



Influence of Leadership Styles on Implementation of Education Policy of 2014 in Public Secondary Schools: A Case of Ukerewe District, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of leadership styles on the implementation of the 2014 Education and Training Policy in public secondary schools in Ukerewe District, Tanzania. The research emphasizes that the existence of a policy alone does not ensure its successful implementation, highlighting school leadership as a critical determinant in achieving effective outcomes. Utilizing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, data were collected from 162 respondents, including school heads, teachers, students, and Ward Education Officers through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Findings reveal that democratic leadership is the predominant style (77.5%), fostering teacher involvement, transparent communication, and a sense of ownership, which facilitates policy adoption. However, the persistence of autocratic leadership (17.5%) in some schools leads to teacher disengagement and superficial compliance. A critical finding is the notably low application of transformational leadership (5.0%), representing a missed opportunity for inspiring the deep, sustainable commitment required for meaningful educational change. The study concludes that while democratic practices provide a necessary foundation, leadership inconsistencies and a deficit in transformational approaches constrain the policy's full potential. It recommended that educational authorities implement targeted capacity-building programs to develop transformational leadership competencies among school heads while strengthening mechanisms to encourage more consistently participatory and inclusive practices across all schools.

Keywords : Leadership Styles, Education Policy, Democratic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Autocratic Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the influence of leadership styles on the implementation of the 2014 education policy in public secondary schools in Ukerewe District, Tanzania. Educational policies provide critical frameworks for institutional management and learning outcomes, but their existence does not guarantee success (OECD, 2017). Effective implementation is decisively dependent on school leadership, as school heads are the primary agents who translate policy objectives into practice (Vaillant, 2015; Fejohn & Faniran, 2016). Their leadership styles directly impact teacher motivation, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement, which are all crucial for policy success (Mpaata et al., 2017). This chapter outlines the background, problem statement, objectives, and significance of studying this relationship.

Globally, the role of leadership in policy implementation is evident. Successful examples from countries like Colombia, Poland, and South Korea show that school autonomy coupled with strong accountability enhances implementation (Kim, 2020). In contrast, many African nations, including Tanzania, face challenges such as weak monitoring, poor resource management, and a lack of stakeholder collaboration (Yulia, 2020). A key issue is that policies are often imposed without consultation, leading to impractical directives (Mwangangi, 2018). Research consistently shows that authoritarian leadership undermines policy effectiveness and demoralizes staff, while democratic leadership fosters participation and improves adherence (Mutabari, 2023; Graham Wilson, 2019). This is corroborated by findings from Nigeria, where democratic leadership

showed a very strong positive correlation with effective policy implementation, unlike autocratic or laissez-faire styles (Abraham, 2022).

The specific context of Tanzania and Ukerewe District reveals significant implementation barriers. In Tanzania, the execution of education policies is hampered by poor financial management practices among school administrators, including a lack of transparent reporting and participatory decision-making (Chacha, 2022). Similarly, in Uganda, the effectiveness of school heads is critical, with a positive correlation found between their daily administrative activities and successful policy implementation (Mpaata & Mpaata, 2018). These local challenges are compounded by systemic issues like inadequate funding, corruption, and a lack of policy continuity, as seen in Nigeria (Enyiazu, 2022), and top-down, rushed implementation without sustainable planning, as evidenced by Ghana's Free Senior High School policy (Addo, 2019).

Therefore, this study positions leadership not merely as a contributing factor but as a determinant of whether educational policy objectives are realized at the school level. The primary concern is to investigate the specific influence of leadership on the implementation of education policies in Ukerewe District. It aims to explore whether effective school leadership leads to successful policy implementation or if the prevalent struggles stem from leadership weaknesses, thereby addressing a critical gap in understanding how leadership styles directly impact the efficacy of national policies in a local context.

