a learner stated that the school surroundings are generally green and clean; therefore, we are motivated to maintain cleanliness and have a conducive learning environment.

A learner from Sekela school mentioned that in the environment had this to say: The school environment is clean both inside and outside the classroom. All the classrooms are well-furnished, making us comfortable as we learn and participate in cleaning the environment through the assigned portions given to us.

Pacesetter leaders are driven to achieve results and set high standards, pushing their staff to meet goal after goal and effectively accomplish tasks as planned. A constant, hard-driving pace can wear down some employees, and it isn't easy to sustain successfully over an extended period. However, this pacesetter leadership model may lead to leaders burning themselves out and taking their team with them. Therefore, the leader needs to balance and lead at a manageable pace.

A learner from Mwadila school voiced that the school is result-oriented. We are encouraged to study and maintain silence until break time so that an outsider might think there are no learners. In the event of any noise, any teacher or prefect will immediately intervene to control the noise.

Since the schools are result-oriented, in conclusion, the grade 12 learners had this to say: Everyone stresses us, including the head teacher, teachers, and our parents, over working hard and getting six points. You hear that during school assemblies before the start of the day, during morning prayers. At home, our parents will sing the same song about six points. So the stress on our part is too much.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to the head teachers in the three schools, they used the following leadership styles: democratic, transformational, and autocratic. Bhatia (2013) stated that a consultative or democratic leader makes decisions in consultation with and through the participation of subordinates. This leadership style requires leaders to utilise good communication skills and be able to share power or responsibility with their subordinates. **The head teachers agreed with IMD (2022) that spontaneous, open, and candid communication is** often associated with a participative leadership style. However, the head teachers noted that participative leadership considers the leader as not decisive and instead depends on subordinates, who expect to be consulted constantly. If not consulted, they take offence and participate less in an activity. According to Bhatia (2013), the democratic leadership style is time-consuming and may result in delays in decision-making. Over time, subordinates may develop the habit of expecting to be consulted on everything. Therefore, the head teachers and Bhatia (2013) resonated with the above sentiment.

The head teachers utilised transformational leadership styles, which, as they stated, were effective because they could bring about change and transform the outlook of everything, from infrastructure to learners' academic performance, which yielded desirable results. According to CMOE (2024), a transformational leadership model inspires change and innovation, focusing on open communication to create a shared vision, empower teams, and foster a culture of innovation and evolution. However, it may create unrealistic expectations if the leader doesn't establish clear guidelines and offer some direction (CMOE, 2024). At the same time, measuring and evaluating the model's direct impact on business results was challenging. Due to its mechanism, head teachers need to take more steps to help teachers relax as they perform their duties, thereby reducing stress. The head teacher acknowledged that they had not done much to support the teachers besides providing monthly monetary incentives and termly tuition funds.

The head teachers and the literature in this study revealed that transformational leaders focus on change and the people. **A focus on change:** According to Bryant (2022), transformational leaders are comfortable with change and understand that it is necessary for organisational success. Cole and Kelly (2015) apply the McKinsey 7S model, which comprises strategy, structure, systems, styles, staff, shared values, and skills. In conclusion, changes to one component can affect all the other components (Cole and Kelly, 2015). To bring about change, the head teacher has to be aware of the elements of the McKinsey 7S model. **A focus on people:** Transformational leaders see the potential in every one of their followers (Bryant, 2022). The head teachers stated that they identify teachers' full potential, especially in their subject allocation, to bring out the best in learners' academic performance. They strive to develop their followers' strengths and abilities to reach their full potential (Bryant, 2022). Changing the focus to people is ideal for the institute, aligning with the head teacher's plan. However, focusing on change can be challenging and costly, particularly considering the McKinsey 7S component.

An example of a transformational model is Arianna Huffington, who inspired change and innovation, created a workspace that fostered better creativity and innovation, and introduced sleep pods to prevent worker exhaustion and burnout (University of St. Augustine, 2024). Not much was done to address the sleeping pods' potential to prevent worker exhaustion and burnout, and this issue needs to be examined further. The revelation is that a Sleep pod, also known as a nap pod, is a special type of structure or chair that allows people to nap, relax, and rejuvenate at the end of the day. The challenge is that sleeping pods are not possible in these schools, as stated by the head teachers.

