# Teachers' Perceptions of School Leadership Factors Influencing Student Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Tunduma Town Council, Tanzania

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*Abstract:* This study explored teachers' perceptions of factors influencing the effectiveness of school leadership in enhancing student academic performance in public secondary schools in Tunduma Town Council, Tanzania. Employing a mixed-methods approach guided by transformational and distributed leadership theories, data were collected from 99 teachers using surveys and supplemented by interviews with school heads. Findings revealed strong teacher consensus that the head of school's critical role (M=4.21), supportive and motivational leadership (M=4.16), and policy implementation (M=4.10) significantly shape leadership effectiveness. Regression analysis indicated these factors explained 67% of the variance in perceived effectiveness ($R^2=0.67$), with the head's critical role ($\beta=0.34$, p=0.001) and strong leadership enhancing teaching ($\beta=0.29$, p=0.006) as the strongest predictors. Resource constraints and limited community involvement were noted as challenges. The study recommends targeted leadership training focusing on motivational and instructional support to enhance student outcomes in resource-limited settings.

*Keywords:* School leadership, teachers' perceptions, academic performance, transformational leadership, Tanzania.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Affecting Leadership Effectiveness**

Globally, the evolution of school leadership has been shaped by different educational reforms introduced with the aim of improving student outcomes and institutional performance. In the 19th century, many European countries introduced inspectorate systems designed to monitor and enforce standards of educational quality. These early reforms played a significant role in laying the foundation for modern school leadership practices, particularly by emphasizing accountability, supervision, and structured oversight of teaching and learning. Such systems established the expectation that leadership in schools extends beyond administration to include direct influence on classroom practices and student achievement (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2015).

Over time, these initial reforms evolved into more comprehensive leadership frameworks that integrated both instructional and transformational approaches. Modern perspectives on school leadership recognize that while monitoring remains essential, leaders must also inspire and motivate teachers, foster collaboration, and create enabling environments for effective teaching. This shift reflects a broader understanding that leadership is not only about maintaining standards but also about driving innovation and continuous improvement in education. The trajectory from inspectorate-driven oversight to holistic leadership models underscores the dynamic nature of educational leadership and its responsiveness to changing societal and academic needs (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2015).

Effective school leadership is widely recognized as a cornerstone of educational quality, particularly in developing contexts where systemic challenges like resource scarcity and high student-teacher ratios prevail (Leithwood *et al*., 2019). In Tanzania, initiatives such as the Secondary Education Development Programme II (SEDP II) and Big Results Now (BRN)

have sought to strengthen leadership to improve student performance, yet outcomes remain suboptimal (URT, 2010; Mosha, 2018). Teachers, as frontline implementers of educational policies, play a pivotal role in translating leadership practices into classroom success, making their perceptions of leadership effectiveness critical (Owusu-Addo *et al.*, 2022). This study focuses on teachers' perspectives on factors affecting school leadership effectiveness in enhancing student academic performance in Tunduma Town Council, a rapidly urbanizing commercial hub in Tanzania's Songwe Region.

The unique socio-economic context of Tunduma, characterized by cross-border trade and population growth, places significant strain on its educational infrastructure, with overcrowded schools and limited resources posing challenges for leadership (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016). Previous research highlights the importance of leadership styles in shaping teacher morale and student outcomes. For instance, Raman *et al.* (2022) found that supportive leadership enhances teacher efficacy, while Muriuki *et al.* (2021) linked transformational leadership to a 12% increase in student performance in Kenyan schools. However, there is a research gap in understanding how Tanzanian teachers perceive specific leadership factors, particularly in understudied regions like Tunduma.

The misalignment between school leadership practices and teachers' expectations, contributing to persistent low student performance despite national reforms (Gervas, 2019). This study explores teachers' perceptions of the factors that affect the effectiveness of school leadership in improving students' academic performance. It was guided by the research question: What are teachers' perceptions of the factors that affect the effectiveness of school leadership in improving students' academic performance?

