ASSESSMENT OF HEAD TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP STYLES ON MORALE BUILDING AMONG TEACHERS AT MBEYA CITY COUNCIL

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Abstract: **This study explored the contribution of primary school head teachers' leadership styles on morale building among teachers at Mbeya city council. A qualitative research design was adopted, involving 25 respondents whose views were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that head teachers employed various leadership styles, including transformational, democratic, autocratic, transactional and, in rare cases, laissez-faire. Transformational leadership emerged as the most prominent among experienced head teachers, characterized by mentorship, individualized support, ethical conduct and encouragement of innovation. Despite these positive contributions, head teachers faced numerous challenges in sustaining teacher morale. These included inadequate resources and heavy workloads which weakened motivation and often necessitated rigid leadership responses. Limited teacher participation in decision-making, inconsistent recognition, and high community expectations with insufficient support compounded these difficulties. The study concluded that effective leadership, while crucial, must be complemented by systemic and institutional support to achieve sustainable improvements in teacher morale.**

Key Term: Leadership, Leadership Styles and Morale Building.

1. INTRODUCTION

Head teachers play an instrumental role in nurturing teacher morale through their leadership styles, which significantly influence the school's working environment. Leadership in this context transcends traditional administrative functions, serving as a transformative process that impacts teacher motivation, satisfaction, and professional growth (Northouse, 2022). Effective head teachers inspire staff by articulating a shared vision, fostering collaboration, and celebrating achievements. Teacher morale building involves cultivating a positive, enthusiastic and empowered mindset among educators, enhancing job satisfaction and engagement (Author, 2018). Leadership, however, remains a complex and multidimensional concept. While some scholars distinguish leadership from management, others view them as complementary, both crucial to achieving institutional goals (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Okumu et al., 2018). Globally, strong and inclusive leadership has been linked to teacher satisfaction and improved learning outcomes, as demonstrated in Finland, Singapore, the United States and Australia, where transformational and distributed leadership models have enhanced teacher engagement and performance (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood *et al.,* 2020; Gurr *et al.,* 2021).

Similarly, evidence from Africa including South Africa, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria confirms that participatory and empowering leadership practices improve teacher morale, reduce turnover, and enhance student achievement (Mestry & Grobler, 2019; Kusi *et al.,* 2016; Ololube, 2017). In Tanzania, primary schools face persistent challenges such as inadequate resources and classrooms (Mugisha, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2020). Head teachers, therefore, play a vital role in addressing these issues through effective leadership that promotes motivation, collaboration and professional growth. In

Mbeya City, these challenges are particularly pronounced, with limited teaching materials. Different leadership styles including transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic have varying effects on teacher motivation and engagement (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Sun, 2012) but litle is known. Given the limited empirical research on this topic in Mbeya City Council, the current study seeks to assess the contribution of head teachers' leadership styles to morale building among primary school teachers. Understanding the relationship was essential for improving teacher motivation, enhancing performance and promoting sustainable educational development in Tanzania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of transformational leadership, developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass and Avolio (2006), integrates earlier leadership philosophies such as behavioral, charismatic, situational and transactional theories. Transformational leadership emphasizes the relationship between leaders and followers, where leaders inspire individuals to exceed personal interests for collective organizational goals. It operates through four key components idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration which together enhance morale, motivation, and productivity (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The theory suggests that leaders who act with integrity, articulate a compelling vision and nurture personal growth can profoundly influence employee motivation and commitment (Bushra *et al.,* 2011).

In educational settings, transformational leadership provides a framework for understanding how head teachers can inspire teachers to perform beyond expectations through vision sharing, trust building, and professional support. Empirical evidence from global contexts consistently supports the positive link between transformational leadership and teacher morale. Studies from Germany (Bruch, 2013), Canada (Giroux, 2014), Australia (Noland, 2017) and South Korea (Choi & Kang, 2019) demonstrate that transformational leaders foster motivation, resilience and adaptability, improving both teacher satisfaction and student outcomes. Similarly, Johnson and Baker (2021) and Kim and Lee (2020) found that transformational leadership helped sustain morale and innovation during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Research from developing countries such as Ghana (Oduro & Mensah, 2021) and Kenya (Ahmed & Hassan, 2023) confirms that democratic and transformational leadership enhance morale even in resource constrained environments, underscoring the universal value of supportive participatory leadership practices.

