



**EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC  
DISPARITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN HIGH AND UNDERPERFORMING  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS LUSAKA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.**

**BY**

**KIBWANA SULTAN**

**A Dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Education in Educational  
Administration and Management.**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

**LUSAKA**

## **COPYRIGHT**

No part of this dissertation may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted by electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise before seeking permission from the author.

**Kibwana Sultan**

©2025

All Rights Reserved

## **DECLARATION**

I, **KIBWANA SULTAN**, declare that this dissertation represents my work, and it has not previously been submitted by any other person for a degree at the University of Zambia or any other University. Furthermore, it does not incorporate any published work or material from other researchers without being acknowledged.

Signature:

Date:



## **DEDICATIONS**

To my father, Sultan Kopa for your unwavering encouragement and the values you instilled in me through your good upbringing. I wish you a speedy recovery.

To my mother, Tausi Ramadhani whose continuous prayers, moral support, and financial assistance from childhood to adulthood have been the backbone of all my achievements. Your sacrifices, often foregoing your own needs for my education, will forever be remembered.

To my future wife and children, your presence in my thoughts gave me the strength to persevere in my pursuit of a master's degree at the University of Zambia.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I am humbled to express my deepest thanks to God Almighty for His mercy, protection, and support throughout my academic journey at the University of Zambia. This achievement would not have been possible without His mighty hand guiding me every step of the way.

Secondly, I extend my heartfelt thanks and recognition to my supervisors, Prof. Ferdinand M Chipindi and Dr. Margaret Mwale Mkandawile (PhD). Their unwavering support, tireless efforts, and considerate guidance have been instrumental in shaping this work. I count myself blessed to have had such supervisors who encouraged, critiqued, and insisted on excellence. May your daily encounters be filled with God's favour and rewards.

Thirdly, I express my gratitude to the entire teaching staff of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies. Your wise words motivated me to focus on my research with incredible determination. I also sincerely thank my research assistant, Mr. Brian Phiri, for his invaluable help during data collection. I also sincerely appreciate the contributions of all the participants in this study; your contributions are highly cherished. I would mention each of you by name if it were ethically permissible.

Fourthly, I appreciate the diverse academic and emotional support I received from my colleagues: Mr. Chiza Lawi, Eng. Ngonde Khamisi, Ms. Ansila Nyaki, Ms. and Mr. Jackson Manase. Your companionship and support on this noble journey are truly treasured.

Last, but certainly not least, I wish to acknowledge my parents, siblings, and friends with whom I stayed while in Zambia. This achievement is a testament to the love and care you extended to me during my studies.

## ABSTRACT

The coexistence of underperforming and high-performing public secondary schools raises critical questions about the factors contributing to the persistent academic performance gap, particularly the role of leadership styles in shaping academic outcomes. Despite various interventions by the government of Zambia to address educational disparities, these gaps continue to persist, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of the leadership factors at play. Moreover, a significant research gap remains in exploring the mechanisms through which leadership practices influence academic disparities, especially in terms of school climate, teacher motivation, and student engagement, which are vital for improving academic outcomes. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the relationship between leadership styles and academic disparities in Lusaka District, Zambia, with a focus on their influence on academic performance.

The study was guided by three objectives: To establish the main leadership styles used by the headteachers in selected high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools, determine the contribution of leadership practices toward the academic disparities between high-performing and underperforming public schools, and identify potential areas for improvement in leadership practices within underperforming public secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. Employing a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data was collected through standardised semi-structured questionnaires administered to 80 teachers and 200 students, sampled through systematic random sampling. While, qualitative data complemented the quantitative data, including interviews with 8 headteachers and 8 deputy headteachers obtained by purposive sampling. The data obtained by the qualitative method of data collection were coded by a thematic approach, then categorised, tabulated, and arranged under themes and subthemes whereas the quantitative data were analysed using using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 (SPSS Inc., Chicago IL).

The thematic analysis of the study data revealed key themes related to leadership styles and their influence on academic disparities, including main leadership styles attributed by the headteachers in high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools, contribution of leadership practices toward the academic disparities, and potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public schools. The findings revealed that headteachers in these schools employed different leadership styles, including instructional, democratic, servant,

situational, and authoritative leadership. However, the leadership styles used varied between high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools, influencing leadership practices and academic performance.

The study further revealed that leadership practices played a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating academic disparities. High-performing public secondary schools demonstrated strong leadership practices, including effective communication of vision and strategic plans, inclusive decision-making, delegation of tasks, instructional support and professional development, and efficient resource management. In contrast, underperforming schools struggled with weak leadership practices, limiting collaboration, teacher engagement, and student support. Additionally, handling academic disparities was a major focus, with interventions such as remedial programs, guidance and counseling, and extracurricular activities were effectively implemented in high-performing public secondary schools while, headteachers in underperforming schools struggled to implement these interventions effectively due to leadership challenges. Their efforts were often hindered by resistance to change, the nature of students, and over-enrollment, further widening academic disparities.

It could be concluded that leadership practices employed by headteachers in public secondary schools contribute to academic disparities. In high-performing schools, headteachers demonstrated leadership practices that fostered teacher development, collaboration, and adaptability, resulting in improved academic outcomes. In contrast, underperforming schools were characterised by rigid, autocratic leadership, which hindered teacher engagement, innovation, and student support, ultimately contributing to ongoing academic challenges. It was recommended that leadership's knowledge and leadership practice should be closely integrated to mitigate academic disparities in public schools effectively. Furthermore, gender roles in leadership and their impacts on academic disparities should be assessed by comparing high-performing and underperforming public schools.

**Keywords:** Leadership style, leadership practice, academic disparities, high-performing and underperforming.

## 1.0 TABLE OF CONTENT

COPYRIGHT .....	ii
DECLARATION .....	iii
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL.....	iv
DEDICATIONS.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0. Overview .....	1
1.1 Background of the Study .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	5
1.3 Purpose of the Study .....	5
1.4 Research Objectives.....	5
1.5 Research Questions .....	6
1.6 Significance of Study .....	6
1.7 Delimitation of the Study.....	6
1.8 Limitations of the Study.....	7
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	7
1.9.1 Fielder’s Contingency Theory .....	8
1.9.2 Theory of Academic Performance .....	8
1.10 Conceptual Framework.....	9
1.11 Operational definitions of key terms.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12

2.0. Introduction.....	12
2.1 Leadership in Nurturing Academic Success .....	12
2.2 State of Knowledge on Leadership/Performance Linkage. ....	14
2.3 Leadership Style Vs Academic Performance .....	16
2.3.1 Global Perspective .....	16
2.3.2 African Perspective .....	17
2.3.3 Zambian Perspective .....	20
2.5. Research Gaps.....	24
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGIES .....	26
3.0 Introduction.....	26
3.1 Research Approach.....	26
3.2 Research Design.....	27
3.3 Target Population.....	27
3.4 Sample Size.....	27
3.5 Sampling Technique .....	29
3.6 Research Instruments .....	30
3.6.1 Interviews.....	30
3.7 Instrument validity and reliability.....	30
3.8 Data Collection Procedure .....	31
3.9 Data Analysis .....	31
3.10 Ethical Consideration.....	32
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS .....	33
4.0 Overview.....	33
4.1 Main leadership styles attributed by the Headteachers in high-performing and underperforming Schools.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

4.1.1 Instructional Leadership Style .....	33
4.1.2 Democratic Leadership Style.....	36
4.1.3 Situational Leadership Style .....	39
4.1.4 Servant Leadership Style. ....	41
4.2. Contribution of Leadership Practices toward the Academic Disparities between High-performing and Underperforming Public Schools.....	43
4.2.1. Communication of Vision and Strategic Plans .....	43
4.2.1.1 Frequent Meetings .....	48
4.2.1.2. Regular Briefings and Assemblies.....	50
4.2.2 Involvement in Decision-Making .....	51
4.2.4 Instructional Support and Professional Development.....	57
4.2.4.1 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) .....	59
4.2.5 Resource Management.....	60
4.3 Potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public schools.....	65
4.3.1 Handling Disparities in Academic Performance.....	65
4.3.1.1 Remedial Programs.....	66
4.3.1.2 Guidance and Counseling .....	67
4.3.1.3 Extracurricular Programs .....	69
4.3.2 Challenges in Addressing Academic Disparities.....	71
4.3.2.1 Resistance to Change .....	71
4.3.2.2 Nature of the students and over-enrollments. ....	73
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....	77
5.0 Overview.....	77
5.1 Main leadership styles attributed by the Headteachers in high-performing and underperforming Schools.....	77