Statement of the Problem

This study examined how school heads' leadership styles affect the implementation of the Education policy of 2024. This policy was updated in 2023 for education innovation and started to be implemented in January 2024. Tanzania's education has undergone various changes, such as the 1967 Education for Self-Reliance, 1974 Universal Primary Education, 1977 Education Sector Development Program, PEDP 2002-2006, SEDP 2004-2009, 2014 Fee Free Basic Education Policy, 2023 Curriculum innovation for quality Education. The Tanzanian government has been struggling to enhance education; some authors claim that leadership styles, such as authoritarian, transformational, and democratic leadership styles of school heads, can influence the implementation of education policy. However, the real intention of the government to improve quality is not realized; hence, it is in this context that the researcher wants to find out if leadership styles can assist in the implementation of education policy, which is quality education.

Study Objectives

To identify key leadership styles employed by school heads in the implementation of the education and training policy of 2014.

Theoretical Review

This study draws on Situational Leadership Theory. The Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) provides an appropriate model for this analysis, since it suggests that leaders adapt their style in reaction to context variables such as teacher readiness and

policy demands. In Ukerewe District, where schools face diverse challenges ranging from teacher shortages to limited infrastructure, the theory's flexible approach could help explain how school heads navigate these complexities while implementing the 2014 Education Policy. However, the theory's limitations, including its short-term focus and lack of structured guidelines for long-term policy alignment, suggest that additional strategies are needed to ensure sustainable implementation. This study, though, focuses on how situational leadership is played out in Ukerewe secondary schools and whether or not it serves to facilitate or complicate policy goals.

Empirical Review

In Denmark, Lausern & Weiss (2025) researched how school leaders' transformational leadership behavior influences teachers' adoption of a learning management system (LMS) in sense-making as a mediator in Danish primary and lower secondary schools. The research, through a cross-sectional survey of 962 teachers, finds that, transformational leadership behaviors of school leaders strongly increase the adoption of the LMS among teachers and stimulate more sense-making about the tool. In the USA, the Amurao (2021) study analyzes the role played by transformational leadership in creating educational innovation, in particular the capability of visionary leadership to drive and encourage change in educational institutions in the USA.

Abraham (2022) in Nigeria examined the leadership style and effectiveness of policy implementation on COVID-19 pandemic management in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. The

study employed a correlational design and responded to three questions regarding this correlation. The study did not get any significant correlation between democratic leadership style and effective policy implementation, no significant correlation between laissez-faire leadership style and effective policy implementation, and a significant positive correlation between democratic leadership style and effective policy implementation.

Reta (2021) conducted research in Ethiopia examining the critical contribution of leadership styles to policy implementation effectiveness in the Addis Ababa City Government public sectors. Research hypothesis acknowledges that policy implementation gaps typically stem from leadership development practice, particularly if appointments are made with greater emphasis on political agendas than competency-based career growth. Mbua (2023) in Cameroon examined the effect of principals' leadership styles on teacher and school effectiveness in secondary schools in Tiko Sub-division, Fako Division. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the investigation revealed substantial impacts of principal leadership, with mean effectiveness scores of 4.34 for schools and 4.20 for teachers, both statistically significant. The results particularly highlighted the positive effects of instructional, participatory, and transformational leadership styles on educational outcomes.

In Kenya, Awega et al (2015) conducted a study about the Effect of Leadership Style on the Delivery of Quality Education in Public Technical and Vocational Education Institutions in Kenya. The study used a survey research design and the finding found that the leadership style influenced the success of

the reform process in the organizations, as the process became more successful when the management involved other staff in the process, but took the leadership role, which in turn enhanced the quality of the technical education. In addition, Chacha (2022) employed a mixed research approach to study the effects of leadership skills on implementation of education policy in Tanzania. The study found that the heads of schools do not properly use the school budget for decision-making, do not give accurate financial information about their schools, and do not keep proper records of staff to enable the proper planning and allocation of fiscal resources for implementing free secondary education, among other things.

