

Teachers' Perspectives on Principals' Leadership Strategies for Managing Student Behavioural Challenges in Public Secondary Schools: *A Case Study of Muhanga District, Rwanda*

Mr. Florien UWIZEYIMANA¹, Prof. XIA XUE²,
Mr. Pierre Chrisologue IMANISHIMWE³, Mr. Theogene NTIRENGANYA⁴

School of Education, Northeast Normal University, China

Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China

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Abstract: This study explores teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership strategies for managing student behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda. Grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory, the research explores the influence of leadership practices, including counselling, mentorship, and participatory decision-making, on student behaviour and academic performance. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten teachers and two principals from five secondary schools, purposively selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics in diverse school contexts. The findings indicate that principals who engage in inclusive and supportive leadership practices have a positive impact on student behaviour; however, challenges such as inconsistent policy implementation, heavy administrative workloads, and limited parental involvement significantly constrain the effectiveness of these strategies. Teachers reported that while guidance-based leadership had a notably positive effect, its application was inconsistent across schools, with variability linked to individual principals' leadership styles and contextual factors within each institution. This variability was shown to directly influence both student behaviour and academic outcomes, underscoring the importance of consistency in leadership practices. The study underscores the need for enhanced leadership development programs that integrate emotional intelligence, restorative practices, and effective behavioural management strategies. It also highlights the importance of involving teachers in decision-making processes regarding student discipline and fostering stronger partnerships between schools and local communities. These findings offer crucial implications for educational policy and practice, not only within Rwanda but also in broader contexts, providing evidence-based recommendations to refine leadership practices, improve behavioural management, and ensure alignment between policy and practice in secondary schools.

Keywords: Teachers' Perspectives, Principals' Leadership Strategies, and Student Behaviour Management.

I. INTRODUCTION

Overview

Leadership is widely acknowledged as a multidimensional construct that defies a single precise definition. As Bennis (1987, as cited in Tatlah & Iqbal, 2012) aptly notes, leadership can be metaphorically compared to beauty, as it is difficult to define in abstract terms but is often recognized in practice. Scholars have associated it with a wide range of qualities,

responsibilities, roles, and functions, underscoring its complexity and contextual nature (Giltinane, 2013). One prominent definition emphasizes leadership as a social influence process through which an individual deliberately guides others to structure activities and relationships within a group or organization (Tatlah et al., 2012). This perspective highlights not only the relational and interactive nature of leadership but also its intentional aspect in shaping organizational dynamics. However, the diversity of definitions suggests that leadership may be better understood as a fluid and situational phenomenon rather than a fixed set of traits, making it essential for researchers and practitioners to approach it with both flexibility and contextual sensitivity.

Globally, School leadership is widely recognized as a critical driver of educational quality worldwide. Research indicates that effective leadership can positively impact student learning outcomes, particularly when leaders focus on instructional improvement and fostering a positive school climate (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Robinson, 2019). However, the extent of this impact is often contingent upon contextual factors such as school culture, community engagement, and available resources. For instance, a study by Hallinger and Heck (2010) found that leadership effects on student learning are mediated by the school's capacity for improvement and the collaborative efforts of the leadership team. This suggests that while leadership is a significant factor, its effectiveness is not uniform and depends on the broader organizational context.

Moreover, the emphasis on leadership as a primary factor influencing student achievement has been critiqued for oversimplifying the complex interplay of variables that contribute to educational outcomes. Recent analyses highlight that leadership's impact is often indirect and mediated through teacher practices and school culture, rather than being a direct cause of improved student performance (Grissom et al. 2013; Leithwood, 2021; Robinson, 2019). This underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of leadership's role, recognizing that its effectiveness is influenced by various internal and external factors.

In Africa, school leaders face persistent challenges in managing student behavior, which significantly affects teaching and learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2019; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Bush, 2024). Behavioural issues such as absenteeism, lateness, classroom disruptions, and peer conflicts are widespread, undermining classroom instruction and school performance (UNESCO, 2021; Gershoff, 2017; Olatunji & Nwosu, 2023). Principals are responsible for implementing disciplinary policies and shaping the overall school climate, yet their effectiveness is often constrained by limited professional development, inadequate resources, and high student-to-teacher ratios (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, 2021; Zickafoose, 2024). Furthermore, reliance on punitive practices, including corporal punishment, is largely ineffective for fostering sustainable Behavioural change and may negatively affect student well-being (UNESCO, 2021; Gershoff, 2017; Olatunji & Nwosu, 2023). Student Behavioural challenges in secondary schools are a significant concern. Effective leadership by school principals is crucial in addressing these challenges, as their strategies and decision-making influence teachers' effectiveness and students' discipline. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of leadership in managing student Behaviour and its impact on academic performance in Rwandan secondary schools (Kabuye & Mugiraneza, 2024; Uzama & Kiarie, 2024).