5.2 Contribution of Leadership practices toward the Academic Disparities between high-performing and underperforming Public Schools.....	77
5.3 Potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public schools.....	82
5.4. Summary of the chapter .....	89
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....	90
6.0 Overview.....	90
6.1 Theoretical and conceptual implications Drawn from the study	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
6.2. Conclusion from key findings.....	90
6.3 Practices Recommendation .....	90
6.4 Recommendation for further studies.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
REFERENCES .....	92
APPENDICES .....	101

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 3.1: Distribution of Respondents Selected from Each School.....	29
Table 3.2: Gender Distribution of Teachers in High-Performing and Underperforming Schools Responded to the Questionnaires.....	29
Table 4.1 A showing teachers' responses about resources provided.....	64
Table 4.2 A table showing the responses from students on whether they face any challenges in accessing books and other study materials.....	65

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:Factors Impact Academic Performance .....	10
Figure 4.1: Showing overall support provided by the school administration.....	37
Figure4.2: Teachers admitted if there were any challenges in addressing academic performance.....	40
Figure 4.3.:Showing teachers' admittance to headteacher involvement as high.....	43
Figure 4.4 :Shows the number of teachers who rated the headteacher's support for the well-being and morale of teachers as high.....	45
Figure 4.5 :Teachers rating headteacher communication effectiveness.....	48
Figure 4.6: Percentage of students' awareness of goals and objectives for academic performance.....	50
Figure4.7:Teachers describing the frequency of meetings with the school head .....	52
Figure 4.8 Students who felt they were involved in decision-making at school .....	57
Figure 4.9: Teachers who highly rated the level of collaboration and teamwork with the headteacher.....	60
Figure 4.10: Shows teachers who admitted to being professionally supported by the headteachers.....	62
Figure 4.11 Showing resource support.....	69
Figure 4.12 : Students receiving additional support.....	72
Figure 4.13: Showing the responses from the teachers concerning the presence of extracurricular programs .....	74
Figure 4.14: Students who rated their learning environment as good or excellent.....	75

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

DEBS	District Education Board Secretary
ESDP	Education Sector Development Program
HIMS	Headteachers in Service Meeting
HODs	Heads of Departments
INSET	In-Service Education and Training
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOGE	Ministry of General Education
NECTA	National Examinations Council of Tanzania
NSGRP	National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty
SBCPD	School-Based Continuing Professional Development
SEDP	Secondary Education Development Plan
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TGM	Teacher Group Meeting
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNZA	University of Zambia
USA	United State of America

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives, and research questions that need to be addressed. It also includes the significance of the study, theoretical and conceptual framework, scope of the study, delimitation, and limitations. The chapter also contains the operational definition of key terms and ends with a summary of the chapter.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

The global focus on achieving educational excellence has sparked debates on the appropriate leadership styles for school administrators, teachers, and board members to implement curricula and deliver high-quality education (Adlam, 2003). In acquiring quality education Ibrahim and Orodho, (2014) further intensified these debates on the leadership styles that should be adopted to implement curriculum to yield high-quality educational output. Hence, effective school leadership is recognised as a key factor in delivering quality education, necessitating its significant impact on school standards to underscore the correlation between poor leadership and underperforming schools.

In both developed and underdeveloped countries, strong leadership skills in education are consistently acknowledged as crucial for achieving successful educational outcomes. In United State of America (USA), educational management is primarily delegated to individual states, and these states have implemented standard-driven approaches to define the desired outcomes for their education systems (Mbobola, 2014). Similarly, research in England by Day et al. (2016) suggests that successful school leaders combine transformational and instructional leadership to enhance job satisfaction by aligning shared educational values with the specific needs of their schools. This, in turn, improves educators 'engagement and effectiveness. Furthermore, research conducted in selected Greek schools by Geraki (2014) concluded that school heads primarily focus on monitoring, facilitating, and supporting teachers and students to achieve academic objectives. This aligns with the findings of Day and Sammons (2016) in North America who found that talented leadership was crucial for the success of schools. Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that

leadership is essential for schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for students and stakeholders.

The persistent gap between high-performing and underperforming public schools necessitates the inquiry into the leadership styles that foster such coexistence. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that existing comparative studies on school leadership provide limited comprehensive insights into the national contexts that shape principal's actions (Mbobola, 2014). To further enrich the ongoing debate surrounding the contextualised adaptation of leadership style, it is imperative to shed more theoretical and empirical light on the subject.

Research conducted in Pakistan by Ahsan-Ur-Rehman et al. (2019) revealed that school heads play a crucial role in the success of schools and students. Successful principals in high-performing and excellent schools utilise various leadership styles, indicating the importance of understanding the diverse approaches employed by effective principals to enhance academic achievement and address existing gaps. Similarly, in Malaysia, despite government initiatives like the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, disparities in academic achievement persist. As a result, the Ministry of Education emphasises the necessity of high-performing principals with instructional leadership skills (Chay Choy Mee, 2020). This underscores the significance of effective leadership styles in reducing the disparities between underperforming and high-performing schools.

Many countries in Africa are paying attention to investing in education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. However, the main challenge of leadership in education leads to students' ongoing poor academic performance (Miller and Yodar, 2002; Grissom et al. 2014). In Botswana, despite efforts from the government such as free education and supports from primary to secondary levels, which is reflected by a significant share of the country's budget, academic performance has been declining since 2010 and this decline has been attributed to the leadership styles employed by the headteachers (Matambo, 2013). In Rwanda, a study by Kabatesi (2016) revealed that despite all the efforts from the Rwandan government, there were still disparities in academic performance in the Gasabo district in 2010, 2011, and 2012, and the problem found was the headteachers' leadership styles. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education in Eritrea plays a central role in managing the educational system and strives to develop it (Mengesha and Tessema, 2019). In 2005, the Ministry of Education implemented a transformation in the curriculum, shifting from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered and interactive pedagogy (Mengesha and

Tessema, 2019). However, despite these changes, the quality of education in Eritrea continues to be largely inadequate. This problem is partially attributed to ineffective school leadership and the presence of unqualified principals (Mengesha and Tessema, 2019).

The government of Tanzania initiated project clusters such as the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP), Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), Tanzania Development Vision 2025, and Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP 2004 and 2010) to bridge the disparities in academic performance in public schools (Ministry of Education, 2023). However, despite these endeavors, low transition rates and disparities in academic performance exist among districts according to the results from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) in 2022. These challenges are primarily attributed to significant challenges, particularly in school management and leadership style implementation. An assertion supported by Musyoka (2018) found that inadequate supervisory skills of headteachers, including the failure to review teachers' notes and provide confidential feedback after lesson observations, were identified as contributing factors to the persistent disparities in academic performance in Kenya.

Education in Zambia is shaped by the Government's Vision 2030, which aims to transform the country into a prosperous, middle-income nation by 2030, and the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) 2022-2026, focusing on improving education for human and social development. Key sector plans include the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2017-2021 and the Early Childhood Education and Skills Sub-Sector Plan (ECESSP) 2021-2025. These plans align with international commitments under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5 (Rigole, Sharma, and Bergmann, 2024).

Improving learning outcomes has been a key focus of the Zambian Ministry of Education (MoE) and is a priority objective within its 2017-2021 Education and Skills Sector Plan (ESSP), which also identifies the need to 'ensure that education policy and practice is based on sound and rigorously developed evidence' (Zambia, MoGE and Ministry of Higher Education [MoHE] 2017). This emphasis on evidence-based policy to be carried forward in the subsequent educational strategies under Vision 2030 and the 8NDP, ensuring that the foundational goals of improving educational quality and access are continually reinforced and aligned with both national aspirations and global commitments to sustainable development.

The Zambian government has made significant investments in national education development, including increasing budgets from 2008 to 2010 and implementing various initiatives such as a homework policy, feeding programs in schools, professional development programs for teachers, Headteachers in Service Meetings (HIMS), and Teacher Group Meetings (TGM) (MoE, 2015). Furthermore, according to Rigole, Sharma, and Bergmann (2024), since the change in government in 2021, national education priorities in Zambia have been refined to include the implementation of the free education policy and an overall increase in investment in education. Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the expansion of opportunities for young people, including skills development, have been identified as priority areas for increased focus and investment. To improve education quality, the government's manifesto includes instituting a curriculum review, hiring 30,000 new teachers, and addressing the teacher deployment imbalance.

However, despite the implementation of these interventions, disparities in academic performance persist. The examination council of Zambia (ECZ), as reported in the National Survey Assessment Report, revealed significant variations in academic performance across most schools (Phiri, 2022). These disparities may be attributed to the lack of managerial skills, which can impact teachers' morale and subsequently affect their performance (Andende, 2016). The role of headteachers in providing leadership and establishing effective relationships with teachers also has a direct influence on the teaching and learning process, ultimately impacting academic performance either positively or negatively. Hence, it becomes crucial to examine important factor: the leadership styles exhibited by the headteachers.