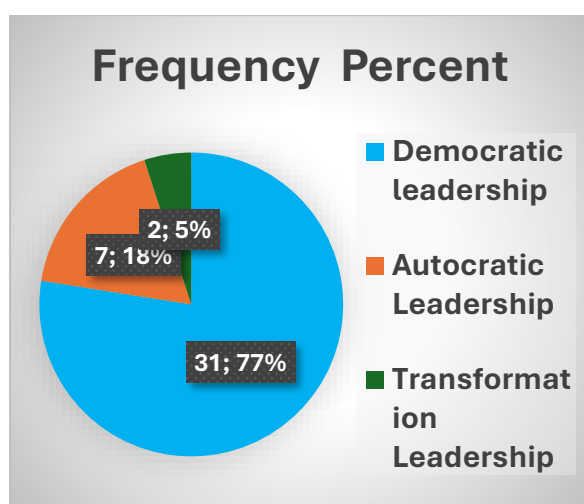
METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to complement each other, and used a convergent parallel design in which quantitative data were collected through questionnaires while qualitative data were obtained via interviews and classroom observations simultaneously. It was conducted in public secondary schools in Ukerewe District in Tanzania's Mwanza Region, an area selected because it reflects common challenges of rural education systems, including poor infrastructure, limited resources, and difficult access due to its island geography. The target population included heads of schools, teachers, students, and Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and sampling involved stratified random selection for schools as well as proportional random and purposive sampling for participants, resulting in 162 respondents comprising 4 heads, 40 teachers, 124 students, and 4

WEOs. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and document reviews, and were analyzed using SPSS for quantitative data both descriptive and inferential and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The study ensured adherence to ethical considerations including obtaining permissions, informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this objective was to identify the most salient leadership styles employed by school leaders in the implementation of the education and training policy of 2014. The study used quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. To begin with, quantitative data, the study asked teachers to provide their views regarding common leadership styles employed by school leaders, and the responses are presented in Figures and Tables.



Source: Field Data (2025)

Figure 1.
Key Leadership Styles Applied by School Heads in Secondary Schools (n=40)

The findings from Figure 1 highlighted a strong preference for democratic leadership among school heads. Democratic leadership, as the term implies, is participative and, as such, is concerned with working in partnership and involving others in decision-making. In the implementation of policy, participation is most desired because it gives teacher ownership of the process, creates more commitment, and ensures achievement. Teachers are more motivated to alter their practice so that the aims of the policy are met if they know that what they have to contribute counts. Also apparent, though on a small scale, is the dominance of autocratic leadership. Whilst autocratic controls may be helpful during a time of crisis or pace of decision, their use in the administration of policy has the effect of threatening long-term success. The reason for this is that an autocratic approach to leadership tends to foster passive obedience as opposed to active commitment, a circumstance that disenfranchises teachers and renders them irrelevant to the broader agenda of reform. Long-term sustainability of change in these situations is therefore doubtful.

The study found an extremely low prevalence of transformational leadership among school principals, which represents a lost opportunity for the deep, structural change intended by the 2014 policy, as this style is key for inspiring teachers to embrace fully the reform vision beyond mere compliance. While the widespread democratic leadership successfully fosters participative cultures and practical policy uptake, and autocratic leadership in some schools risks creating superficial compliance, the absence of transformational leadership ultimately limits the potential for a lasting culture of

innovation and school improvement, highlighting a critical need for professional development to cultivate these inspirational skills in school heads.

Table 1.
Involvement of Teachers in Decision Making

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>Teachers (N=40)</i>						
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
Involvement of teachers in decision-making	Not at all 3(7.5)	Rarely 4(10)	Neutral 6(15.0)	Somewhat 5(12.5)	Very Involved 22(55.0)	40 (100)
Effective communication	Very Ineffective 1(2.5)	Ineffective 1(2.5)	Neutral 10(25.0)	Effective 11(27.5)	Very Effective 17(42.5)	40 (100)
<i>Students (N=124)</i>						
Head teacher visiting the classroom	Never 32(25.8)	Rarely 3(2.4)	Monthly 7(5.6)	Weekly 25(20.2)	Daily 57(46.9)	124 (100)
General School atmosphere	Very Negative 1(8)	Negative 31(25.5)	Neutral 5(4.0)	Positive 37(29.8)	Very Positive 50(40.3)	124 (100)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The study revealed mixed levels of teacher involvement in decision-making regarding the new education policy. While a majority of teachers (67.5% combined) felt very or somewhat involved, a significant minority (17.5%) felt minimally or not involved at all, and a further 15% were neutral. This indicates that while participatory practices are widespread, a substantial portion of staff feels excluded or disengaged which can lead to passive compliance or resistance and ultimately hampers uniform policy implementation across the school.