In Rwanda, the country has made significant strides in expanding educational access and implementing competence-based Curriculum (World Bank, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). The Rwanda Education Board (REB) reports that principals often struggle to consistently enforce codes of conduct, address indiscipline, and apply non-punitive disciplinary strategies (REB, 2021). This situation is compounded by limited professional development opportunities for school leaders, resulting in varied disciplinary practices across schools (Ndahayo, 2021). Research further indicates that, although national policies discourage corporal punishment, many school leaders lack training in alternative approaches, leading to inconsistent implementation of discipline policies (Ndahayo, 2021; Gershoff, 2017). Consequently, strengthening school leadership capacity has become a policy priority to ensure that principals are equipped to foster positive learning environments that align with national education reforms and support effective student Behaviour management (World Bank, 2019; REB, 2021).

While existing research has explored various dimensions of school leadership and student behaviour, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding teachers' lived experiences of principals' leadership strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges within the Rwandan secondary-school context. Most prior studies have examined leadership styles and student outcomes as separate constructs, without critically engaging with how leadership practices are perceived and experienced by teachers in relation to Behavioural management. For instance, Le Saux et al. (2021) investigated system-level leadership practices and their association with school quality in Rwanda, while Musabwayire and Sikubwabo (2024)

analysed the influence of school leadership practices on teachers' commitment in Musanze District. Although these studies contribute valuable insights into leadership effectiveness, they fall short of capturing the experiential and context-specific dimensions of how principals' leadership strategies shape teachers' approaches to student behaviour. This gap constrains the development of a nuanced understanding of effective, contextually grounded approaches to managing Behavioural challenges in Rwandan public secondary schools (Sibomana, 2022; Lauterbach et al., 2025).

This study is significant as it provides insights into how principals' leadership directly affects the management of student behavior, an area critical for academic achievement and school climate. Understanding teachers' perspectives can guide professional development, inform policy-making, and improve leadership practices in Rwandan public schools. Globally, the findings contribute to the literature on educational leadership and students' Behavioural management, offering lessons for schools facing similar challenges in comparable contexts.

Research Objectives

The research was conducted under the guidance of the following three (3) specific research objectives:

- 1 To identify the most pressing student Behavioural challenges that teachers perceive principals' leadership strategies are inadequate or ineffective in addressing in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda.
- 2 To explore the specific leadership strategies employed by principals to manage student Behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda.
- 3 To examine teachers' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of principals' strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda.

Research Questions

This research was conducted under the guidance of three (3) specific research questions that are aligned with the research objectives:

- 1 What are the most pressing student Behavioural challenges that current principal leadership strategies are perceived to be inadequate or ineffective in addressing in Muhanga District, Rwanda?
2. What specific leadership strategies do principals employ to manage student Behavioural challenges?
- 4 How do teachers perceive the overall effectiveness of these strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda?

II. LITERATURE

2.1 School Leadership in Secondary Schools

School leadership in secondary schools involves principals, deputy heads, teachers, and supporting staff working collaboratively to ensure both academic excellence and holistic student development. Effective school administration extends beyond instructional supervision to include creating safe and inclusive learning environments, promoting student welfare, and efficiently managing school operations (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). In Rwanda, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2016) emphasizes the critical role of principals and deputy heads in shaping school culture and establishing consistent Behavioural norms. Successful school leaders integrate administrative duties with a strategic vision for overall student development, employing data-driven decision-making while simultaneously attending to students' social and emotional well-being (Leithwood, 2021). Such integrated leadership approaches contribute to a cohesive, supportive, and high-performing school environment.