The study is grounded in two theoretical frameworks. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) posits that leaders inspire through vision, motivation, and individualized support, fostering teacher commitment and student achievement. Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006) emphasizes shared responsibilities across stakeholders, promoting collaboration. These theories are relevant in Tanzania, where resource constraints necessitate both inspirational and collaborative leadership approaches. The significance of this study lies in providing context-specific insights to inform leadership training, policy reforms, and school improvement strategies in similar settings.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study area

The study was conducted in the Tunduma Town Council, located in the Songwe Region near the Tanzania-Zambia border as shown in Figure 2. This strategic location of Tunduma, serving as a commercial and transit hub, created a unique and dynamic educational environment that was well-suited for the research on the perceived relationship between school leadership and student performance. The diverse socio-economic and cultural influences stemming from cross-border interactions, rapid urbanization, and the council's position as a commercial center presented distinct challenges for educational leadership in the area (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016). Figure 1 shows the location of Tunduma Town Council in Tanzania.
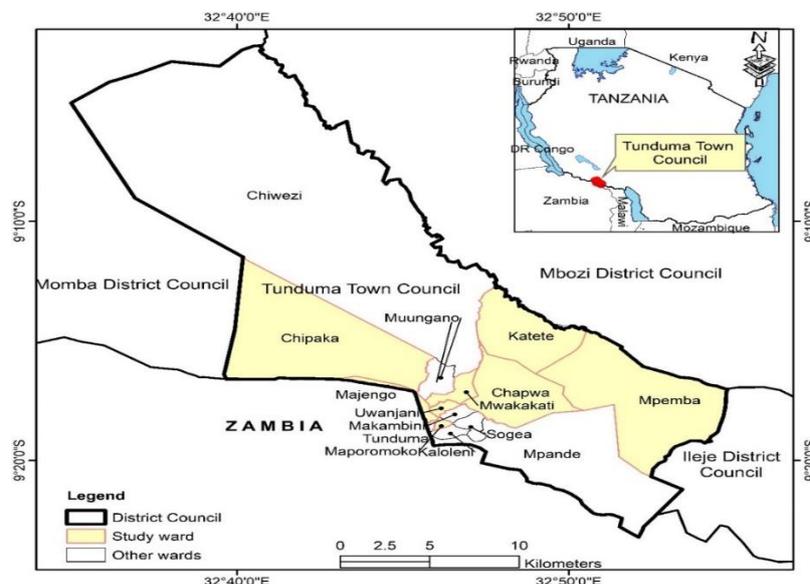


**Figure 1: Map of the location of Tunduma Town Council**

### 2.2 Research Approach and Design

A mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design integrated quantitative surveys for breadth and qualitative interviews for depth, allowing triangulation to enhance validity.

### 2.3 Population. Sampling procedure and sample size

The target population comprised teachers and heads from public secondary schools in Tunduma. A sample of 99 teachers was selected using a combination of purposive and random sampling to ensure representation across gender, age, and professional experience. Purposive sampling targeted teachers with direct classroom experience, while random sampling ensured diversity. School heads were purposively sampled for interviews to provide leadership perspectives.

### 2.4 Data Collection Methods and Tools

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires with Likert-scale items (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) assessing six perception factors: (B1) head's critical role, (B2) strong leadership enhancing teaching, (B3) supportive/motivational leadership, (B4) parent/community belief in leadership, (B5) policy implementation, and (B6) resource management. Open-ended questions captured qualitative insights. Semi-structured interviews with five school heads explored contextual factors and leadership practices. Instruments were pilot-tested with 10 teachers to ensure clarity and relevance.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and multiple regression to assess the predictive power of perception factors on leadership effectiveness. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses underwent thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes such as motivational leadership and resource challenges. Triangulation cross-verified findings across data sources.

