

Impact of Headteachers' Strategies for Creating a Conducive Learning Environment on Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Kilifi South Sub-County

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment on academic performance in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County, Kenya. Despite national efforts to improve education, academic performance in the region has declined, raising concerns about school leadership effectiveness. The study addresses a research gap by examining how headteachers' practices—especially in managing physical resources and fostering positive learning climates—affect learner outcomes under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). A descriptive survey design using a mixed-method approach was adopted. The study targeted 15,394 participants, with a sample of 390 selected using Yamane's formula and disproportionate stratified sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, with analysis conducted using SPSS and thematic methods. Reliability and validity were ensured through pilot testing and expert review. Findings revealed that headteachers significantly influence academic performance through fair distribution of materials (mean = 4.90), facility maintenance (4.81), and infrastructure management (4.80). However, strategies promoting emotional support received a lower rating (mean = 3.46), indicating a gap in psychosocial leadership. Regression analysis confirmed a significant relationship between headteachers' strategies and learner performance ($B = 0.326$, $p = 0.000$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concludes that while physical and instructional strategies are well-implemented, emotional support systems need strengthening. It recommends that the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) provide professional development on psychosocial leadership, the Ministry of Education increase funding for learning materials and infrastructure, and headteachers adopt child-friendly practices. Future research should explore headteachers' emotional intelligence, the role of parental involvement, and comparative management strategies in rural and urban schools.

Keywords: headteacher strategies, learning environment, academic performance, Kilifi South, CBC, school leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Creating a conducive learning environment is a fundamental responsibility of school leadership and has a profound influence on learners' academic performance. Globally, studies emphasize that headteachers who actively manage learning environments contribute significantly to student success. Auliah et al. (2021) conducted a case study in Malaysia and found that principals who fostered collaborative relationships, maintained orderliness in school environments, and prioritized learner engagement created emotionally supportive climates that enhanced academic outcomes. Similarly, Alanoglu (2023), in a study of Turkish public schools, concluded that learning-centered leadership practices including teacher support, resource allocation, and instructional focus—correlated positively with improved school climate and student performance.

Regionally, similar trends have been observed. In South Africa, Moyo and Dlamini (2020) found that schools led by headteachers who prioritized participatory leadership, infrastructure management, and student

discipline created more effective learning spaces, directly improving academic achievement. In Ghana, Mensah and Boateng (2023) reported that well-maintained facilities, adequate teaching materials, and supportive teacher-student relationships significantly contributed to higher learner performance. These findings indicate that beyond pedagogy, the physical and psychological conditions of schools—largely shaped by headteachers—are integral to academic success.

In the Kenyan context, several studies have highlighted the role of headteachers in creating environments that influence learning outcomes. Muriuki, Kimosop, and Gachahi (2023) found that headteachers' involvement in managing teaching resources and maintaining physical infrastructure positively affected student performance in private primary schools in Nyeri and Murang'a counties. Mutua, Cheloti, and Kamau (2023), in Makueni County, also emphasized the importance of structured school environments led by headteachers who align facilities, learning materials, and learner-centered support systems. Despite these national insights, specific studies examining the impact of headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment on academic performance in Kilifi South Sub-County remain scarce. This study thus seeks to fill that gap by assessing how these strategies contribute to learner outcomes in this unique coastal setting.

Statement of the Problem

Despite national efforts to improve access and equity in education, academic performance in several public primary schools within Kilifi South Sub-County continues to decline. Data from Junju and Gongoni Primary Schools reflect a downward trend over the past five years. At Junju, the percentage of candidates scoring above 250 marks in the KCPE dropped from 50.45% in 2019 to 30.43% in 2023. Similarly, Gongoni declined from 40.19% to 31.06% over the same period. These figures raise serious concerns about the academic environment in which learners are expected to thrive.