Regarding communication, most teachers (70%) found the school heads' dissemination of policy requirements to be effective or very effective, aligning with democratic leadership traits. However, a quarter of teachers were neutral and a small minority (5%) found the communication ineffective, suggesting persistent gaps. These communication

shortfalls, often linked to autocratic styles, can create uncertainty and inconsistent application of the policy, underscoring the need for more targeted and inclusive communication strategies.

Student data provided further insights, showing a clear divergence in leadership visibility. Nearly half of the students reported daily head teacher classroom visits, associated with hands-on, democratic leadership. Conversely, over a quarter stated their head teacher never visits, suggesting a more detached, autocratic style. While most students perceived a positive school atmosphere, a large neutral group (37%) indicated that leadership presence is not strongly shaping the school culture in many instances, highlighting the critical link between visible leadership and a positive, policy-conducive environment.

Generally, these findings underscore that effective policy implementation is closely tied to inclusive leadership practices. The correlation between democratic leadership, teacher involvement, and effective communication is clear. However, the significant numbers of excluded, neutral, or poorly-informed teachers, coupled with inconsistent leadership visibility, point to a need for more deliberate engagement and communication strategies to ensure all staff are committed partners in the reform process, thereby achieving consistent and effective policy implementation.

The study also carried out in-depth interviews with the head teachers of visited secondary schools in Ukerewe District. The findings of the first head teacher on crucial leadership style employed to implement the Education and Training Policy of 2014 indicated that the school head predominantly employs a democratic

leadership style in the implementation of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014. This was predicated on the head teacher's reply, the number of staff meetings, seeking comments from different stakeholders, and decision-making based on data. Specifically, one of the participants in the workshop confirmed:

At our institution, we have regular staff meetings where every teacher is encouraged to share his or her views. I believe that decisions must come from below as well. Before I implement any part of the Education and Training Policy, I sit down with my colleagues and even call parents and community members to ask them what they think. Their contribution allows us to make informed, inclusive decisions that serve the needs of our learners. It has raised transparency and formed firmer relationships across the school. It also helps us connect our own goals with the broader educational objective. (Interviewee A, July 2025).

The quote reflects a leadership philosophy underpinned by participatory government and collaborative decision-making. The school's principal reflects commitment to distributed leadership by not just practicing active discussion with internal stakeholders (teachers) but also external stakeholders (parents, members of the community) in interpreting and implementing policy. These processes reflect a deliberate shift away from authoritarian, top-down structures toward a more dialogic and democratic system of governance in which the legitimacy of decisions is increased through shared ownership.

The implementation of regular consultation by the head teacher reflects

democratic theory tenets, including collaborative processes, communication, and consensus building (Bush, 2011). Through a focus on openness and stakeholder participation, it generates relational trust, which is a basis for sustaining education reform. For the case of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2014, which has a focus on decentralization, autonomy, and community participation, these leadership practices are applied to facilitate localized adaptation of policy directives. This shift away from a command-and-control framework toward a participatory framework not only enhances policy responsiveness but ensures that implementation is also sensitive to contexts in the face of resource scarcity. Most importantly, through the involvement of the community, the head teacher strengthens the role of the school as a socio-educational node that infuses local perspectives into national reform agendas.

The second interviewee augmented:

I practice equity by establishing a culture where each teacher feels free to contribute equally in planning meetings. We guide our choices by benefiting from pupil achievement statistics and classroom observations. I am still the final one to make a decision, yet I never do so without hearing. This democratic approach has established trust and facilitated policy implementation, although other leadership styles are at times applied. Teachers are more committed and respected since they have more ownership of school initiatives. It also generates a feeling of mutual responsibility in accomplishing our objectives. (Interviewee B, July 2025).