2.2 Discipline Management Strategies in Secondary Schools

Discipline management is a central function of school leadership, essential for maintaining a learning environment conducive to academic success. Research indicates that a combination of teaching strategies, clear rules, and structured regulations is effective in promoting student discipline. Oplatka and Atias (2007) found that carefully designed instructional approaches could foster self-discipline and enhance academic achievement. Similarly, Way (2011) highlighted that well-communicated and consistently enforced school rules positively shape student behavior. Evidence indicates that reinforcement strategies such as guidance, rewards, and constructive consequences effectively support behaviour management (Ofoyuru & Too-Okema, 2011), while other studies show that counselling, clear communication, and

supportive disciplinary practices improve both compliance and academic performance (Karanja & Bowen, 2012). These findings underscore that effective discipline requires a balanced approach that combines structure, consistency, and supportive interventions, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and a positive school climate.

2.3 Leadership Theories and School Discipline

Leadership theories provide essential frameworks for understanding how principals influence school discipline and student behaviour. Transformational leadership, for instance, emphasizes inspiring and motivating teachers and students toward shared goals, which has been linked to improved student conduct and a more positive school climate (Leithwood, 2021). On the other hand, instructional leadership theory focuses on principals' active involvement in guiding teaching and learning processes, ensuring that classroom management and discipline strategies are aligned with broader educational objectives (Hallinger, 2019; Arlestig & Törnsten, 2014). These theoretical perspectives suggest the principals' leadership styles are not only administrative but also pedagogical, shaping how discipline is approached within the school environment. However, critics argue that transformational leadership may sometimes overlook practical management aspects (Nguyen et al., 2020), while instructional leadership has been critiqued for placing too much emphasis on academic outcomes, sidelining socio-emotional needs (Hallinger, 2011).

Leadership strategies are methods used by school leaders to achieve organizational goals through the effective use of resources and collaboration with staff. They typically involve the four management functions: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Organizing entails assigning tasks and defining responsibilities, while leading involves motivating, guiding, and resolving conflicts (Giltinane, 2013). Bush (2011) emphasizes that management is a supportive framework for teaching and learning, and the effectiveness of leadership can be measured by student outcomes. Thus, strong leadership strategies provide the foundation for improving learning environments.

2.4 Distributed Leadership and Shared Responsibility

Distributed leadership theory posits that effective school leadership is not vested in the principal alone but shared among teachers, staff, and other stakeholders (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2019). Applied to student Behavioural management, this perspective emphasizes the need for principals to collaborate with teachers in enforcing rules and building consistent expectations for student conduct (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Research highlights that when teachers feel empowered to participate in discipline-related decision-making, schools experience fewer Behavioural disruptions and stronger collective responsibility for maintaining order (Tian et al., 2016). However, distributed leadership has been critiqued for assuming equal capacity and willingness among teachers, which may not reflect reality in resource-constrained settings (Bolden, 2011).

2.5 Social Learning Theory and Student Behavior

Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides another useful framework for understanding student behaviour in schools. It suggests that students model their actions on observed behaviours, meaning that teachers' and principals' interactions set examples for acceptable conduct (Bandura, 2011). When principals promote positive discipline strategies such as restorative practices rather than punitive measures, they create an environment where students are more likely to internalize constructive behaviours (Gershoff, 2017). Recent research further supports this by showing that social-emotional learning interventions positively influence student behaviour and school climate (Durlak et al., 2011; OECD, 2020). Nevertheless, critics argue that social learning theory underplays the role of structural and cultural factors such as poverty, class size, and community norms, which significantly affect student Behaviour (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

2.6 Systems Theory and School Discipline

Systems Theory emphasizes that schools function as interconnected units where leadership, teaching, student behavior, and community engagement influence one another (Owens & Valesky, 2015; Bush, 2020). From this perspective, disciplinary challenges cannot be addressed in isolation but must be managed within the broader school culture and policy framework. For instance, principals who integrate discipline policies with national reforms such as Rwanda's competence-based curriculum and ban on corporal punishment are better positioned to create sustainable change (World Bank, 2019; REB, 2021). However, Systems Theory has also been critiqued for being too abstract, offering limited practical guidance for principals handling daily discipline challenges (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Despite this limitation, contemporary scholars emphasize that system thinking helps leaders design holistic, context-sensitive strategies that align with wider institutional and policy frameworks (Bush, 2024).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach that is suitable because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences (Creswell, 2014). It aims to explore teachers' lived experiences and perspectives regarding principals' leadership strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in five public secondary schools located in Muhanga District, Rwanda. This district was firmly selected due to its diverse educational settings and its representation of **typical Rwandan secondary schools**, characterized by a blend of urban and rural catchment areas, moderate resource constraints, and alignment with national education policies and curricular standards. Such a context provides a realistic microcosm of Rwanda's broader secondary education system, thereby enabling an in-depth exploration of leadership strategies employed in schools serving varied student populations and addressing complex Behavioural management practices