Evidence from global and regional contexts emphasizes that school leadership—particularly in managing the learning environment—is a critical driver of academic success. Recent studies across Türkiye, Malaysia, Ghana, and South Africa highlight that well-organized, emotionally safe, and resource-rich learning environments significantly boost student outcomes. In Kenya, Muriuki et al. (2023) similarly linked strong headteacher leadership to improved academic performance. However, Kilifi South Sub-County schools show inconsistent application of these strategies, potentially contributing to declining KCPE results.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of a conducive learning environment, limited research has investigated how these specific leadership strategies by headteachers affect academic performance in Kilifi South. Most studies focus broadly on school management without isolating the influence of the learning environment as a distinct factor. This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the extent to which headteachers' strategies for establishing conducive learning environments influence learners' academic outcomes in public primary schools within Kilifi South Sub-County.

Research Objective

To establish impact of headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment on academic performance in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment and academic performance in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory, originally developed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard Bass in 1985. Transformational leadership emphasizes the role

of school leaders in inspiring, motivating, and empowering teachers and learners to achieve high levels of performance. The theory identifies four core components of leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration which are essential in shaping school culture and fostering a supportive learning environment(Mafe, 2023) In the context of primary education, headteachers who adopt transformational leadership styles are more likely to implement strategies that create a positive school climate, promote professional collaboration among teachers, and address learners' diverse needs (Shala, Mehmeti, Shabani & Qerimi, 2024). This leadership approach encourages innovation, boosts morale, and enhances collective responsibility, all of which contribute to academic success (Huang, Sindakis, Aggarwal & Thomas, 2022). The application of transformational leadership theory in this study provides a lens through which the strategies employed by headteachers such as enhancing discipline, promoting teacher motivation, improving school infrastructure, and engaging parents can be examined and understood in relation to student academic outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques, was employed in this descriptive survey design to examine the influence of headteachers' management strategies on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County.

Target Population

The target population included 39 public primary schools within Kilifi South Sub-County. A total of 15,394 participants were involved in the study, comprising 39 headteachers, 108 class teachers, 360 teachers, 520 parents, and 14,367 pupils.

Table 1 Target Population

Category	Target Population	Percentage (%)
Head Teachers	39	0.3
Class Teachers	108	0.7
Guidance and Counseling Teachers	360	2.3
Parents	520	3.4
Pupils	14,367	93.3
Total	15,394	100

Target Sample

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, ensuring a 95% confidence level with a significance level of 0.05 as follows

$$n = N (1 + Ne^2)$$

Where

e= Error tolerance level,

N = total population

$$n = \text{number of samples } n = 15394 (1 + 15394 * 0.05^2)$$

$$= 389.9 \text{ respondents}$$

The sample is approximated to 390 respondents

Disproportionate stratified sampling was used to ensure adequate representation of key subgroups. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interview guides. Pilot testing was conducted with 39 respondents to assess instrument reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha and split-half reliability tests were applied, while expert review supported content validity. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS Version 27, while qualitative data were examined thematically. Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, and data security were rigorously observed. The target sample is presented in Table 2 below

Table 2 Target Sample

Category	Target Sample	Percentage (%)
Head Teachers	39	10
Class Teachers	44	11.3
Guidance and Counseling Teachers	70	17.9
Parents		
Pupils	104	26.7
Total	133	34.1

Findings on Headteachers' Strategies for Creating a Conducive Learning Environment on Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools

The findings from the study revealed that headteachers in Kilifi South Sub-County play a critical role in shaping the learning environment, which in turn significantly influences learners' academic performance. Respondents strongly agreed that headteachers ensure fair distribution of learning materials (mean = 4.90), regularly oversee the maintenance of classrooms and facilities (mean = 4.81), and manage infrastructure improvements that positively affect academic outcomes (mean = 4.80). Similarly, the availability of adequate learning resources under the headteacher's supervision (mean = 4.77) and the establishment of a generally positive school atmosphere (mean = 4.52) were also rated highly. These findings demonstrate that leadership strategies related to physical resource management and infrastructure are well-implemented and widely appreciated. However, the strategy involving promotion of a child-friendly and emotionally supportive environment received a significantly lower mean score (3.46) with a high standard deviation (1.415), indicating inconsistency across schools and a potential gap in addressing learners' psychosocial needs.