Other leadership styles, including transactional, laissez faire and autocratic, have also been examined in relation to teacher morale. Transactional leadership, as observed in studies by Smith and Brown (2018) and Mwangi and Kamau (2021) provides clear expectations and rewards that can enhance short term motivation though it lacks the emotional engagement necessary for long term morale. Conversely, laissez faire leadership has been consistently associated with low morale lack of direction and teacher frustration (Adebayo & Ojo, 2020; Chang & Lee, 2021). Similarly, autocratic leadership characterized by rigid control and minimal participation has been shown to undermine morale by restricting autonomy and stifling creativity (Ali & Khan, 2018; Mwangi & Njuguna, 2020). These findings highlight that while transactional and autocratic styles may ensure discipline and compliance, they are less effective than transformational or democratic approaches in fostering sustainable motivation and engagement.

Despite extensive research on leadership styles and teacher morale globally, several gaps remain. Most studies focus on transformational leadership's positive outcomes but pay limited attention to how different leadership styles interact or function across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Few comparative studies have examined how transformational, transactional, autocratic and laissez faire leadership styles collectively influence teacher morale in low resource environments such as Tanzania. Moreover, contextual factors such as workload, resource scarcity and systemic constraints are often overlooked when evaluating leadership effectiveness. There is therefore a need for localized, empirical research in Tanzanian primary schools particularly in Mbeya City Council, to assess how head teachers' leadership styles contribute to teacher morale within these unique environmental and institutional conditions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mbeya City Council, one of the seven administrative councils that make up Mbeya Region in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. The city serves as a major administrative, commercial and educational hub, strategically located along the Tanzania Zambia Highway a vital corridor for trade, communication, and migration within the region (URT, 2020). The council oversees a diverse network of public primary and secondary schools that vary in size, resource endowment, and performance. This diversity provided a suitable context for exploring differences in head teachers'

leadership styles and their effects on teacher morale. The area was purposively selected due to its distinctive educational environment and the variety of leadership practices exhibited by school heads (Mugisha, 2018). Mbeya City has been at the forefront of implementing key national education reforms, including the introduction of fee-free basic education, curriculum revisions, and continuous professional development programs for teachers (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, 2020). These reforms have expanded the responsibilities of head teachers, requiring them to effectively balance administrative management, staff motivation, and instructional leadership.

A qualitative research design was employed, involving 25 participants whose views were analyzed thematically. The data were collected using semi structured interviews, which were deliberately selected as the primary research tool due to their flexibility and ability to generate rich, detailed information. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe further into responses, seek clarifications, and encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and opinions. This approach not only facilitated an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives but also ensured that emerging themes relevant to the research objectives could be captured effectively.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Head Teachers' Leadership Styles Used in Increasing Teachers' Morale

This study examined the leadership styles adopted by head teachers in their efforts to enhance and sustain teachers' morale in Mbeya City Council. The study was guided by the research question *What leadership styles are employed by head teachers to increase teachers' morale in Mbeya City Council?* the analysis focused on four key themes: autocratic leadership, democratic/participatory leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. Findings revealed that head teachers adopted different leadership styles based on several factors, including their level of experience, the nature of work related challenges and the performance expectations of their schools. This demonstrates that leadership practice within schools is dynamic and situational, influenced by contextual realities and the personal attributes of the head teachers. Those with extensive leadership experience tended to apply transformational and participatory leadership styles, inspiring teachers through motivation, teamwork, and innovation. They also promoted inclusive decision-making processes that cultivated a sense of ownership, accountability, and collective responsibility among staff. In contrast, some head teachers adopted autocratic leadership approaches, particularly when working under intense pressure or when rapid action was required to meet performance targets. While this strict approach was sometimes perceived as necessary to maintain order and discipline

4.2 Transformational Leadership Practices

The following section presents direct quotations and narratives from interviewees, which illustrate the practical application of these leadership styles in schools and highlight their influence on teacher morale. Through that different leadership style was a source of creating morale to teachers towards their performance. The following was the result obtained during interviews**:** One of the teacher argued that

> In this school head teachers work close with teachers by consulting and involving teachers in decision making. Involvements of teachers increase ownership in handling their duties which build morale to teachers (T1 - of Primary School, 24 August 2025).