One head teacher acknowledged using autocratic leadership styles and stated that it was helpful in certain situations, such as resolving a matter. She said it was used to give the teachers and learners direction when it came to beating deadlines. Autocracy enabled her to provide guidance and commands on what to do, especially to less competent lower-level subordinates, resulting in effective outcomes. The head teachers agreed with the University of St. Augustine (2024) that autocratic or authoritarian leadership prefers a structure that focuses on tasks, makes decisions independently, thrives with strict scheduling, asserts unquestionable authority, focuses on setting and achieving goals, and motivates with rules and penalties. The head teacher was in tandem with Bhatia (2013), who stated that when a leader prefers to be dominant in decision-making, and there is little room for error in the final accomplishment, autocratic leadership may enhance results and improve productivity. It is about giving results-oriented commands and avoiding fair input for teachers and learners. However, the authoritarian leader should also be mindful that employees may feel invisible, neglected, and abused if treated in ways that disregard their needs (Reitsma, 2024). Reitman disagrees with autocratic leadership styles, as they can lead to subordinates feeling invisible and neglected when their needs are disregarded. Therefore, it is advised that head teachers be mindful of their decision-making regarding things that concern both teachers and learners.

Teachers stated that head teachers in their leadership utilised democratic, autocratic, charismatic and bureaucratic leadership styles. On democracy, they said that head teachers allowed individuals to participate in school activities. Against this background, teachers reported having had good experiences working in Catholic grant-aided secondary schools. It encouraged them to take their work seriously to ensure that 100% of learners' academic performance was achieved. They said they have instilled the spirit of hard work and will demonstrate it wherever the government posts them. Teachers further stated they have learnt leadership styles just by working in this environment. They realised how best to work independently to influence learners' academic performance, having the privilege of attending this school. The acknowledged grant-aided school was like a training school which prepared them to take up higher positions, though they would instead continue working there. Another teacher said that I have learnt to work hard and how to be committed to my job with less supervision. Kinyanjui (2014) stated that democratic or consultative leadership was the best in Ugandan schools. It was also found that most head teachers in Uganda employed this type of leadership to foster ownership (Kinyanjui, 2014). The teachers and Kinyanjui (2014) agreed that democratic leadership styles were the most effective as they created ownership among subordinates. However, Bhatia (2013) believes that the democratic leadership style is time-consuming and may lead to delays in decision-making. Over time, subordinates may develop the habit of expecting to be consulted in everything. In short, Bhatia does not favour democratic leadership styles.

Teachers stated that head teachers use autocratic leadership styles depending on the situation, such as making final decisions based on what they feel would be in the school's best interest. However, the University of St. Augustine (2024) noted that authoritarian or autocratic leaders have little interest in collaborative decision-making and are highly task-oriented. These leaders control their staff and prefer to motivate them through restrictions and punishments, contrary to what the teachers said. However, this type of leadership can lead to tasks being completed quickly and efficiently by producing the desired results. However, it can also lead to lower staff motivation, decreased employee satisfaction, and ultimately higher turnover. The head teacher displays the following characteristics: prefers structure, makes decisions independently, focuses on tasks, thrives on strict scheduling, asserts unquestionable authority, focuses on setting and reaching goals and is motivated by rules and penalties (University of St. Augustine, 2024). The teachers agreed on the setting and achieving the goal of surrendering a non-performing teacher back to the Ministry of Education, which did not sit well with them. Teachers reported being motivated every month through the school's motivation policy. Pupils were motivated yearly through awards day, and non-performing learners had to repeat a grade or transfer to another school against their will. The head teachers agreed with the above statement that such was happening in the school.

Teachers said charismatic leadership styles were exercised in the school, and the head teacher was inspired by their personal qualities. A negative aspect is that when a leader changes, subordinates face challenges adapting to the incoming leader. Reitsma (2024) argued that with such an intense focus on your goals, you may develop tunnel vision, forgetting the bigger picture or falling prey to self-

absorption and distracted focus, which can cause significant issues in organisational efforts. Therefore, this type of leadership style can cause harm to the institute if not checked, as stated by the teachers.