### 2.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity was ensured through expert review of instruments and alignment with research objectives. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha (>0.7) for questionnaire items. Pilot testing refined question clarity. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and clearance from the University of Iringa.

## 3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents (N = 99) shows that males were the majority (55%), reflecting gender dominance in the teaching profession (MoEST, 2022); the largest age group was 30–40 years (35%); and most respondents had over six years of teaching experience (80%), indicating a predominantly middle-aged, experienced sample suggesting the study's findings are therefore largely shaped by perspectives of male, middle-aged, and experienced teachers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The demographic mix strengthens the study's insights into leadership perceptions. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed important insights into how teachers perceive the effects of leadership on academic performance. The results show a fairly balanced gender distribution, with male teachers slightly higher (55%) than female teachers (45%), suggesting that both perspectives are well represented in assessing leadership roles. Age distribution indicates that the majority of teachers fall within the 30–40 age group (35%) and 40–50 age group (30%), meaning most respondents are mature and experienced, which may influence their expectations of strong and practical leadership in managing academic performance. Furthermore, professional experience shows that while 20% of teachers are relatively new (1–5 years), a significant proportion (80%) have more than six years of service, with 25% having over 16 years of teaching experience. This indicates that many teachers bring a wealth of experience, shaping their perceptions of leadership as not only a motivational factor but also a practical determinant of resource management and instructional support. Collectively, these demographics suggest that perceptions of leadership in Tunduma are shaped by a mix of youthful energy and seasoned experience, reinforcing the demand for leadership strategies that inspire while also addressing the practical challenges of academic performance.

### 3.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Affecting Leadership Effectiveness

Teachers' perceptions of factors influencing school leadership effectiveness were assessed through a survey of 99 teachers, revealing strong agreement on key leadership attributes. The head's critical role (M=4.21, SD=0.78), supportive and motivational leadership (M=4.16, SD=0.80), and policy implementation (M=4.10, SD=0.85) received the highest mean scores, indicating their perceived importance in enhancing student academic performance. Strong leadership enhancing teaching (M=4.05, SD=0.82), resource management (M=3.92, SD=0.90), and parent/community belief (M=3.88, SD=0.88) scored lower but remained positive, with moderate standard deviations suggesting some variability across schools.

Regression analysis showed that these factors collectively explained 67% of the variance in perceived leadership effectiveness ($R^2$=0.67, Adjusted $R^2$=0.64, $F_{(6,70)}$=36.98, p<0.001), with the head's critical role (β=0.34, p=0.001), strong leadership enhancing teaching (β=0.29, p=0.006), and supportive/motivational leadership (β=0.22, p=0.030) as significant predictors, while parent/community belief (p=0.066), policy implementation (p=0.090), and resource management (p=0.156) showed weaker contributions.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Perception Factors**

| Factor | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Head's critical role | 4.21 | 0.78 |
| Strong leadership enhances teaching | 4.05 | 0.82 |
| Supportive/motivational leadership | 4.16 | 0.80 |
| Parent/community belief | 3.88 | 0.88 |
| Policy implementation | 4.10 | 0.85 |
| Resource management | 3.92 | 0.90 |

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Factors Affecting Leadership Effectiveness**

| Predictor (Variable) | B (Unstandardized) | Std. Error | β (Standardized) | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 0.45 | 0.20 | | 2.25 | 0.028 |
| Head's critical role | 0.32 | 0.09 | 0.34 | 3.56 | 0.001* |
| Strong leadership enhances teaching | 0.28 | 0.10 | 0.29 | 2.80 | 0.006* |
| Supportive/motivational leadership | 0.20 | 0.09 | 0.22 | 2.22 | 0.030* |
| Parent/community belief | 0.15 | 0.08 | 0.18 | 1.88 | 0.066 |
| Policy implementation | 0.12 | 0.07 | 0.15 | 1.71 | 0.090 |
| B6 - Resource management | 0.10 | 0.07 | 0.12 | 1.43 | 0.156 |