Another teacher said that:

> Our head teacher always involves us in making key decisions, especially about teaching schedules and school programs and even how to support and supervise well our pupils. For example, before preparing the school timetable or introducing a new initiative, he calls us for meetings where every teacher has a chance to share their opinions (T2 – of Primary School , 24 August 2025).

The arguments above from the key informants are related with arguments from the Headteacher from of one of the primary school who witnessed that in ensuring performance subordinate was involved in various activities as well as decision making to ensure school achievements. During interviews it was found that:

> We usually perform better in this school because, in practicing leadership responsibilities, I actively involve teachers in key decision making processes. This includes collaboratively deciding on the

allocation of extra teaching time, implementing strategies for closely monitoring student progress and determining appropriate assignments and learning activities for students (HT1 of one of the Primary school, 24 August 2025).

Another key informants had the same view related with transformation and participatory leadership. For instance one of the participant said that:

Head teachers do provide mentorship and coaching to new teachers. Our head teacher focuses on developing our skills and helping us grow more on our career. The head teacher provides guidance, mentorship and support, so we feel empowered to make decisions and improve student outcomes (T1 - of Primary School , 25 August 2025).

In this school we feel inspired to follow our head teachers directives because of the integrity and ethical standards he demonstrates to us. His commitment to fairness, honesty and the school's mission motivates us to align our efforts with the school's goals, that is why this school normally perform better in academic phas (T1 - of another Primary School , 23 August 2025).

The findings from the interviews indicate that transformational leadership practices are strongly demonstrated in the sampled schools. One of the dominant themes is teacher involvement in decision-making. Teachers and the head teacher from emphasized that when teachers are consulted and included in making key decisions, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility in carrying out their duties. For instance, teachers reported being involved in the preparation of teaching schedules, school programs, and pupil supervision strategies. This participatory and inclusive leadership approach enhances collective responsibility, shared vision and teacher morale, which in turn improves performance outcomes.

4.3 Democratic Leadership Practices

In addition, the study confirmed the presence of democratic leadership practices, as reflected in the perspectives of some participants who highlighted inclusive decision making processes. One participant explained that being consulted in these processes made them feel respected and valued as professionals, while another emphasized that this approach fostered a sense of teamwork and collective responsibility within the school. Such reflections demonstrate that democratic leadership not only enhances teacher morale but also strengthens collaboration, which in turn contributes to improved performance and a supportive school environment.

Our head teacher always involves us in making key decisions, especially about teaching schedules and school programs. For example, before finalizing the timetable, we come together as a staff to discuss the workload and the needs of pupils (T1- of Primary School, 23 August 2025).

Member of school committee confirmed that participation was a permanent agenda towards school developments. Parents contribute on kind effort and financial resources during school developments like construction of toilets and other activities which require resource.

I appreciate that our head teacher in listens carefully to different opinions before implementing various developments activities. Even when we disagree, he makes sure every perspective is considered. This inclusive approach strengthens our teamwork and helps us move forward as a united community instead of individuals working separately (CM1 - of Primary School, 22 August 2025).

We feel a strong sense of ownership in the school because decisions are made collectively. Whether it is about budgeting, extracurricular activities, or academic programs, our voices are heard. This reduces conflicts, improves cooperation, and builds trust among all staff, since everyone knows their contributions are respected (CM1 - of Primary School, 25 August 2025).

The findings of this study revealed that democratic leadership practices were evident in the sampled schools, particularly through inclusive decision making processes. Teachers reported that head teachers often sought their input before finalizing important matters such as the allocation of financial resources, distribution of responsibilities and preparation of teaching timetables.