Academic performance ranking of schools is usually done based on the overall school certificate pass regardless of the size and type of the school. However, academic performance can be explained using various parameters which include procedural and declarative knowledge acquired, achievement tests and the general certificate (Hara, 2022). The coexistence of underperforming and high-performing public secondary schools raises important questions about the factors that contribute to this persistent performance gap. Therefore, this study explored the leadership styles and their influence on academic disparities by comparing high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools in the Lusaka District, Zambia. The goal was to assess how these schools differ in academic performance despite receiving similar support from the government.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the Zambian government's continuous efforts to improve the education system, there is an ongoing disparity in academic performance among public secondary schools. Some schools consistently excel academically, while others struggle to achieve satisfactory results, even with equal support and resources, which can be reflected in the variations of academic achievement across. For example, despite having a remarkable 62729 students entering for examinations in Lusaka, 4617 students still did not pass their examinations as can be seen from the 2022 general certificate examinations results (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2023).

Many studies have been done in Zambia about education leadership (Andende, 2016; Chimunza, 2021; and Sompa, 2015). However, few studies were dedicated to exploring the influence of leadership styles on academic performance (Yumba, 2020; Godwin & Kabeta, 2020; Malambo, 2012; Phiri & Chunda, 2022), whereas, in these few studies, there was less focus on the comparative analysis between high-performing and underperforming public schools. Furthermore, these studies did not specifically aim to determine how leadership styles and practices influenced academic performance disparities in these public secondary schools. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the influence of leadership styles on disparities in academic performance by examining both high-performing and underperforming public schools.

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The study aimed to explore leadership styles and their effects on academic disparities in Lusaka District, Zambia.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The specific objectives guided this research study were:

- i. To establish the main leadership styles used by the headteachers in selected high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools.
- ii. To determine the contribution of leadership practices toward the academic disparities between high-performing and underperforming public schools
- iii. To identify potential areas for improvement in leadership practices within underperforming public schools in Lusaka District, Zambia.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The following research questions were guiding this study:

- i. What were the main leadership styles used by the headteachers in high-performing and underperforming selected public secondary schools?
- ii. How do leadership practices influence academic performance disparities between high-performing and underperforming public schools?
- iii. What were the potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public secondary schools?

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The study aimed to contribute valuable insights that could aid in the development of existing secondary education by examining leadership styles and the potential mechanisms resulting to academic disparities. By exploring the relationship between leadership styles and academic performance in high and underperforming public secondary schools, the study sought to add new knowledge to the existing body of research on leadership styles. The findings were expected to provide guidance and inspiration to headteachers in underperforming public secondary schools, encouraging them to adopt and implement effective leadership skills demonstrated by high-performing public secondary schools. Ultimately, the goal was to leverage leadership practices as a means that may enhance the quality and outcomes of addressing academic disparities. Beyond practical contributions, the study holds significant policy implications. Furthermore, the findings could inform policymakers on the need to integrate structured leadership development programs into national education policies, ensuring that headteachers receive mandatory training before assuming leadership roles and continue professional development throughout their careers.

## **1.8 Delimitation of the Study**

The study was limited to 8 public secondary schools, with an equal selection from both high-performing and underperforming secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia. These schools were selected based on statistical data from the Examination Council of Zambia (ECZ), which showed stable academic performance trends over the past three years.

Lusaka province was chosen because it provided target secondary schools with rich-information sample groups. Lusaka was considered a good representative province with rapid socio-economic and technological development. Ngoma and Chirwa (2018) argued that Lusaka had experienced

significant economic growth and development in recent years, driven by increased investment in infrastructure, improved access to education and healthcare, and the growth of the service sector. Given such development, Lusaka province is comprised of many people with different cultures from various parts of Zambia and even other parts of the world. Thus, this province helped the researcher obtain a sample with varying cultures and experiences, resulting in rich and holistic leadership practices, making the study more global. Furthermore, this study focused on assessing the leadership practices exhibited by the headteachers in selected secondary schools under the contingency leadership theory and the theory of academic performance. The target population for the study comprised headteachers, deputy headteachers, teachers, and students.

### **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

Before the commencement of data collection, Lusaka Province experienced a cholera outbreak. This public health crisis resulted in the delay of school openings, and even after schools reopened, strict restrictions were imposed on external visitors. Consequently, the researcher was unable to meet with respondents as planned, leading to delays in data collection. To overcome this challenge, the researcher coordinated closely with school administrators to schedule data collection during permitted times and adhered to all health and safety regulations to gain access to participants. This adaptive strategy helped mitigate delays and ensured that sufficient data was collected for meaningful analysis despite the constraints.

### **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

This study focused on theories that emphasise the importance of the environment and situation in managing organisations. According to Dunklee (2004), leadership in schools is a situational phenomenon shaped by the collective perceptions of individuals, closely tied to established norms, and influenced by the frequency of interactions among school members. Consequently, this study was specifically guided by Fred Fiedler's (1960) contingency theory as the primary framework, supplemented by the theory of academic performance for the dependent variables.

The application of these two theories provided a comprehensive and contextually sensitive approach to understanding the relationship between leadership practices and academic performance. Furthermore, this approach helped address both personal and contextual factors that influence academic performance.

### **1.10.1 Fiedler's Contingency Theory**

This study was guided by Fiedler's contingency theory, which describes leadership as predominantly influenced by the favorability of the situation, indicating the degree to which the situation enables the leader to exert influence. Cheng and Chan (2002) propose that situational factors moderate the relationship between leadership style and organisational outcomes, indicating that predicting outcomes solely based on leadership style is knowing the situational variables.

The inclusion of contingency theory in this study enhanced the understanding of the complexities of leadership practices and their impact on academic performance. Firstly, it recognised that effective leadership is contingent upon specific circumstances and contexts. By selecting schools with diverse contextual characteristics, such as different student populations, resource availability, and community dynamics, the study captured variations in leadership practices and their effects on academic performance across different school contexts.

Secondly, it provided a systematic approach to understanding the interaction between leadership practices and situational factors through rigorous data analysis examining the fit or match between a leader's style and situational favorability. Additionally, contingency theory emphasises the importance of considering multiple factors in assessing leadership effectiveness. This approach encouraged the study to adopt a mixed-methods design, allowing for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The study fully understood leadership styles, situational factors, and their effects on academic performance by combining different research methods, such as questionnaires and interviews.

### **1.10.2 Theory of Academic Performance**

The supportive underpinning theory in this study was the theory of Academic Performance by Don Elger from the University of Idaho in the United States of America. Elger (2007) suggests that performance can be improved through mindset, a productive environment, and self-evaluation.