Table 3 Responses on Creating a Conducive Learning Environment

Creating a Conducive Learning Environment	Mean	Std. Deviation
The headteacher ensures fair distribution of learning materials such as textbooks to support effective teaching.	4.90	.430
The headteacher regularly oversees the maintenance of classrooms and facilities to ensure a safe and supportive learning space.	4.81	.679
Improved school infrastructure, as managed by the headteacher, has positively influenced academic achievement.	4.80	.714
Availability of adequate learning resources under the headteacher's supervision has enhanced learners' academic success.	4.77	.732
A positive school atmosphere created by the headteacher contributes to improved academic performance.	4.52	.660
The headteacher promotes a child-friendly environment that supports learners' well-being and motivation.	3.46	1.415

The findings in Table 3 are consistent with the study by Anderson and Muller (2022) in Berlin, Germany, which established that headteachers who prioritized classroom organization, student engagement, and

teacher collaboration saw a 15% improvement in standardized test scores. The high ratings in Kilifi South regarding infrastructure and learning materials suggest similar gains in academic performance where learning environments are orderly and well-resourced. Likewise, Mensah and Boateng (2023) found that in Accra, Ghana, schools with well-maintained facilities and adequate teaching resources demonstrated better learner outcomes, reinforcing the importance of headteachers' involvement in physical learning conditions. The Kilifi South findings also mirror Muriuki, Kimosop, and Gachahi's (2023) results in Nyeri and Murang'a counties, which linked effective resource and staff management to improved academic achievement through activities such as training, supervision, and teacher motivation.

In contrast, the lower rating on the emotional and motivational support offered by headteachers in Kilifi South aligns with observations made by Patel and Sharma (2021) in Mumbai, India. Their study found that schools that actively implemented learner-centered strategies, such as peer mentorship and collaborative teacher-parent programs, not only improved academic performance but also enhanced student well-being. The variability in Kilifi responses suggests that while material conditions are prioritized, emotional support structures are inconsistently implemented. This points to a need for targeted leadership development focused on psychosocial aspects of learner engagement. Similarly, Moyo and Dlamini (2020) emphasized the importance of fostering a positive school culture and maintaining high expectations to improve learner performance in Johannesburg. This perspective further highlights a dimension of leadership that could be strengthened in Kilifi South to create a more holistic and inclusive learning environment

Lastly, while this study did not directly assess goal-setting strategies, the strong organization around physical infrastructure and learning materials suggests alignment with Mutua, Cheloti, and Kamau's (2023) emphasis on structured and strategic leadership. Their findings in Makueni County underscored the value of S.M.A.R.T. goals and performance tracking, which headteachers in Kilifi South could adopt to bridge the gap between infrastructure provision and learner-centered support. Together, the findings reinforce that while Kilifi headteachers excel in creating physically conducive environments, enhancing emotional support systems is essential for fully realizing the benefits of the Competency-Based Curriculum. The study proceeded to test the hypothesis

Table 4 Test of Hypothesis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment	.326	.033	.318	10.002	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Learners Academic Performance					

The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment and academic performance in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County. However, the regression analysis results indicate otherwise. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.326$) with a standard error of 0.033 shows a positive influence of the headteachers' strategies on learners' academic performance. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.318, and the t-value is 10.002, which is statistically significant at $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). These results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis and support the alternative hypothesis that headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment significantly influence academic performance among learners in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County.

Qualitative Findings

Interviews with key informants revealed the vital role that headteachers play in cultivating safe and supportive learning environments. One headteacher noted, "We conduct regular safety audits of classrooms, ensure perimeter fencing is intact, and involve teachers in identifying any risks to learners' well-being."

Another participant emphasized the importance of emotional support, stating, “Beyond academics, we try to make the school feel like a second home. We talk to children when they seem distressed and encourage teachers to adopt positive discipline approaches.” The interviews further revealed a strong perceived link between infrastructure and academic performance. As one teacher explained, “When learners study in clean, well-lit classrooms with enough desks, they are more attentive and motivated. It boosts their morale and concentration.” These narratives show the multidimensional nature of a conducive learning environment, encompassing physical safety, emotional support, and the availability of essential facilities all of which contribute significantly to learners’ academic outcomes.