3.3 Population and sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants possessing rich, contextually grounded insights aligned with the objectives of this qualitative study. This non-probability sampling approach enabled the deliberate selection of ten teachers from five public secondary schools and two principals, each with a minimum of two years of continuous service in their respective schools, to ensure adequate familiarity with the institutional environment. The inclusion criteria required that all selected teachers had served in their schools for at least two years, thereby ensuring that participants had sufficient experience to provide informed perspectives on leadership practices and student Behavioural challenges. The inclusion of both teachers and principals facilitated methodological triangulation, strengthening the credibility and depth of the data by capturing multiple perspectives on leadership dynamics and Behavioural management within the school context. This sampling strategy aligns with the recommendations of qualitative research scholars (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015), who emphasize the importance of information-rich cases in generating comprehensive and trustworthy findings.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected through a combination of **semi-structured interviews** and **document review** to ensure a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives. For the semi-structured interviews, an interview guide with open-ended questions was prepared, closely aligned with the research questions. These interviews allowed participants to share their views on principals' leadership strategies, the perceived effectiveness of these strategies, and the challenges they face in their implementation. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for detailed analysis. In addition, a **document review** was conducted to triangulate the interview data. Relevant school documents, including policies, disciplinary guidelines, and records of leadership strategies, were examined to provide contextual insights and verify the information provided by teachers. This combined approach enhanced the depth, validity, and reliability of the study findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method well suited for identifying patterns and meanings within qualitative data. The process began with familiarization, where the researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' responses. This was followed by coding, in which the data were organized into meaningful categories that reflect recurring ideas and concepts. From these codes, the researcher identified themes that captured teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership strategies, their views on the effectiveness of these strategies, and the challenges they encounter in relation to Behavioural management. Finally, these themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives, ensuring that the analysis not only reflects participants' lived experiences but also provides insights directly aligned with the purpose of the study

3.6 Ethical consideration

Ethical principles guided all stages of this research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant authorities before data collection. Informed consent was sought from all participants, ensuring that they fully understood the purpose of the study and their role in it. Participants' **anonymity and confidentiality** were maintained throughout, and all data were securely

stored to protect their privacy. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. These measures upheld the ethical integrity of the research while fostering trust and openness among participants.

IV. FINDINGS

This study explored teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda. The research examined how both groups observed, interpreted, and responded to student behaviors and leadership practices. Guided by Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), which emphasizes inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, the findings were organized into four thematic areas: Persistent Behavioural Challenges among Students, Leadership Strategies Employed by Principals, Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Leadership Strategies, and Factors Limiting the Successful Implementation of Leadership Practices. These themes collectively reveal that principals employ a blend of moral guidance, counselling, collaboration, and participatory decision-making to shape positive student Behaviour and foster a constructive school environment.

Persistent Behavioural Challenges among Students

Teachers and principals reported that Behavioural challenges remain pervasive in public secondary schools across Muhanga District, posing serious threats to effective teaching and learning. Common issues identified include indiscipline, absenteeism, disrespect toward authority, substance abuse, and the growing influence of peers and social media. Such behaviors were seen to reduce students' engagement, disrupt classroom management, and undermine academic performance. As Teacher F observed, "Teachers don't feel confident when students become aggressive or resistant," while Teacher B noted that "peer influence and drug use have made students lose focus in their studies," resulting in absenteeism and declining motivation. Similarly, Teacher H added, "Some students are stubborn and consume alcohol, which affects their learning and engagement."

Principals echoed these concerns, highlighting external influences as a root cause. Principal 1 pointed out, "Some learners come to school already influenced by bad peer groups and community behavior. Some use drugs, while others simply lack discipline due to weak parental follow-up." Likewise, Principal 2 declared, "Students are easily influenced by social media and external environments, which affect their attitude toward school rules and teachers."

These accounts reveal that Behavioural problems stem not only from school-based factors but also from socio-cultural and familial contexts that extend beyond educators' immediate control. This complexity supports Bass's (1985) notion that transformational leadership requires addressing followers' moral and personal growth rather than merely enforcing rules. Consequently, purely punitive measures appear inadequate, emphasizing the need for leadership that integrates moral influence, empathy, and individualized support consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory.