4.4 Autocratic Leadership Practices

Through interviews, it was also revealed that sometimes some schools practiced an autocratic leadership style. In schools where autocratic leadership dominated, decision making was largely centralized, with head teachers making most of the key choices without consulting teachers or parents. However, in some cases, a combination of leadership styles was observed, where head teacher's balanced strict control with elements of democratic, transactional practices, depending on the situation. This mixture reflected the need to maintain discipline and authority while at the same time responding to the demands for participation and inclusiveness in school governance. Through interviews it was noted that some of school practiced autocratic or combination of different leadership style. The Key informants confirmed that;

> Sometimes it depends with the situations; decisions come directly from the head teacher without much consultation with teachers or parents especially doing handling sensitive issues. While this makes the process fast and straightforward, it often leaves us feeling sidelined (T2 - of other Primary School, 20 August 2025).

> We are often just told what to do, and there is little room to challenge or suggest alternatives. Even when we have ideas that could improve situations or management, the culture exams does not allow much space for dialogue (CM2 - of Primary School , 28 August 2025).

> The head teacher prefers control and authority, which sometimes makes us feel excluded from the decision making process. We know decisions are made quickly, but the lack of consultation with community makes it difficult for us to feel ownership or commitment to those directives (CM2 - Primary School, 24 August 2025).

The findings from the interviews revealed that some schools also practiced autocratic leadership or a combination of different styles, depending on the situation. Key informants noted that in certain cases, particularly when handling sensitive issues, head teachers made decisions directly without consulting teachers or parents. While this approach ensured speed, clarity and efficiency in decision making, it also created feelings of exclusion among staff and stakeholders. Teachers expressed that being sidelined limited their sense of ownership, as they were expected to implement directives without having the opportunity to contribute their views. This shows that although autocratic leadership may be effective in urgent or delicate matters, it risks weakening teacher morale and undermining participatory culture within the school.

4.5 Transactional Leadership Practices

Transactional leadership was observed in some schools. This leadership style was evident where head teachers emphasized clear structures of reward and punishment to influence performance. Teachers reported that good performance, such as timely completion of assigned tasks or going the extra mile in supporting students, was often acknowledged through verbal praise, recognition during staff meetings, or even small incentives. On the other hand, failure to meet expectations was met with corrective measures, strict supervision, or loss of certain privileges. Such practices created a system of accountability and discipline, ensuring that responsibilities were met, but at the same time, some participants noted that it limited creativity and innovation, as teachers mainly worked to comply with directives rather than to take initiative." key informants confirmed that:

> Our head teacher makes it very clear that good performance is rewarded. For example, teachers who meet their targets or show commitment in extra duties are recognized with incentives or praise, which encourages us to work harder (T2 - Primary School, 22 August 2025).

Other Key informants confirmed that;

> Sometimes we feel that our relationship with the school leadership is more like a contract if you perform well, you are rewarded; if you underperform, you face consequences. It keeps us accountable, but it also makes the environment a bit rigid (T1 - Primary School, 28 August 2025).

Additionally Key informants confirmed that;

> I have noticed that leadership here is largely about exchange teachers are motivated by tangible rewards such as allowances, recognition during meetings or extra responsibilities that come with

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benefits. This system works, but it doesn't always address deeper professional needs (T2 - Primary School, 28 August 2025).

The study findings indicated that transactional leadership practices were evident in some schools, particularly through the use of rewards and sanctions to influence teacher performance. Teachers noted that good performance, such as meeting targets, timely completion of tasks or commitment to extra duties, was often acknowledged through verbal praise, recognition during staff meetings or small incentives. Such practices motivated teachers to work harder, as they understood that effort and achievement were directly linked to tangible or symbolic rewards.

4.6 Laissez Faire Leadership Practices

Laissez-faire leadership was observed only rarely in the schools, as confirmed by a few participants. Teachers reported that in such cases, the head teacher provided minimal guidance or direction, allowing staff to make decisions independently. While this approach sometimes gave teachers the freedom to exercise their professional judgment, participants noted that it often led to confusion, lack of coordination and inconsistencies in implementing school programs, since there was limited oversight or support from the leadership. During interviews it was found that:

> In some rare cases, the head teacher steps back and let us manage our classrooms and schedules on our own. It feels freeing, but sometimes it's hard to know if we are doing things the way the school expects (T2 - Primary School, 20 August 2025).

> There are moments when leadership gives us complete autonomy to decide how to teach or organize activities. While this allows creativity, it can also lead to confusion when there is no clear guidance or follow-up (T3 - Primary School, 21 August 2025).