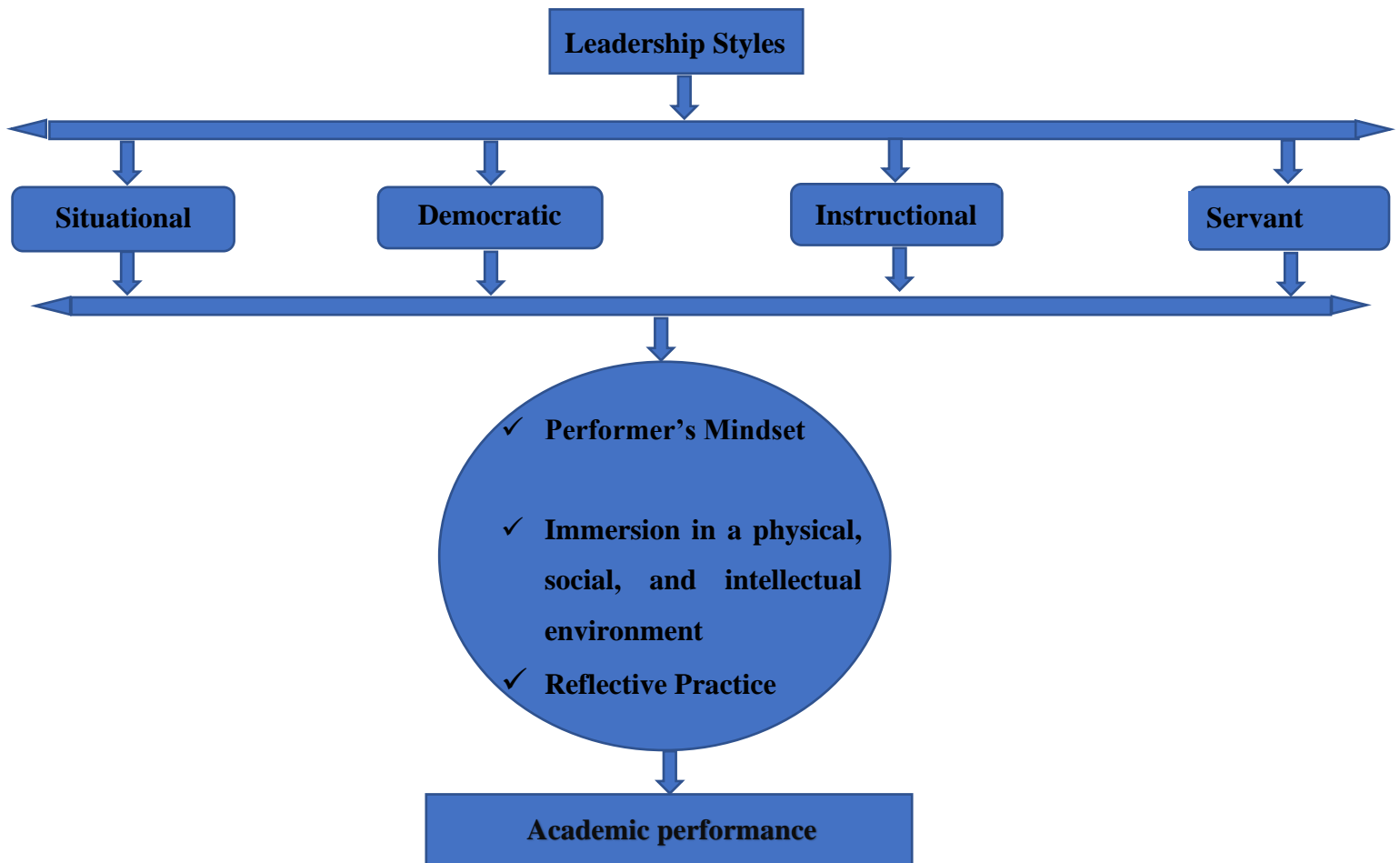
This theory is relevant as it directly addresses the factors that contribute to academic performance. By exploring various leadership practices and their impacts on academic performance, the study investigated how specific leadership approaches influence the mindset that shapes students' and teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and motivation toward learning in both high-performing and underperforming schools. This investigation provided valuable insights into enhancing academic performance. The study not only examined how specific leadership approaches influence mindset

but also assessed how these styles contribute to creating a positive and conducive learning environment in these schools. Additionally, the theory highlights the role of self-evaluation in improving academic performance. By studying different leadership practices, the researcher examined how these practices influenced the self-evaluation process of students and teachers in both high-performing and underperforming schools.

The integration of the theory of Academic Performance and contingency theory provided a comprehensive and contextually sensitive approach to understanding the relationship between leadership practices and academic performance outcomes. The theory of Academic Performance considers factors such as mindset, environment, and reflective practice, while contingency theory emphasises the interaction between a leader's characteristics and situational factors. By combining these theories, the study understood how different leadership styles interact with performance attributes and contextual factors that impact academic performance. This integrated framework bridges the leadership-performance gap by empowering headteachers to align their leadership practices with specific situational factors and address the achievement gap between high-performing and underperforming secondary schools. Furthermore, the integrated approach addressed personal and contextual factors that influence student performance. The theory of Academic Performance highlighted the importance of considering mindset and the physical, social, and intellectual environment, while contingency theory acknowledged the contingency of leadership effectiveness in specific circumstances and contexts.

### **1.11 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework in this study examined the factors that impact academic performance. The independent variables under investigation were the leadership styles exhibited by the headteachers, while the dependent variable was academic performance.



**Figure 1: Factors Impact Academic Performance**

The conceptual framework of this study was designed to bring about order, unity, and a relationship between the input (headteachers) that directly influence a variety of leadership practices that tend to shape the undertaken teaching and learning environment in public schools and the output (gaping academic disparities).

The above figure focuses on the headteachers' leadership styles such as democratic, instructional, situational, and servant that have direct implications on teachers' instructional practices and students' learning experiences. For example, autocratic leadership may hinder collaboration and responsiveness, potentially widening performance gaps, while instructional leadership can foster support structures that aid in addressing individual student needs and narrowing disparities. Situational leadership allows for flexibility in adapting to diverse challenges, potentially mitigating disparities by tailoring interventions. Conversely, servant leadership encourages the welfare of the subordinates prioritizing their needs and development leading conducive learning environment.

Headteachers who prioritise fostering a growth mindset, creating inclusive environments, and promoting reflective teaching practices using their daily leadership practices attributed to their

general leadership styles are more likely to narrow academic performance disparities by empowering both teachers and students to thrive academically.

### **1.12 Operational definitions of key terms**

i. Academic performance disparities: This is the situation of having the gap between high-performing and underperforming secondary in academic performance.

ii. Completion rate: The number of learners who have completed a given grade (in a given year), expressed as a percentage of the total number of learners of official school age for that grade.

iii. Continuous Professional Development (CPD): This refers to ongoing professional development activities for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge.

iv. Leadership practices: Refer to the leaders' methods and behaviors when directing, motivating, and managing others to achieve pre-determined goals.

v. Remedial Programs: These are targeted interventions designed to support students who are struggling academically.

vi. Strategic Plans: These are formalised documents outlining the school's long-term and short-term goals and objectives.

vii. Transition rate: Percentage of students/pupils advancing from one level of schooling to the next level.

### **1.12. Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presented the study's theoretical and contextual background, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, objectives of the study, and research questions. It also discussed the delimitations, limitations, conceptual and theoretical framework, and operational definitions of terms.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter delineates the literature review on leadership styles exhibited by the headteachers and their concomitant influence on the academic performance of students, thereby, engaging with broader constructs about educational leadership and management and functionality thereof within the school settings. The review is predominantly directed toward pertinent studies on a global scale, with particular emphasis on the African milieu, notably the Zambian context investigating the leadership paradigms linked with people, tasks, and academic outcomes. Moreover, the review highlights possible gaps in the existing literature, summarises key findings, and posits recommendations to address these identified gaps, intending to foster practical knowledge useful to society. Lastly, the chapter ends with a summary.

#### 2.2 Leadership Effects on Academic Success

School leadership has always been a venerated issue when it comes to the success of a school, the headteacher can lead either to the downfall or the success of the school. The strong ability to continually lead to the school's mission and vision and succeed in creating exceptional outcomes and outputs has been a matter of investigation (Benjamin, 2014). Strategies and leadership skills influence not only students' academic success but also play a key role in the overall management of a school (Pinto, 2025). Barber, Clark, and Whelan (2010) conducted a study that compared school leadership using a sample of 1,800 principals across high-performing schools in Europe to determine the factors that influence pupils' performance. Using an online survey to solicit participation from respondents, they found out that apart from classroom teaching, nothing was found to influence improvements in school standards more than the quality of headteachers' leadership. It is paramount therefore to give schools strong leadership now that national educational goals have been well articulated (AIDP & GoZ, 2015). Moreover, teacher leadership and professional self-renewal have been reported as critical components to sustaining success academically (Jacobson, 2011).

In Zambia, the Ministry of General Education (MOGE) faces challenges in adapting to the ever-changing educational environment and is committed to enhancing existing systems to measure performance effectively, a key objective for any organisation. The policy document "Educating

Our Future,” enacted in 1996, addresses several critical issues, including the in-service training of teachers. Lorraine (2014), highlights the need for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs in Zambia, identifying several types of In-Service Education and Training (INSET) programs that the country should develop and implement including demand-driven programs. These programs focus on school needs and are based in schools and resource centers, cost-effective programs and give an opportunity of learning to a large number of teachers and programs for learning contents and methodologies together.

Surya and Yunus (2012) investigated principal leadership styles in high academic performance of selected secondary schools in Kelantan Darulnaim in Malaysia and examined the perception of teachers towards the principal leadership styles. The findings from the study showed that teachers had positive perceptions of the principal’s leadership styles. The study also found that the role of the principal is important in determining the high academic performance of students in examinations. The study agrees with the study from Seashore, Karen, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010), and Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) all found that there is a strong positive relationship between headteachers and academic performance. Ultimately, good leadership is essentially motivation. That is to say, in order to be an effective leader is to have the necessary attributes of human motivation in learning and development as this propels a collective will towards a common goal (Ford, et. al., 2020). Studies show that more and more teachers are quitting their jobs because of underperforming school administrators, and some students and teachers are not receiving the best education possible (Burkhauser, 2016). As a result, schools’ performance and academic outcomes are suffering from a lack of effective leadership and qualified teachers. A study conducted by Sompa (2015) revealed the responses from the teachers that communication breakdown, ethical misconduct, and incompetence of the headteachers were causes of the conflicts in schools. This study supported by the study aimed at exploring the role of school leadership in the academic achievement of pupils using a survey strategy by Wallace (2014), found out that in Malawi, 73% of headteachers who were superintendents and had been classroom teachers before, had their pupils achieving better academic grades in public exams than the 27% who were appointed headteachers without passing through the various stages of teaching experience. Even though Wallace’s study reinforces the importance of the headteacher’s instructional experience, the study, however, did not expand on how inexperienced teachers become headteachers in

Malawi. However, it has been demonstrated that teacher leadership significantly predicts self-efficacy and performance which subsequently transcend to student performance (Akman, 2021).