In one school, it was said that bureaucratic leadership styles were used. The University of St. Augustine (2024) stated that the bureaucratic leadership model involves a heightened focus on results and performance, asserting a strict chain of command. CMOE (2022) opined that bureaucratic leaders typically implement non-negotiable processes, holding employees accountable to clear criteria and a set of objectives and allowing managers to track results. Bureaucratic leaders thrive when they can report to stakeholders and board members, such as the PTA and the school board, to facilitate their needs. However, requiring such strict adherence to established rules and protocols can create a rigid and tense workplace for employees (University of St. Augustine, 2024).

Despite parents stating that the HBVM sisters use transformational, participative, autocratic, and charismatic leadership styles. They also said that their leadership styles incorporated moral, spiritual, and academic excellence, as learners focused on being responsible, God-fearing, and hardworking at school and home. The parents agreed with Mugumbate and Mumba (2021), who stated that Kaunda's humanism was founded on the principles of God. The Mission also runs schools based on humanist principles, where God is central to many activities. In line with the Ministry of Education's (1996) mission statement stipulates that the Ministry of Education is to guide the provision of education for all Zambians so that they can pursue knowledge and skills, manifest excellence in performance and moral uprightness, defend democratic ideals, and accept and value others persons based on their person worth and dignity, irrespective of gender, religion, ethnic origin, or any other discriminatory characteristic. The Ministry of Education aligns with Phasha (2016), who stated that coexistence is living in harmony with others, grounded in mutual Ubuntu values of respect and solidarity.

In focus group discussions, learners reported that their head teachers employed autocratic, democratic, transformational, and pacesetting leadership styles. One school stated that autocracy was used by the head teacher when the repeat policy was applied to poorly performing learners. They were asked to repeat a grade, and if they disagreed, they had to leave the school; a force transfer was issued. Decisions were made, and no dialogue was allowed; it was non-negotiable. The University of St. Augustine (2024) stated that autocratic leaders do not consult with or consider the opinions of others when making decisions. The learners agreed with the University of St. Augustine, as they felt it was unfair to be informed that they would have to repeat a grade or transfer to another school.

Other schools reported that the leadership styles employed by the head teachers were democratic, transformational, and pacesetting. For democratic learners, the head teacher was democratic, as they encouraged participation in school activities and solicited suggestions on topics such as improving academic performance. For the transformational leadership style, learners reported that the head teacher was goal-oriented and focused on the future, encouraging learners to work hard for better results. In a school setting, transformational leadership encompasses the following characteristics: Focus on the future. Transformational leaders consistently consider the necessary actions to achieve organisational goals (Bryant, 2022). The learners agreed with Bryant's above statement.

According to Reitsma (2024), pacesetting leaders are driven to achieve results and set high standards to push their staff to meet goal after goal. Learners said the school is result-oriented, and we are forced to work hard, which stresses us. We get tired of the same song of getting six points from the school management and our parents. The learners resonate with Reitsman (2024), who states that leaders are result-oriented and set high standards to push learners to achieve goal after goal. Learners said one should work or study hard and perform well on the mid-term and end-of-year tests.

On the contrary, Kinyanjui's (2014) study found that no one leadership style was used in schools. Kinyanjui (2014) cited that good academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) was exhibited by schools whose head teachers had a mixture of autocratic (Task-oriented behaviour) and democratic (relationship-oriented behaviour) leadership styles, which the head teachers acknowledged having used. Similarly, the HBVM sisters employed a range of leadership styles, adapting to the specific situations they encountered.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was revealed that there is a lack of literature on the analyses of the influence of the religious sisters' head teachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance, a study of selected Catholic grant-aided secondary schools in Lusaka and Central Provinces despite all the contributions towards education in Zambia.

It has been observed that a leader's role is to ensure that everyone in the team and the organisation is motivated and inspired to perform at their best. This is neither quick nor easy, but the benefits of having happy employees far outweigh the time and effort spent motivating them in the long term.

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