Leadership Strategies Employed By Principals

Teachers described a wide range of leadership strategies employed by principals to manage student behavior, demonstrating a shift from authoritarian to more inclusive and supportive approaches. Principals were said to combine counselling, mentorship, and participatory decision-making to promote student discipline and self-awareness. Teacher D remarked that "principals often organize seminars to fight against drug abuse and provide counselling so that students can reflect on their behavior." Similarly, Teacher C observed that "advice and dialogue change students more effectively than punishment." Teachers emphasized that participatory structures, such as inclusive disciplinary committees, empower students to take ownership of their actions. As Teacher G explained, "inclusive committees help students feel part of the process and take responsibility for their actions."

The principals' reflections reinforced these observations, illustrating leadership practices rooted in transformational principles. Principal 1 shared, "I always try to guide students through open discussions, assemblies, and counselling sessions. I encourage teachers to act as mentors and role models." Likewise, Principal 2 highlighted inclusivity and shared decision-making: "We have a disciplinary committee that includes teachers, parents, and even student representatives. Decisions made collectively are easily accepted and respected." Both principals also reported using recognition and reward systems to promote positive behaviour, as Principal 1 noted, "We motivate disciplined students through public recognition and small awards. It inspires others to behave well."

These findings demonstrate that principals rely on individualized consideration, attending to students' emotional and Behavioural needs and intellectual stimulation, encouraging reflective thinking and moral reasoning. Such strategies align with Bass's (1985) transformational model, in which leaders inspire internal change rather than enforce external compliance. The success of these strategies, however, depends heavily on collaboration among teachers, parents, and administrators, as well as the principal's ability to model empathy, fairness, and consistency.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Leadership Strategies

Teachers expressed generally positive views regarding participatory and counselling-oriented leadership strategies, emphasizing their capacity to foster mutual respect, open communication, and moral self-discipline among students. Teacher F observed, "Learners feel they are among decision-makers," illustrating how student involvement promotes ownership and cooperation. Teacher E added, "Democratic leadership works better because students participate in setting school rules and easily respect them afterwards." These perceptions highlight the link between shared leadership and intrinsic motivation, consistent with transformational leadership's focus on empowerment and moral influence.

However, some teachers raised concerns about the inconsistent application of these strategies across schools. They noted that where principals demonstrated fairness, transparency, and emotional support, Behavioural outcomes improved significantly. Conversely, schools led by principals with authoritarian or reactive tendencies experienced persistent challenges. This contrast underscores Bass's (1985) assertion that transformational leadership is effective only when it is authentically and consistently practised.

Principals' perspectives largely aligned with those of teachers. Principal 1 stated, "Students respond better when they feel respected and listened to. Dialogue has reduced conflicts and absenteeism." Similarly, Principal 2 explained, "When learners participate in making rules, they tend to follow them. Our counselling sessions have helped many students reform." Yet both principals acknowledged obstacles in ensuring consistency, particularly among teachers. As Principal 1 admitted, "the challenge is consistency. Some teachers still prefer punishment instead of guidance."

Overall, the findings suggest that participatory and guidance-based leadership enhances Behavioural outcomes through relational trust and moral influence. When principals exhibit idealized influence, serving as ethical role models and engaging staff and students collaboratively, schools experience more enduring Behavioural change than when discipline is imposed hierarchically.

Factors Limiting Successful Implementation of Leadership Practices

Despite widespread commitment to positive leadership, both teachers and principals identified several constraints that hinder the effective implementation of these strategies. A major limitation is the administrative workload that reduces principals' direct engagement with students. Teacher B lamented that "principals are always busy," while Principal 1 confirmed, "Sometimes I spend most of the day attending meetings or handling reports instead of interacting with students."

Another significant challenge is weak parental involvement, which undermines school discipline and continuity. Teacher A remarked that "some parents fail to support disciplinary measures or even contradict them," and Principal 2 similarly noted, "Parental cooperation is sometimes missing, making it hard to sustain Behavioural change." Both groups further cited resource shortages and inconsistent policy enforcement from local education authorities. Teacher G observed that "district officials returned expelled students to school, which undermined the authority of school leaders," while Principal 1 stated, "When higher authorities reverse our disciplinary decisions, it confuses students and weakens our authority."