Through the practice of leadership, a person may solicit the assistance and backing of others in achieving a common aim. Nwajiaku, Cheah, and Sakiru (2022) describe leadership as the continuous interplay of supporters, peers, superiors, job setting, and ethos by developing a quality attitude, which can prevent repeating mistakes of earlier leadership studies and the need for a highly organised approach. The adhesion supported by the finding of Masnawati and Darmawan (2022) revealed that the dynamic relationship between educational leadership and teacher performance evaluation influences educational policies and practices in schools. However, some studies suggest that principals' activities are remarkably variable and that specific leadership activities or changes in leadership activities over time, do not predict changes in student performance (May, et. al., 2012). But even so, school principals should view themselves as leaders of social justice, with the responsibility and capability to ensure that all students succeed, regardless of their individual characteristics or backgrounds (Shaked, 2020).

### **2.3 State of Knowledge on Leadership/Performance Linkage.**

Strategic leadership is the ability of the leader to anticipate, prepare, and position for the future; It has also been observed to be the leader's ability to anticipate, create a vision, empower others, and exercise flexibility, to create a strategic and viable future for the organisation. Strategic leaders, formulate the goals and strategies for the organisation. They do this by developing structures and processes that affect the present and future performance of the organisation. They are experienced leaders who are knowledgeable and can create a vision execute plans and make significant decisions in a vibrant environment (Gakenia, Katuse, & Kiriri, 2017). This analysis is supported by their study of schools in Kenya in ways of improving academic performance, though strategic leadership on its own did not have much influence on academic performance without leadership traits and the availability of resources to execute.

A leadership style combined with teacher induction, organisational culture, and teacher motivation can positively influence the academic performance of students. Teachers groomed into the school culture and coached and mentored into the system will be able to create an environment of academic excellence. Headteachers are the ones who can decide what kind of environment they

want to create for their schools and therefore devise strategies that promote academic excellence. (Luke & Osoro, 2019).

The headteacher's leadership styles affect the climate of the school; the attitudes that teachers have toward leadership; the turnover rate of teachers and the academic achievements of students. Therefore, Qiuyan (2022) investigated how transactional leadership and transformational leadership affected student academic achievement. Using the Contingency or situational theory to support the study, he encouraged further studies to be needed to investigate the different principal leadership practices and what differences in leadership philosophies can affect student progress.

Servant leadership, as described by van Dierendonck (2011), focuses on leading through service by empowering and developing others. It emphasises personal characteristics like humility, authenticity, and stewardship while fostering trust and fairness in leader-employee relationships. These dynamics support individual self-actualisation and positive job attitudes, leading to improved organisational performance. Servant leadership also encourages a focus on sustainability and corporate social responsibility, aligning leadership with ethical practices. This approach balances the well-being of employees with long-term organisational goals, making it a sustainable leadership model. The findings relate to the findings of Rashid and Shirima (2024), and Irving and Longbotham, (2007) revealed that servant leaders successfully contributed to creating work environments that foster fulfillment and dedication among teachers by prioritising empathy, active listening, and support for professional development to them. This proved the necessitate of doing the current study investigating the leadership styles and their attributes in how they contributed to varied academic disparities in public secondary schools.

Bugyei and Aidoo (2022) also examined the leadership styles of the headteachers and how these leadership styles influenced teacher motivation in the public basic schools in the Anomabo Education Circuit of the Mfantseman Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. Using the quantitative approach of Cross-sectional survey design, the results revealed that most headteachers in the Anomabo preferred autocratic leadership. This may have been because teachers in that area did not feel motivated enough to do their tasks due to low remunerations. The headteachers did not had. regular in-service training and some were not fully qualified for the job. This study tried to investigate whether this might be the case in schools of interest that do not show improvement in academic performance here in Lusaka. Research by Bugyei investigated the leadership style and

teacher motivation dimension, but the purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of leadership styles on leadership practices that contributes to academic performance disparities.

## **2.4 Leadership Style Vs Academic Performance**

### **2.4.1 Global Perspective**

In a study trying to understand the relationship between the headteacher's demography, his leadership style, and the school's performance, Richard (2022), noticed that the longer the headteacher stayed in the school, the more they resorted to democratic leadership styles, and the better the school performance became. Most headteachers investigated were in their early tenures and resorted to transformational and delegative leadership approach. However, in a multinational study between Germany and China, Chen, Ning, and Bos (2022) wanted to establish which principal leadership style produced better student performance in each country. Their results revealed that instructional and integrated leadership produced high student performance in Germany while both instructional and transformational leadership achieved student performance in China. In conclusion, instructional leadership was the main form of leadership these two countries employed to get results from the students, which is in contrast with other studies that praise democratic leadership. It also shows that leadership is a situational act that needs to be investigated for the improvement of the educational system in our countries.

Howard and Knight (2022) analysed leadership styles to discover which leadership style had the most significant positive and negative impact on student academic performance. This study done in Alabama attempted to reveal if there was a significant difference in student academic performance based on the school leader's leadership style, years of leadership, and gender. The results showed that transformational leadership had a positive effect on academic performance regardless of age or years of experience.

The study conducted in Commonwealth, Virginia by Tina (2010) quantitatively investigated using a correlational design and employed descriptive data analysis techniques to examine whether or not leadership style and school climate are significant predictors of student achievement. The quantitative method was chosen because correlations between leadership style, school climate, and student achievement were identified through statistical analysis. The data revealed that both teacher and principal participants most often viewed their school's dominant leadership style as transformational, and the second as transactional with a 6% variance in scores accounted by

leadership style. Not only the study done outside African contexts but also further investigation needs to be done to examine the potential mechanisms that leadership styles influence school climate and ultimately contribute to positive academic outcomes.

In Pakistan, Farooq, Mahmood and Iqbal (2022) gathered that most headteachers preferred to use democratic leadership styles, so that they may improve the student's academic performance, even though they sometimes resorted to autocratic leadership style. In their qualitative study that intended to gather the opinions of the subjects, they unearthed the need for a mixed approach to leadership. Their study was in support of a study done by Kapela, Kopoka, and Namusonge (2021) who investigated how leadership styles affected all the educational stakeholders and improved academic performance. Their study unearthed that no single style is perfect for all situations but each style has its target group, thereby directly or indirectly affecting academic performance. Democratic leadership style was most effective in the classroom setup where teachers had the freedom to handle teaching material as they saw fit, though bureaucratic leadership affected the acquisition of teaching and learning materials in the public schools under study. Their study concluded that a mixed leadership style fits public schools rather than a monotonous modified laissez-faire leadership style that at most does not hold teachers and other key players accountable for the declining quality of education.

Litz, Juma, and Carroll (2017) examined the perceptions of two principals in the United Arabian Emirates on how they saw their leadership styles. Their findings indicated that the principals were satisfied with their leadership styles because they believed they were helping others, in other words, they were practicing servant leadership. The leadership style practiced by a principal is one fundamental factor that determines the success of any school. A principal with appropriate leadership competencies can positively influence the way teachers undertake their duties which in turn will determine the students' academic performance.

#### **2.4.2 African Perspective**

In a study by Britwum, et al. (2022) which assessed the effectiveness of leadership styles and the achievement of students, it was found that authoritarian and democratic were not significant predictors of students' academic achievement but laissez-faire was the only leadership style that predicted students' academic achievement in the Colleges of Education in Ghana. Using the descriptive cross-sectional survey design and a self-developed leadership questionnaire to collect

data, the study recommended that principals should make use of different combinations of leadership styles to enhance the smooth running of the Colleges of Education in Ghana in further contrast to suggestions of other studies to use democratic means to achieve performance.