Another key informant from Ujima primary school insisted that:

> Occasionally, the head teacher does not interfere with our decisions and we handle matters independently. This freedom is appreciated, but it sometimes causes inconsistencies (T3 - Primary School, 20 August 2025).

Other key informants from Muyeye primary school insisted that:

> When the head teacher does not provide guidance, it gives us room to exercise professional judgment. However, the absence of support sometimes leads to mistakes or misunderstandings that could have been avoided with better oversight (T2 - Primary School, 28 August 2025).

The findings revealed that laissez faire leadership was observed, though only in rare cases, where head teachers allowed teachers significant autonomy in managing their classrooms, schedules and teaching methods. Teachers expressed that this freedom was appreciated as it enabled them to exercise professional judgment, make independent decisions, and explore creative approaches in teaching and organizing activities.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate that transformational leadership was prominently practiced among experienced head teachers in the sampled schools. Such leaders motivated and inspired teachers through vision-setting, mentorship, and individualized support. Teachers highlighted that being involved in decision making, receiving recognition for their unique strengths and being encouraged to innovate significantly enhanced their sense of ownership, commitment, and morale. These practices also fostered trust, collaboration, and professional growth, contributing positively to overall school performance. These results corroborate the views of Leithwood *et al.* (2020) and Bass and Riggio (2006), who argue that transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation, engagement, and professional dedication. Similarly, empirical studies in comparable contexts confirm that transformational leadership improves teacher productivity, morale, and educational outcomes (Shahmoradi & Baghbanyan, 2011; Bekhet & Mugableh, 2019; Faruq, 2023).

Democratic or participatory leadership was also evident, characterized by inclusive decision-making processes involving teachers, parents and in some cases, students, particularly in areas such as timetabling, budgeting and school development initiatives. This inclusive approach fostered a sense of collective responsibility, strengthened collaboration, reduced

conflicts and enhanced community support, ultimately boosting teacher morale. These findings align with Gronn (2002) and Bush (2019), who emphasize that participatory leadership promotes ownership, engagement, and organizational effectiveness. Nevertheless, the study found that some schools maintained partial centralization in decision making due to hierarchical structures and resource limitations, which constrained the full benefits of democratic leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Autocratic leadership was applied selectively, often in high-pressure or time-sensitive situations where rapid decision making was necessary to maintain discipline and ensure task completion. While this approach helped stabilize performance and enforce compliance, excessive reliance on autocratic methods was reported to reduce teacher motivation, engagement and creativity. Teachers expressed feelings of exclusion when decision-making was highly centralized. These observations are consistent with Mulkeen (2007), Day *et al.* (2016) and Okumbe (1999), who note that directive leadership may be effective for short-term objectives but can undermine intrinsic motivation if overused (Bush, 2011; Sergiovanni, 2001; Nguni, *et al.,* 006).

These findings shows that effective school leadership in Mbeya City Council involves context sensitive and adaptive approaches. Transformational and democratic practices are most beneficial for enhancing teacher morale, collaboration, and professional growth, whereas autocratic leadership, though occasionally necessary, requires careful balance to avoid negative impacts on motivation and engagement.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that leadership practices among primary school head teachers in Mbeya City Council significantly affect teacher morale, engagement and school performance. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision setting, mentorship, individualized support and encouragement of innovation, was most effective in enhancing teacher motivation, trust, collaboration and professional growth. Democratic or participatory leadership also contributed positively by involving teachers, parents, and sometimes students in decision making, fostering collective responsibility and community support. Autocratic leadership was applied selectively under high pressure situations, but excessive use was found to reduce motivation and creativity. Thus effective school leadership in Mbeya is adaptive, context-sensitive and benefits from a balance of leadership styles to sustain morale and improve outcomes.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that education authorities promote transformational leadership practices, strengthen participatory decision making and ensure autocratic approaches are applied judiciously. Capacity building programs should equip head teachers with adaptive leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and strategic decision making abilities. Additionally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of leadership practices can help identify effective strategies and share best practices across schools. Implementing these measures will foster supportive, motivating and high performing school environments that enhance teacher satisfaction and student achievement.

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