This quote describes a style of leadership that is fair, participative, and fact-based. The head teacher knows their statutory powers but simultaneously democratizes decision-making through insistence on teacher contribution and information based on data. This balance suggests a style of leadership that brings democratic practice together with some elements of instructional leadership, thereby constructing both professional trust and accountability.

The use of student performance data and observation in schools highlights an evidence-based practice consistent with instructional leadership frameworks that place importance on learning outcomes, teacher development, and data-driven school reform. However, by providing equal opportunity for teachers' input, the head teacher also adheres to democratic leadership principles, where equity and openness are of utmost concern. This integrated leadership style enables a subtle balance between maintaining strategic control and promoting participatory engagement. In terms of ETP 2014, this double emphasis guarantees that school-level planning is both empirically driven and contextually adaptable at the same time.

Another head teacher argued:

We monitor and gauge the implementation of policy through a combination of approaches. First, we conduct regular staff meetings for review of progress and remediation of problems. Secondly, we employ lesson observation and class tests to check for policy objective congruence. We also collect feedback from parents, students, and teachers to view the impact and areas that need improvement. So, we have records and

reports that enable us to track measures of performance such as resource utilization, attendance, and pupil outcomes. This allows us to make informed decisions based on data and streamline our methods if needed (Interviewee C, July 2025)

The above account is typical of democratic leadership that is underpinned by inclusiveness and participative decision-making. The school leader engages teachers and other stakeholders by constant consultation and cooperation, as evidenced by frequent staff meetings and formal feedback gathering. The practice is in line with principles of democratic leadership, where collective decision-making replaces autocratic decision-making (Northouse, 2021). In addition, the utilization of feedback and data to guide strategic revisions reflects transparency and accountability, key elements of participatory governance in education (Bush, 2018). The use of democratic leadership here reflects a proactive attempt to promote stakeholder participation in policy implementation.

Earlier research supports the fact that democratic leadership is linked with enhanced teacher motivation, cooperation, and group ownership of school goals. Beyond this, incorporating teachers, students, and parents into monitoring and evaluation actions ensures implementation difficulties are recognized early and resolved collectively. This participative environment creates a feeling of responsibility and belongingness among stakeholders that, as Leithwood and Jantzi (2016) noted, is crucial to sustaining educational reforms. However, while democratic leadership is emphatically good, it relies on the initiative of stakeholders to engage actively in decision-

making. Where teachers or parents lack the capacity or the will to participate, the process could become cumbersome and less effective.

Findings from the second head teacher's comments indicate a leadership that combines transformational and participative (democratic) approaches in implementing the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014. The head teacher highlighted establishing awareness among teachers, provision of teaching and learning resources, and the involvement of stakeholders to enhance effective implementation. Specifically, some participants highlighted:

To sure that every teacher is familiar with the 2023 policy, provision of books and syllabuses, and addressing every student about the adoption of the new syllabus. Provision of new syllabus books continues to be an obstacle as well as sufficient information about syllabus adoption. Involving the conscious stakeholders to meet and interact with the teachers and discuss the best use of the syllabus. (Interviewee D, July 2025).

This is a leadership approach that is interested in motivating the teachers and the students through awareness and motivation, which is fundamentally a characteristic of transformational leadership. The leader is not only making resources such as books and syllabi available but also inviting teachers and students to embrace policy changes. Furthermore, inviting external stakeholders to share knowledge with teachers is an indicator of participative leadership as it invites collaboration and openness in decision-making (Bush, 2018). The embracement of transformational and

participative styles is a reflection of an active and visionary style of leadership. By introducing teachers to the policy reforms, the head teacher demonstrates intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, two central aspects of transformational leadership. In addition, involving stakeholders to advise serves to ensure that implementation is informed by diverse expertise, thereby making policy implementation qualitative. Literature highlights the applicability of transformational leadership in school reforms due to its potential to bring about teacher commitment and adaptability to change. Similarly, participative leadership has been associated with more ownership and less resistance to policy implementation (Bush & Glover, 2014).