In Rategos' study (2015) to investigate the influence of various leadership styles on student performance, using the contingency theory, she established that most principals (89%) had poor communication skills when it came to decision-making, they did not involve other stakeholders. The overall study showed that principals had poor democratic skills like communication, and humility when in error (53%), or failure to listen to advice (45%). Her study gave a proposal that the democratic leadership style had a great influence on students' performance in public secondary schools though a study done by Mbera (2015) recommended that a balance between autocratic and democratic leadership should be maintained and taught in educational colleges because it produces effective academic results.

Obama, et al. (2016) and Oyugi and Gogos' (2019) studied on the effects of principals' leadership styles on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Kenya unearthed that principals use diverse leadership styles from democratic to transactional or from autocratic to laissez-faire. Regardless of this fact, they failed to produce a necessary environment in their schools that can support effective teaching and student performance. Their study stands to prove that there is a need for more investigation into the appropriate leadership styles that can be employed in public schools. The same study done in Ghana by Gyasi, et al. (2016), established that unless headteachers are equipped with the proper knowledge and skills for leadership they would not influence change in the academic performance of their schools. Their study was mixed research that further concluded that colleges should incorporate leadership skills in their curriculum.

In an attempt to propose a standard leadership style for the schools of Nigeria, Yahya (2015) found that most leaders use democratic and transactional types of leadership in their pursuit of student academic achievements. They added that it worked well if it was combined with the principals' academic qualifications and experience in the field of education. Paul and Toyin (2017) later supported this assertion even though the schools perform moderately

A study by Osagie and Momoh (2016) investigated principals' leadership styles in successful secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria. Using the transformational leadership model to

conceptualise the leadership styles of the principals, the study showed that transformational leadership is an important element of school improvement. The study concluded that for most schools to be successful should hence use transformational leadership as the flagship method to develop the teachers and not consider instructional or democratic ways of leadership as exhibited in prior alluded to studies.

In Somalia, Jama (2023) explored which leadership style can lead to students' academic performance and intended to establish the relationship between school heads' leadership styles and students' academic performance. His results established that democratic leadership styles primarily influence students' academic performance, though simultaneously discouraging the laissez-faire leadership style because it produced negative results. His study used only questionnaires, which might have caused some biases as the respondents might answer 'appropriately' to please the researcher. This study was in support of the study done in Tanzania by Msofe, (2017) who insisted that a laissez-faire leadership style was leading in causing low academic performance. Additionally, she added that the autocratic leadership style was less preferred by the headteachers.

A study carried out by Kambambovu (2018) sought to identify major leadership styles employed in running Secondary schools, to evaluate their influence on students' performance. This mixed research study revealed good leadership styles play an important role in improving academic performance such as democratic and autocratic methods of leadership. The study further recommends educational administrators be orientated in democratic leadership styles before they are appointed as school heads.

In the Marakwet Sub- County of Kenya, a study conducted by Chepkonga et al. (2015) aimed to assess the influence of headteachers' democratic leadership style on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. The study revealed that democratic leadership style was believed to have a positive impact on student achievement. However, it is important to note that the study utilised a descriptive research design, which had limitations in terms of gathering comprehensive information. The structured nature of the questionnaires employed in the study constrained respondents to a predetermined set of questions and response options. As a result, their ability to provide nuanced or detailed insights was limited. To address these limitations and bridge the methodological gap, the current study incorporated a more comprehensive approach. In

addition to utilising semi-structured interviews, open-ended and close-ended questionnaires were employed as an additional data collection method.

The study conducted in Kigoma District explored the effects of various leadership styles on students' academic performance, focusing on leadership styles such as democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, transformational, coach-style, and bureaucratic. It identified the impact of these leadership styles on factors like job satisfaction, teacher motivation, and the overall school environment. Additionally, it highlighted leadership challenges such as poor parental involvement, overcrowded classrooms, and financial constraints. However, the study did not provide a comparative analysis of how these leadership styles function differently in high-performing versus underperforming schools. The gap lies in the lack of exploration into how leadership practices contribute to academic disparities between schools with different levels of success. Moreover, the study focuses primarily on the operational aspects of leadership without deeply examining how leadership practices influence strategic decision-making and long-term school improvement.

Makgato and Mudzanani's (2018) study in South Africa analysed how low-performing and high-performing schools are affected by the leadership styles of their principals. Using a qualitative approach, they uncovered that democratic and transformational styles of leadership contributed to the high performance of the learners. The low-performing schools differed from the high-performing schools because they were more permissive toward the behavior of their learners. The study suggested that principals should practice more participatory and democratic styles of leadership and improve their disciplinary measures by involving middle managers. This is in contrast to the study done by Igwe, Ndidiamaka, and Chidi (2017) which proved that the autocratic leadership style has better results than the democratic leadership style. This study was done between public schools and mission schools in Enugu State, Nigeria, enabling the current study to focus on public secondary schools in a comparative manner between high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools.

### **2.4.3** **Zambian Perspective**

In an attempt to appraise the performance of a school to the headteachers' leadership style in Mpika, Chunda (2022) unearthed that headteachers' leadership styles had an effect on learners' academic performance and no single leadership style is effective unless they are combined. The study recommended that headteachers should involve all the stakeholders in decision-making; this

means the headteachers used more autocratic leadership styles or had poor communication skills. This finding is supported by the research of Mwape (2013), who noticed that some headteachers in Zambia used either laissez-faire or directive in daily operations, while most headteachers used the participatory leadership style in problem-solving situations. The study further established that school performance in secondary schools was positively related to democratic leadership which was the style most used in Zambian Schools. He added for teachers to be motivated, democratic leaders consult with subordinates on proposed actions and encourage participation. However, the Zambian school systems are heavily laden with some uniquely African cultural values, beliefs and practices with an adherence to authoritarianism (Matshakaile, 2019). For this is reason it important to evaluate current leadership styles as this may have a trickle-down effect to student performance as earlier alluded to.

Phiri's (2022) study explored the influence of head teachers' leadership styles on pupil academic performance in grant-aided and public schools in Zambia. Using a case study, she established that the headteachers from grant-aided schools exhibited democratic to autocratic leadership styles while headteachers from public schools showed more of an autocratic to laissez-faire type of leadership. Her study recommended that management training be mandatory for all school leaders and that grant-aided and public-school principals should have a moment to share experiences on improving their schools' academic performance. The recommendation supported by Simunza's (2021) finding revealed that training and development were the salient ways to improve the headteachers' administrative roles. Even with such recommendations, there is still need for reviews and studies on school leadership to be conducted and provide a clearer picture of the national landscape will image (Kalabo, O. M. (2017).

The study conducted by Kanchele (2021) attempted to find out the influence of headteachers' leadership styles on learner academic performance in selected secondary schools in the Munyinga district of North Western Province, Zambia. Through interviews and focal discussions, the study revealed that headteachers' leadership styles had an effect on learners' academic performance and no single leadership style is effective unless they are combined. The finding aligns with Mulonga, Meki-kombe, and Kabeta (2024) in their study exploring managing practices and leadership styles of female headteachers in high-performing secondary schools in Kabwe Urban Zambia. The study involved only high-performing schools allowed the current study to thoroughly investigate the

other side of the school category which is underperforming schools and compare it to high-performing schools investigating the leadership practices and their impacts on academic disparities. According to Kabeta, et. al., (2015) instructional leadership from headteachers may have a positive effect on the teaching and learning process and that its inadequacy can impact negatively the teaching and learning process leading to poor pupil performance.

Despite government efforts to boost teacher's performance in schools, secondary schools still face several challenges. The study of Chibomba (2024) aimed to investigate the environmental factors that affect teachers' performance in public secondary schools. A mixed-methods case study design was used, which involved purposive and multi-stage sampling of research participants from four public secondary schools in Lusaka. The study revealed that social-environmental factors that positively affect teacher performance were established as the relationships between teachers, learners, and supervisors in various forms. These forms include; friendliness, the ability of a teacher to command respect, punctuality of teachers, and allowing questions during lessons by teachers. The findings further suggest that explaining to slow learners, the presence of standard leadership styles, good relationships between teachers and their supervisors, and among teachers positively affect teachers' performance. Chibomba's study aimed at checking the environmental factors affecting teachers' performance left for this current study to investigate the causes of these factors if related to leadership styles and their influence on academic disparities.

## **2.5 Contribution of leadership practices on academic performance**

Educational change requires collective effort from the entire school community, with teachers playing a pivotal role. A study by Lucia Lomba-Portela et al. (2022) found that excessive workloads contributed to resistance to change from teachers depending on their ages and experiences. However, the link between this resistance and academic performance remained unclear, warranting further investigation in Zambia to determine its impact on public school performance. Similarly, Kimeu et al. (2015) examined how instructional resources affected student performance in Makueni County, Kenya. This study concluded that the access to quality teaching materials significantly influences academic success. Uchendu, Ekanem, and Jonah (2013) supported this by emphasizing that proper resource maintenance is a factor in achieving better academic outcomes in Nigeria. Oluwatoyin (2014) further stressed the importance of school leaders prioritizing proper maintenance strategies to improve academic buildings, enhancing

overall educational quality. While these studies highlight resource as important, there is still need to explore leadership's role in providing teaching materials, especially within the Zambian context.

