

ABSTRACT

Studies conducted in USA, Kuwait, South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda, central region of Kenya and some counties in Nyanza region have revealed that principals' leadership styles influence performance in schools, for instance, leadership style was found to contribute 32.8% to the students' performance in Uganda. Principals are known to use various leadership styles in enhancing students' academic performance, however, it was noted between 2012-2016 that students' performance in Awendo was generally unsatisfactory with an average mean of 4.9, lower than the neighbouring Uriri and Rongo sub-counties which had 6.5 and 5.8 respectively. The purpose of this study was therefore to establish the influence of the principals' leadership styles on students' KCSE performance in Awendo sub-county. The objectives of the study were to; determine the influence of principals' democratic leadership style on students' academic performance, establish the influence of principals' autocratic leadership style on the students' academic performance and to establish the influence of principals' *laissez faire* leadership styles on students' academic performance. A conceptual framework was used to show the interplay regarding the independent variable, which is leadership styles and that of the dependent variable, which is students' performance. The research employed descriptive survey design to obtain information. The study population consisted of 35 principals, 340 teachers and 1400 form four students of 2016 since the latter had stayed in school long enough to understand the principal's leadership practices. Saturated sampling method was used to obtain 30 principals as the remaining 5 were used for piloting and simple random sampling used to sample 186 teachers and 301 students. Data was collected using questionnaire, interview schedules, document analysis and focus group discussions. Face and content validity of the instruments were determined by experts in Educational Administration. Pilot study was conducted in 5(14%) schools which were excluded from the main study. The reliability was tested using test-retest method and a Pearson's r of 0.86 for Principals' questionnaire obtained. Quantitative data was analyzed using frequency count, mean, percentage, correlation and simple linear regression. Qualitative data was transcribed, analyzed and used for triangulation. Leadership styles were measured using a rating scale adopted from Don Clark Questionnaire leadership style survey for attributes of democratic, autocratic and *laissez faire* styles whilst students' performance was measured by the school mean score. The study established that democratic leadership accounted for 37.9% of variation in students' academic performance as signified by adjusted R square 0.379. Autocratic leadership accounted for 44.0% of variation in students' academic performance as signified by adjusted R square 0.440 and *Laissez faire* leadership style accounted for 16.2% of variation in students' academic performance signified by adjusted R square 0.162. It was concluded that democratic and autocratic leadership styles had a significant positive influence on students' academic performance while *laissez faire* had a significant negative influence on students' academic performance. The study recommended that the principals in Awendo sub-county be encouraged to use democratic and autocratic leadership styles for better academic performance of students. The study is significant to stakeholders in education in assisting principals to practice leadership styles that would enhance students' academic performance in secondary schools.