These constraints illustrate the systemic factors that affect leadership effectiveness. Transformational leadership thrives in environments that promote trust, autonomy, and shared accountability; when bureaucratic interference and limited parental collaboration persist, such leadership loses traction. Both teachers and principals recommended stronger stakeholder partnerships, capacity-building programs for school leaders, and clearer, consistently applied disciplinary policies to sustain effective Behavioural management.

Concisely, the study revealed that student Behavioural challenges, particularly indiscipline, absenteeism, peer influence, and substance abuse, remain pressing concerns in public secondary schools in Muhanga District. Principals respond to these issues using strategies grounded in counselling, participatory governance, mentorship, and moral guidance. Teachers and principals alike perceive guidance-based and democratic strategies as more effective than punitive approaches, as they foster respect, cooperation, and accountability. However, administrative burdens, limited parental engagement, inadequate resources, and policy inconsistencies hinder the consistent application of these leadership practices.

The findings confirm that Transformational Leadership Theory offers a robust framework for understanding how school leaders can shape student Behaviour through inspiration, individualized support, and moral example. In the Rwandan context, transformational leadership manifests not only through vision and influence but also through empathy, dialogue, and collaboration, attributes that, when fully enacted, cultivate a disciplined, morally grounded, and academically focused school culture.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga district, Rwanda. The findings proved that both teachers and principals share similar understandings of the nature of student misbehavior, the strategies adopted to manage it, and the contextual factors influencing leadership effectiveness. These findings are discussed in light of existing literature and Principles of Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), which emphasizes vision, collaboration and moral influence in educational leadership.

5.1 Understanding of student Behavioural challenges

Teachers and principals in this study identified indiscipline, absenteeism, drug abuse, and disrespect toward authority as the most frequent Behavioural challenges affecting teaching and learning. These findings echo the work of Nkurunziza (2018). We found that indiscipline in Rwandan secondary schools often stems from peer pressure, social media influence, and weak parental engagement. Similarly, Tanyi (2020) emphasizes that student misbehavior in African schools is not merely a school-based issue but a reflection of wider socio-economic and cultural contexts.

The convergence between teachers' and principals' perceptions in this study suggests a shared professional understanding that managing Behaviour requires addressing the root causes rather than symptoms. This supports the transformational view that effective leaders go beyond rule enforcement to inspire positive Behavioural change (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of student behavior, principals and teachers in Muhanga demonstrate awareness of their collective moral role in shaping responsible citizenship, a vision aligned with Rwanda's education policy of promoting discipline and values-based education (MINEDUC, 2022).

5.2 Leadership Strategies for Managing Behavioural Challenges

The study demonstrated that both teachers and principals favored counselling, mentorship, dialogue, and participatory decision-making as the most effective strategies for Behaviour management. These approaches emphasize guidance rather than punishment, consistent with the ideals of transformation. Teachers observed that counselling and dialogue help learners reflect on their actions, while principals noted that open discussions with students and parents build mutual trust and accountability.

These findings corroborate those of Okeke and Mtyuda (2017), who found that transformational school leaders in sub-Saharan Africa tend to adopt participatory and humanistic approaches to Behaviour management that promote mutual respect and self-discipline. Likewise, Kouzes and Posner (2017) argue that leaders who communicate a shared vision and foster collaboration achieve higher levels of commitment and moral conduct among their followers.

The strong preference for participatory and counselling-based approaches among both teachers and principals indicates a gradual shift away from authoritarian leadership traditions that historically dominated African schools. It reflects a professional evolution toward democratic and inclusive leadership, aligning with Rwanda's Competence-based curriculum that encourages learner-centred practices and social responsibility.

5.3 Challenges Affecting Effective Leadership Practices

Despite the shared commitment to guidance-based leadership, participants reported significant barriers that undermine consistent implementation. These include heavy workloads, inadequate parental cooperation, resource constraints, and interference from high authorities. Both teachers and principals expressed frustration when decisions to discipline students were overturned by district officials, a situation that weakens school authority and discourages staff morale.

These challenges reflect what Bush and Glover (2014) term systemic barriers to distributed leadership, where external administrative controls limit school-level autonomy. Similar findings were reported by Ndahiro (2019) in Rwandan schools, where principals struggled to enforce discipline due to conflicting expectations from education authorities and communities. The persistence of such challenges underscores the need for coherent policy frameworks that empower school leaders to manage Behavioural issues within a supportive, decentralised structure.