Participants consistently highlighted that strategic planning, regular monitoring, and resource management by headteachers significantly influenced academic performance. One class teacher explained, “Our headteacher insists on weekly lesson plan reviews and classroom observations. This has really pushed us to stay focused and improve delivery.” In assessing the headteacher's influence on standardized test outcomes, another teacher shared, “Since the headteacher introduced internal mock exams and target-setting meetings, we’ve seen a steady rise in our KCPE results.” Parents echoed this sentiment, with one stating, “Before, we barely got feedback, but now we attend regular academic clinics. I’ve seen my child move from average to top ten in class.” Additionally, several respondents credited improvements in classroom management and learning resources for better student performance. A guidance teacher noted, “The availability of textbooks and structured group discussions have helped learners who used to lag behind. The atmosphere is more focused now.” These insights suggest that when headteachers implement strategic and inclusive management practices, there is a tangible improvement in both teaching quality and learner outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study substantiate the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory by demonstrating that headteachers who actively implement strategic interventions particularly in the areas of physical infrastructure, resource allocation, and school climate positively influence academic outcomes. The strong statistical relationship between leadership strategies and learner performance reinforces the theory's assertion that leaders can transform institutional outcomes by inspiring, motivating, and supporting their teams. The observed gap in the promotion of child-friendly and emotionally supportive environments also expands the application of the theory by emphasizing the need for balanced attention to both structural and psychosocial dimensions of leadership. This insight invites further scholarly investigation into how transformational leadership practices can be adapted to the unique challenges of primary education in resource-constrained environments such as Kilifi South.

On a practical level, the study highlights the critical role that headteachers play in shaping both the physical and emotional aspects of the learning environment. Education stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, County Education Boards, and school management committees should prioritize continuous professional development for headteachers that goes beyond administrative competencies to include emotional intelligence, inclusive leadership, and psychosocial support for learners. While current efforts in Kilifi South have yielded positive results in resource and infrastructure management, the significant disparity in emotional and motivational support across schools signals an urgent need for targeted interventions. Implementing structured programs that promote learner-centered practices, stakeholder collaboration, and school-wide psychosocial support mechanisms could bridge this gap and enhance the overall effectiveness of headteachers in delivering quality education.

CONCLUSION

From the Findings the study concludes:

The findings of this study affirm the crucial role that headteachers play in shaping the learning environment and its subsequent influence on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Kilifi South Sub-County. High mean scores across indicators such as fair distribution of learning materials, infrastructure

maintenance, and provision of adequate learning resources demonstrate that headteachers are effectively managing physical and instructional aspects of the school environment. These strengths align with empirical literature from both local and international contexts, which consistently emphasize the positive impact of well-resourced and organized learning spaces on academic outcomes. However, the relatively low rating in the promotion of a child-friendly and emotionally supportive atmosphere suggests a gap in psychosocial leadership, indicating an area for strategic improvement.

The statistical results further validated the significance of these findings. The rejection of the null hypothesis, based on a statistically significant regression output ($p = 0.000$), confirms that headteachers' strategies for creating a conducive learning environment have a meaningful effect on academic performance. This implies that strengthening leadership strategies, particularly those that balance physical resource management with emotional and motivational support for learners, can yield even greater gains under the Competency-Based Curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **To TSC:** Implement continuous professional development programs focused on learner-centered and psychosocial leadership for headteachers.
2. **To MoE:** Increase budgetary support for infrastructure and learning materials in under-resourced public primary schools.
3. **To Headteachers:** Strengthen emotional support systems and child-friendly practices to complement physical resource management.

Suggestions for Further Researcher

1. Future research could explore the impact of headteachers' emotional intelligence on student well-being and academic performance, particularly in rural school settings. This would help bridge the gap identified in child-friendly and psychosocial support strategies.
2. Another area could investigate the moderating role of parental involvement in the relationship between school leadership and learner outcomes under the Competency-Based Curriculum. Understanding this dynamic could inform more inclusive school management practices.
3. A third avenue would be to examine the comparative effectiveness of management strategies in urban versus rural schools, shedding light on context-specific challenges and opportunities in implementing CBC across diverse educational environments.

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