*$R^2 = 0.67$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.64$, $F_{(6,70)} = 36.98$, $p < 0.001$*

Interviews with five school heads provided qualitative insights that reinforced the quantitative findings, highlighting three key themes which are motivational leadership, resource constraints and community engagement challenges

Motivational leadership: School heads emphasized the importance of fostering teacher morale through regular recognition and constructive feedback, with one head noting, "I hold weekly meetings to acknowledge teachers' efforts, which boosts their commitment." They reported that such practices, like public praise and professional development opportunities, enhance teacher motivation and classroom performance. This aligns with the high survey scores for supportive leadership (M=4.16), underscoring its role in effective school leadership.

Resource constraints: Heads consistently identified limited funding and materials as major barriers, with one stating, "We lack enough textbooks, so I prioritize sharing what we have." They described creative strategies, such as borrowing resources from neighboring schools, to mitigate shortages, reflecting the low survey score for resource management (M=3.92). These constraints highlight the practical challenges leaders face in Tunduma's underfunded educational system.

Community engagement challenges: Heads noted significant difficulties in mobilizing parental involvement, with one remarking, "Parents are busy with trade; their involvement is minimal." The transient nature of Tunduma's population and economic pressures limit community participation in school activities, corroborating the lower survey score for parent/community belief (M=3.88). This theme underscores the socio-economic barriers to implementing distributed leadership in the region.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The emphasis on the head's critical role and supportive leadership in the results mirrors empirical studies, such as Raman *et al*. (2022), where instructional leadership correlated with improved teacher efficacy, akin to the high mean (4.05) for strong leadership enhancing teaching. Similarly, Muriuki *et al*. (2021) reported positive views of transformational leadership among Kenyan teachers, aligning with this study's high scores (4.05–4.21) and interview themes of motivational practices.

However, the weaker influence of community engagement contrasts with Mulkeen (2007), who advocated for its role in low-resource areas, suggesting socio-economic gaps in Tunduma as noted in the qualitative data. The non-significant resource management effect echoes Mosha (2019), highlighting shortages in Tanzanian schools, differing from Ntshoe and Selesho (2014) in South Africa where stronger systems enhanced outcomes. These comparisons affirm that classroom-focused leadership outweighs systemic factors in perceptions, consistent with Robinson *et al*. (2008).

### Contextual Implications

Tunduma's unique context rapid urbanization, cross-border trade, and overcrowded schools' shapes teachers' perceptions. The high endorsement of the head's critical role suggests teachers rely on visible leadership to navigate resource constraints. The moderate effect of community engagement reflects practical barriers, as parents' economic activities limit involvement. These findings highlight the need for leadership strategies tailored to local realities, balancing transformational inspiration with practical resource allocation.

The factor influencing leadership in academic performance is the limited involvement of parents and the wider community. While community engagement is often seen as essential in supporting schools, in Tunduma parents are heavily engaged in economic activities tied to trade and small businesses, leaving little time for school-related participation. This aligns with Bush (2018), who argues that context-sensitive leadership is essential in developing countries where socio-economic pressures limit the scope of parental involvement in education. As a result, school heads in Tunduma must adopt leadership strategies that not only inspire teachers but also realistically address the constraints imposed by the local context. Balancing transformational leadership with pragmatic management enables heads to sustain teacher motivation and improve student outcomes despite external challenges.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This study shows that in public secondary schools, leadership effectiveness is strongly influenced by the head's role ($\beta$=0.34, p=0.001), supportive leadership ($\beta$=0.22, p=0.030), and instructional focus ($\beta$=0.29, p=0.006), which together explain 67% of student performance. However, challenges such as limited resources and weak community engagement hinder progress. To address this, a tailored leadership training program is recommended, focusing on transformational skills like vision-setting and teacher motivation. Such training would enable school heads to inspire teachers, foster collaboration, and enhance outcomes despite constraints. Further longitudinal studies are suggested to validate these findings.

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