5.4 Integration with Transformational Leadership Theory

The findings of this study are consistent with the principals of transformational leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), which emphasizes moral influence by modelling ethical conduct and promoting respect, inspirational motivation by encouraging Behavioural reform through dialogue, and individualized consideration by offering counselling and mentorship to students. Teachers, on the other hand, actively participated in these leadership processes, demonstrating that transformational leadership in schools is not confined to the principal but distributed across the teaching community.

This collaborative enactment of leadership reflects what Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) describe as “collective transformational practice,” where teachers and school leaders jointly create a positive Behavioural culture through shared values and mutual influence. The alignment between teachers’ and principals’ perspectives in this study confirms that transformational leadership can serve as a unifying framework for addressing Behavioural challenges in Rwandan secondary schools.

5.5 Implications for Practice and Policy

The convergence of teachers’ and principals’ views has several implications. First, it highlights the importance of strengthening participatory leadership structures, such as student and teacher disciplinary committees, which promote shared responsibility for student behavior. Second, the findings call for continuous professional development programs focusing on counselling and conflict resolution skills for teachers and school leaders. Third, educational policymakers should ensure consistency in disciplinary decision-making between schools and district authorities to reinforce institutional authority and fairness.

Furthermore, fostering stronger partnerships between schools, parents, and communities is essential for sustaining positive student behavior. As both teachers and principals noted, Behavioural reform extends beyond the school environment and requires community-based interventions. These insights align with Rwanda’s broader educational goal of nurturing morally upright and socially responsible citizens.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The findings reveal several critical implications for policy, practice, and further research. These insights provide a solid foundation for evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of leadership practices in addressing student Behavioural issues within Rwandan public secondary schools.

First, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB) strengthen leadership preparation and development programs by integrating principles of transformational and participatory leadership. Principals should be equipped with advanced skills in emotional intelligence, counselling, moral guidance, conflict resolution, and restorative discipline. The study revealed that school leaders who practiced inclusive and morally grounded leadership were more effective in fostering positive Behavioural change than those relying on punitive measures. This aligns with Leithwood (2021) and Kouzes and Posner (2017), who emphasize that transformational leadership, grounded in moral influence and empowerment, creates a supportive and collaborative school environment conducive to effective Behavioural management.

However, successful integration of these principles will require overcoming entrenched hierarchical leadership structures within Rwandan schools, which may resist such transformational shifts. Hence, it is crucial for leadership training to be accompanied by policy-level support for distributed and participatory leadership models to ensure sustainability.

Furthermore, principals should institutionalize structured counselling and mentorship systems within schools. The findings highlighted that counselling and moral guidance were among the most effective strategies for improving student behavior. Establishing a School Counselling and Mentorship Unit would ensure that Behavioural issues are addressed holistically, through collaboration among principals, teachers, peer mentors, and professional counsellors. This recommendation resonates with Bass’s (1985) principle of individualized consideration, which underscores the importance of addressing learners’ emotional and social needs as part of effective leadership and character development. While this approach is promising, there is a need for significant resource allocation and professional training to ensure the sustainability of these systems, especially in resource-constrained schools.

Equally important is the need to enhance teacher participation in decision-making processes related to student discipline and Behavioural policies. The study found that when teachers were involved in the design and implementation of disciplinary measures, there was a noticeable improvement in consistency and fairness. Principals should therefore adopt

distributed leadership practices that promote collaboration, trust, and shared accountability among staff members. As Spillane (2006) and Harris (2019) observe, distributed leadership empowers teachers to assume ownership of Behavioural management initiatives, fostering a stronger sense of responsibility and professionalism across the school community. However, teachers' willingness to embrace such leadership roles may be hindered by heavy workloads or traditional top-down leadership practices, necessitating structural and cultural shifts within schools to promote true collaboration.

Moreover, the study underscores the vital role of parental and community engagement in promoting positive student behavior. External factors such as limited parental supervision and socio-economic pressures often contribute to Behavioural problems among students. Consequently, school leaders should strengthen partnerships between schools and local communities through regular parent education workshops, home-school dialogues, and community engagement programs. Such initiatives would encourage consistent Behavioural expectations between the home and school environments. As Tanyi (2020) notes, Behavioural management in African educational settings requires multi-level collaboration involving educators, parents, and community stakeholders. However, challenges related to parental engagement, such as socio-economic barriers and limited time, must be addressed to make these programs effective.