However, the problem of availability of materials, as highlighted by the head teacher, is reflective of systemic issues that can render these forms of leadership ineffective. Without adequate materials and adequate instructions, even the most inspiring and participative of leaders may be unable to produce desired outcomes. Findings address the first purpose of the study, which was to establish prevalent leadership styles applied by school heads in the implementation of the policy. Findings in the data show that school heads apply transformational and democratic styles of leadership in addressing issues of the new syllabus under the Education and Training Policy.

In addition the WEO visited said:

Based on my visits, I see that most of the head teachers have a good grasp of the Education and Training Policy. What is most striking is not just their awareness of the written directives but the way they interpret

and position these mandates to engage teachers and communities. The better leaders are those that take policy words and render them into a sense of day-to-day routines by using staff meetings, classroom monitoring, and parent consultation so that it does not feel forced but actual (Interviewee E, July 2025).

This WEO citation informs us that policy consciousness among school heads goes beyond passive acquaintance with official papers. The WEO calls for interpretation and contextualization, whereby head teachers translate national policy into meaningful practices in terms of the realities of their schools. Effective leaders demonstrate the capacity to fill the gap between distant directives and school-level implementations by integrating staff input, classroom realities, and community participation. The WEO commentary brings to the foreground the concept of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012), where the policy is not only enforced but also read and re-framed by practitioners and school leaders. Head teachers' ability to embed the Education and Training Policy (ETP 2014) in everyday school practices such as staff meetings, monitoring, and consultations shows a form of situated leadership.

This is especially relevant in decentralized systems, where policy success or failure lies in adaptation in the local setting. The WEO also underscores the relational nature of policy work: engaging teachers and parents guarantees that policy is not perceived as a top-down diktat but as a collective, collaborative endeavor. Such practice evokes legitimacy, enhances compliance, and fosters ownership. This translates for teachers to mean that school leaders' policy awareness directly influences the extent of embedding reforms in every-day practice. Policy-

making leaders who become genuine routines generate clarity, remove uncertainty, and motivate teachers to make their own class practices conformant to policy goals at large.

She continued:

The school principals I get to meet who are at their best practice democratic leadership, listening, equity, and collaboration together with decisiveness. They know when to open up the conversations and when to provide input. Those that build trust between parents and teachers perform well in policy implementation because they encourage ownership, and also use data and monitoring tools to stay on course. In my view, these are more important than the mere application of authority. (Interviewee F, July 2025).

This citation illustrates a clear vision of effective leadership as a mixture of democratic engagement and strategic management. The WEO lists key qualities, such as listening, fairness, collaboration, and decisiveness, as essential in the achievement of effective policy implementation. Emphasis on building trust, data utilization, and monitoring reflects a participatory model of leadership that values both people and technical sides of school leadership.

The WEO account is concerned with democratic as opposed to instructional leadership, that is, balancing democratic leadership and instructional leadership. Democratic values such as fairness, consultation, and collaboration enhance participation and strengthen teachers' and parents' ownership of reforms. Decisiveness and the application of monitoring tools are instructional and managerial dimensions of leadership,

respectively, that facilitate accountability and progress toward school goals. This mixed leadership model resonates with the contemporary theory of educational leadership that considers that good leaders need to be adaptive in responding to circumstance while negotiating participatory and authoritative practices with each being necessary.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it concluded that while democratic leadership provides a solid foundation for implementing the 2014 Education and Training Policy in Ukerewe District by fostering teacher involvement and ownership, the persistent use of autocratic styles in some schools undermines deeper reform. This happens through disengagement and superficial compliance, and the critical shortage of transformational leadership represents a missed opportunity for inspiring the innovation and sustained commitment needed for profound change. Therefore, it recommended that targeted capacity-building programs be implemented to develop school heads' transformational competencies, accountability mechanisms be strengthened to shift autocratic leaders toward participatory practices, and democratic structures be formalized to ensure all teachers are meaningfully involved in decision-making, thereby moving schools beyond procedural adherence toward a culture of continuous improvement.

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