Mfangavo (2015) investigated student enrolment and resource availability in community secondary schools, identifying overcrowding and insufficient materials as major challenges. However, the study overlooked the role of leadership in managing these issues. Furthermore, Mulonga, et. al., (2024) analysed high-performing schools in Kabwe District, identifying key management strategies such as teacher discipline, regular evaluations, and consistent meetings. However, the study focused mainly on female headteachers and high-performing schools, highlighting the need for a more inclusive comparative study between high- and underperforming schools. However, according to Ogbu (2018) headteachers can utilise instructional practices to organize seminars and workshops in order to enhance teacher knowledge.

Some leadership practices like delegation of tasks were examined by Ahumuza and Ntiradenkura (2022), who found that assigning responsibilities increases teacher job satisfaction and performance. Similarly, Amos, Siamoo, and Ogoti (2022) emphasised that shared leadership enhances teacher accountability and commitment. However, the study in Tanzania revealed that delegated teachers usually lacked decision-making power, raising the need to explore leadership delegation and its influence on students' academic performances in Zambia.

A comparative study by Maluma Phioer and Banja Madalitso (2019) in Zambia's Southern Province found that high-performing schools normally benefited from proprietor support, strong administrators, and adequate infrastructure, whereas underperforming schools suffered from inconsistent leadership and this resulted in resource shortages. The study signalled the need for further comprehensive research into factors driving academic performance and disparities between high-performing and underperforming schools in Zambia.

The role of instructional leadership in schools was examined by Amei, Sr. Dr. Piliyesi, and Dr. Anyona (2020) in Kenya, who found that principals positively impact student performance through regular teacher observations, mentorship, and in-service training. Similarly, Salfi (2010) highlighted successful leadership practices such as collaboration, distributed leadership, and community involvement in Pakistan but focused solely on high-performing schools. It is important

to investigate how such leadership styles and practices can affect both high- and underperforming schools in Zambia.

Kakupa (2014) explored the effectiveness of rural secondary schools in Zambia's Western Province, identifying strong leadership, positive learning environments, and academic policies as key success factors. However, the study did not compare high- and underperforming schools, nor did it examine how leadership practices influence academic disparities seen in these schools. The current study aims to address such information by exploring the role of leadership in mitigating academic disparities across different public-school contexts. By analysing leadership behaviours, resource management, teacher motivation, and student support structures, it will provide a comprehensive understanding of how leadership styles shape educational outcomes in Zambia's public schools.

## **2.6 Research Gaps**

Numerous studies [Richard, (2022); Howard, and Knight, (2022); Chen, Ning, and Bos, (2022); Farooq, Mahamoud, and Iqbal, (2022); Kapela, Kopoka, and Namusange, (2021); Litz, Juma, and Carroll, (2017); Paul and Toyin, (2017); Osagie and Momoh, (2016), Robinson, (2010)] have successfully established a link between leadership styles and academic performance. However, these studies were done outside the African continent, whereby the educational contexts of those countries might be quite different from the educational contexts of African countries, more specifically the Zambian context, thus the current study is imperative.

In the African context, several studies [Rategos, (2015); Britwum, (2022); Obama, (2016); Oyugi and Gogos, (2019); Gyasi, (2016); Yahya, (2015); Jama, (2023); Kambambovu, (2018); Msoffe, (2017); Chepkonga, Ogoti, Jepkoech, and Momanyi, (2015)] have examined the relationship between headteachers' leadership styles and academic performance. However, these studies have not specifically explored the connection between leadership styles and academic disparities, particularly in comparative studies. Despite the research conducted by Igwe, Ndidiyama, and Chidi (2017) and Makgato and Mudzanani (2018), which compared private schools and public schools in Enugu, Nigeria, as well as low-performing and high-performing public schools in South Africa, there was still a need to investigate academic disparities within the educational context of Zambia, specifically.

Meanwhile, there have been limited studies that specifically link leadership styles with academic performance in the Zambian educational context. Some of these studies have focused on comparing private schools against public schools (Phiri, 2022), while others have examined leadership styles and academic performance in a general sense [Yumba, (2022); Kanchele, (2021); Muyunda, (2022); Chunda, (2022)]. Consequently, there exists a scarcity of information regarding academic disparities among public schools when considering the influence of headteachers' leadership practices. Specifically, there is a need to compare the performance of high-performing and low-performing public schools, as these schools receive equal support from the government

Furthermore, despite the studies that have examined the influence of leadership styles on teacher motivation teacher performance, and student engagement [Chafwa, (2012); Mumba, (2022); Mwape, 2013)], there remains a significant gap in research exploring the potential mechanisms through which the leadership practices influence academic disparities through school climate, teacher motivation, and student engagement. This research gap highlighted the need for further investigation into the intricate connections between those factors and leadership practice, relating to academic outcomes, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to academic disparities. Additionally, there was a need for more investigation that considers the role of leadership practice in conjunction with other factors, such as school resources, teacher quality, and student characteristics.

## **2.6. Summary of the Chapter**

This study reviewed relevant literature aligned with its set objectives. It explored the concept of leadership in fostering academic success and examined the relationship between leadership and academic performance. The review provided insights into the global, African, and Zambian contexts, highlighting the impact of leadership on academic outcomes. Additionally, the chapter identified research gaps, underscoring the distinctions between prior studies and the current research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methodology used to explore leadership practices and their impacts on academic performance by comparing high-performing and underperforming secondary schools. The researcher illuminated the research approach, research design, population, sample size, sampling procedures, research instruments, and data collection procedures employed to obtain the pertinent data needed to answer the research questions. Lastly, the chapter presents the trustworthiness of data, data analysis, ethical considerations, and summary of the chapter.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study was guided by a mixed-method approach. This approach was useful in this study as it helped in combining both qualitative and quantitative data sets to produce more meaningful insights than either method could achieve independently. By integrating diverse data sources and multiple approaches to examine the phenomenon, the approach aimed to corroborate or validate findings through convergence or agreement between sources (Creswell, 2014). Since this approach promotes triangulation by comparing and contrasting findings from different methods to enhance the study's validity and reliability (Creswell, 2014), the researcher was able to reduce the bias, provide a more robust interpretation, and strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

The qualitative method involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, it attempts to make sense of or interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008). Therefore, qualitative methods were appropriate for this investigation as they produced detailed data from a small group of participants while exploring feelings, impressions, and judgments (Best and Kahn, 1989). On the other hand, the researcher utilised quantitative methods to gather statistical data, which enabled the researcher to capture measurable variables and perform statistical analyses, by revising and tabulating the data numerically, allowing for characterisation through statistical analysis (Martyn, 2008), to identify patterns and relationships, enhancing the overall robustness and generalisability of the findings.

### 3.3 Research Design

According to Ugwuanyi (2022) and Pandey and Pandey (2015), a research design provides a layout for conducting the research in which data collection methods and data analysis are identified. It performs as the roadmap by specifying ways through which pertinent data to answer the research questions would be collected and analysed. Therefore, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach. This allowed participants to express their perspectives on leadership styles and their influence on academic performance disparities in both high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools. Information such as enrollment, number of extracurricular and remedial programs, challenges faced, and involvement in decision-making and resource management were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The integration of these two types of data provided a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon under study, allowing for more informed conclusions and recommendations.

### 3.4 Target Population

The target population is the actual and large group of elements to whom the researcher would like to generalise the findings of the study (Ary et al, 2010); Fraenkel et al., 2012). This is an ‘ideal choice’ of the researcher (Fraenkel et al., 2012), though it is not always easily attainable during the research study. The study focused on critical education stakeholders in the Lusaka district familiar with the rich information about leadership practices and their impacts on academic disparities. The study deployed its target population from 8 public secondary schools, dividing the number equally between high-performing and underperforming schools following the 2022/23 school calendar examination results (MOE, 2022). Therefore, in this study headteachers, deputy headteachers, teachers, and students, from high-performing and underperforming schools selected were targeted.

### 3.5 Sample Size

The total number of respondents who participated in this study was 296. This was arrived at using the following formula;

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times Pq}{d^2}$$

Where;

$n$  = expected sample size

$Z$  = 1.96 using 95% Confidence level

$P$  = assumed 26.1% presence of the targeted public secondary schools

$q$  =  $1 - P$  or  $100 - P$  for decimal or percentage is respectively

$d$  = 5% margin of error

This included 8 headteachers and 8 deputy headteachers from the selected public secondary schools. Additionally, 200 students and 80 teachers from the same public secondary schools were selected for participation. Each school selected, provided an equal number of participants in each category of the respondents.