In addition, the study revealed challenges associated with inconsistent policy enforcement and bureaucratic interference from education authorities, which often undermined principals' leadership autonomy. To address this, MINEDUC and REB should review and harmonize disciplinary policy frameworks to ensure coherence, fairness, and transparency across schools. Granting principals greater professional autonomy in applying context-sensitive leadership strategies within ethical and legal boundaries will enhance their confidence and capacity to lead effectively. Bush and Glover (2014) argue that leadership autonomy, when supported by coherent policy frameworks, strengthens accountability and innovation in school management. However, policy changes must be implemented in a manner that accounts for the unique challenges faced by schools in different regions, particularly rural areas, where resources and administrative support may be limited.

Moreover, findings indicated that principals' administrative workload limited their engagement with teachers and students, thus affecting their effectiveness in Behavioural management. To mitigate this, it is recommended that MINEDUC introduce assistant principal or vice-principal positions responsible for academic and student welfare coordination. This restructuring would allow principals to focus on instructional and relational leadership, which are essential for promoting moral discipline and a positive school climate. As Hallinger (2019) emphasizes, reducing managerial overload allows school leaders to devote more time to supervision, mentorship, and character development. However, the creation of these positions would require financial and human resource investment, and their success would depend on the careful delineation of roles and responsibilities within the school leadership structure.

The study also emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers as a means of sustaining effective Behavioural management. REB should design and implement CPD programs focusing on classroom management, psychosocial support, and non-punitive discipline strategies. Professional learning communities, peer mentorship programs, and regular workshops should be established to align teachers' practices with the Competence-Based Curriculum (MINEDUC, 2022). Consistent with UNESCO (2021), empowering teachers through targeted training enhances their ability to manage classrooms effectively while nurturing students' emotional and social competencies. CPD programs should be regularly evaluated for effectiveness and adapted to reflect evolving educational needs.

Finally, the study identifies potential areas for future research. Subsequent studies could employ comparative and longitudinal designs to investigate how adaptive, participatory, and transformational leadership strategies influence student Behaviour over time and across different districts. Future researchers may also consider incorporating students' perspectives to complement teachers' insights, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of leadership and Behavioural management dynamics. Moreover, adopting mixed-method approaches could improve the triangulation and generalizability of findings across diverse educational contexts, thereby contributing to a more holistic view of leadership and Behavioural change in schools.

In conclusion, the recommendations outlined in this chapter highlight the necessity of strengthening leadership capacity, promoting inclusive participation, and fostering collaborative partnerships within the education system. By implementing these strategies, MINEDUC, the Rwanda Education Board, and school leaders can enhance the overall quality of school leadership and effectively address Behavioural challenges in Rwandan public secondary schools. However, careful attention must be paid to the feasibility of these recommendations, particularly in terms of resource availability, local context, and resistance to change.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study explored teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership strategies for managing student Behavioural challenges in public secondary schools in Muhanga District, Rwanda. The findings highlighted the crucial role of transformational and participatory leadership in addressing Behavioural issues effectively. Teachers emphasized that inclusive, emotionally intelligent leadership, grounded in counseling and moral guidance, was more successful in fostering positive student Behaviour than traditional punitive measures. Furthermore, the study revealed the importance of involving teachers in decision-making processes related to disciplinary policies and encouraging parental and community engagement to create consistent Behavioural expectations.

The recommendations derived from the study call for strengthening leadership development programs within the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB), focusing on skills such as emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and restorative discipline. The study also advocates for the establishment of structured counseling and mentorship systems within schools, highlighting the importance of teacher participation in decision-making and the need for greater collaboration with parents and the community.

Despite the promising findings, the study acknowledges challenges such as resistance to hierarchical shifts in leadership structures, resource constraints, and the impact of principals' heavy administrative workloads. To address these, it is recommended that MINEDUC and REB consider policy reforms to promote leadership autonomy, enhance teacher involvement, and ensure sufficient resources for counseling programs. Additionally, future research should explore the long-term effects of leadership strategies on student Behaviour and investigate how such strategies can be adapted across diverse educational contexts. Overall, the study underscores the need for a holistic approach to school leadership that empowers principals, teachers, and communities to work collaboratively in fostering positive student behavior, thus improving the overall school environment and academic performance.

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