**Table 3.1: Distribution of Respondents Selected from Each School**

School Name	Types of the School	Headteachers Selected	Deputy Headteachers Selected	Teachers Selected	Students Selected
A	High Performing	1	1	10	25
B	High Performing	1	1	10	25
C	High Performing	1	1	10	25
D	High Performing	1	1	10	25
E	Underperforming	1	1	10	25
F	Underperforming	1	1	10	25
G	Underperforming	1	1	10	25
H	Underperforming	1	1	10	25

**Table 3.2: Gender Distribution of Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers in High-Performing and Underperforming Schools**

School Name	Performance Category	Male Headteachers	Female Headteachers	Male Deputy Headteachers	Female Deputy Headteachers
A	High Performing	-	1	1	-
B	High Performing	1	-	-	1
C	High Performing	-	1	-	1
D	High Performing	1	-	-	1
E	Underperforming	-	1	-	1
F	Underperforming	-	1	-	1
G	Underperforming	-	1	-	1
H	Underperforming	1	-	-	1

### 3.6 Sampling Technique

A combination of purposive sampling and simple random sampling was used to select the public secondary schools. Public secondary schools with consistently high and low academic performance over three years in the Lusaka district were identified and chosen purposefully by the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) before providing those 10 schools selected to the researcher. Subsequently, 8 secondary schools were randomly chosen to access the target populations. Purposive sampling was used to select headteachers and deputy headteachers from the chosen public secondary schools, while teachers and students were randomly selected to participate in the study.

Due to the ongoing nature of the lesson, the researcher waited for the teachers in the staff room. Teachers were randomly selected as they finished their classes and arrived in the office. In contrast, teachers from other schools were found in the office and were chosen by skipping one teacher before selecting another. On the other hand, students were systemic randomly selected from the target population to maintain the study's fairness and impartiality. Students who were found in the class at that time by the researcher were provided with the two letters, A and B, and allowed to pick any. Then students who picked letter A were allowed to participate in the study.

### **3.7 Research Instruments**

The research instruments employed in this study for data collection were interviews and semi-structured questionnaires.

#### **3.7.1 Interviews**

Interviews are believed to be quite helpful in qualitative research on account of the level of interaction that they allow between the researcher and the interviewee. Hence, Interview guides were specifically employed for knowledgeable informants, headteachers, and deputy headteachers, to gather first-hand detailed information directly from them, facilitating a comparison of reactions among participants. The interviews served as the primary source of qualitative data. The interview guide was constructed based on the set objectives of the study including both open-ended and closed-ended questions. This technique aimed to generate in-depth information, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue (Meeks, 2005). The researcher scheduled physical meetings with these rich informants in their offices on an appointed day. Permission was obtained to record the conversations. Furthermore, the consent form was provided to them to ensure the confidentiality of their responses.

#### **3.6.2 Semi-structured Questionnaires**

Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to both teachers and students. Student questionnaires were collected during class time, as students filled them out since the researcher was granted permission to use one class period for this purpose. For teachers, questionnaires were distributed to each selected teacher, and the researcher collected from them privately and individually based on prearranged appointments. This instrument provided no bias, saved time, and ensured uniformity in question formulation, resulting in greater comparability in the process. According to Amin (2005), the questionnaire's disadvantage is a low return rate. To deal with this problem for those teachers who failed to fill it at school, the researcher trained research assistants who were responsible, for amongst other responsibilities reminding the teachers to fill out the questionnaires and to return them in the required timeframe.

### **3.8 Instrument validity and reliability**

Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. In other words, validity is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data accurately represent the phenomena under study (Flick, 2006). Therefore, validity has to do with how accurately the

data obtained in the study represents the variables of the study. On the other hand, reliability is a measure of the degree to which an instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

Johnson and Turner (2003) described triangulation as the practice of collecting data from multiple sources in an investigation to deepen understanding. To enhance the validity of the instruments being used, the researcher employed triangulation. Different methods of data collection were ensured to be employed due to the adoption of triangulation. Therefore, interviews and semi-structured questionnaires employed, were able to complement each other, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the data. This was ensured through observing the consistency of responses from the respondents.

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher submitted the permission letter from the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) to the headteachers. Subsequently, the headteachers signed the letter and then met with the researcher and his assistant researcher. They were introduced to senior teachers who acted as facilitators to the responsible teachers in charge of classes during the data collection periods followed by the researcher interacted with the teachers without the influence of the senior teachers or any other administrator. The researcher spent a maximum of five days in each school.

The qualitative and quantitative data were collected consecutively from the field; qualitative data were collected from the headteachers and deputy headteachers through interviews, meanwhile, quantitative data were obtained from the teachers and students through semi-structured questionnaires.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

The data obtained by the qualitative method of data collection were coded by a thematic approach, then categorised, tabulated, and arranged under themes and subthemes based on the research questions demonstrated by the researcher before starting to collect the data. A description of each theme is analysed and interpreted critically and objectively to ensure the data's uniformity, accuracy, and completeness, considering its validity and reliability. Additionally, quantitative data were entered, cleaned, and validated in Microsoft Office Excel 2016. The descriptive statistics were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 (SPSS Inc., Chicago IL). The Chi-square test

was used to find any association between parameters. All statistics were assumed significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

### **3.11 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical clearance for this study was sought from the University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (UNZA HSSREC) (Appendix F). Permission to conduct this study was further obtained from the Ministry of Education through the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS). Additionally, the researcher sought approval from the headteachers before conducting the study within the school premises.

One of the important considerations in conducting a research study is to ensure the study meets the requirements for ethical investigation. This involves keeping the confidentiality of the respondents. Therefore, in this study, adequate procedures were provided and used by the researcher to safeguard the interests of the participants and their institutions to assure the participants that their responses would be kept confidential and that no one known to them would have access to the information and no one could link the data to their names. This was observed in the reporting of the study's findings in which letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H were used to refer to the selected schools allowing the researcher to give the title to refer to the specific respondents of the certain study area.

Furthermore, the researcher explained the purpose of this study to all participants to promote voluntary participation and informed consent. For headteachers and deputy headteachers after this explanation, they were given a consent form to fill out while for teachers and students, the consent form was included in the questionnaire provided and the participants were supposed to read it before filling out the questionnaire, aimed to ensure a clear understanding and reassurance that their contributions were solely for academic purposes. Participants were also informed of their option to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable. Utmost respect for their responses, as well as confidentiality and anonymity, was ensured.

### **3.11. Summary of the chapter**

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study, detailing the mixed-methods approach and research design. It provides an overview of the target population and discusses the sampling methods, sample size, and techniques used. Additionally, it addresses the

research instruments, along with their validity and reliability, and describes the data collection procedures. The chapter also covers the data analysis methods and ethical considerations. Overall, it serves as a comprehensive guide for data generation in the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4.0 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Overview**

This chapter presents the study's findings on leadership practices and their impacts on academic disparities by comparing 8 public schools i.e. high-performing and underperforming public schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. The investigation of the phenomenon under study was conducted by interviewing headteachers and deputy headteachers through semi-structured interviews together with the data from the teachers and students through semi-structured questionnaires. The themes identified from the data include leadership styles, different leadership practices i.e communication of vision and strategic plans, involvement in decision-making, instructional support and professional development, and resource management, and the challenges encountered by the heads of schools in gaping academic disparities, with specific sub-themes that answered the following research questions that guided this study:

- a) What are the main leadership styles used by the headteachers in high-performing and underperforming selected public secondary schools?
- b) How do leadership practices influence academic performance disparities between high-performing and underperforming public schools?
- c) What are the potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public secondary schools?

There are different types of leadership styles practiced by headteachers in public schools. This chapter divides the cases to examine the styles present in high-performing schools and compare them to the leadership practices observed in underperforming schools.

#### **4.2 Leadership Approaches**

##### **4.2.1 Instructional Leadership Style**

School leaders have a high level of responsibility to students and teachers, and require them to be supportive, motivating, and knowledgeable. The headteachers in high-performing schools

frequently employ an instructional leadership style directly in guiding and supporting the teaching process to ensure the school achieves its educational objectives. They support teachers in their practice by facilitating professional development opportunities including coaching and mentoring, to ensure that best practices are utilised effectively. When asked why she prefers an instructional leadership style, the headteacher B commented;

*“It is very important because I believe there is no human being who is perfect even as a leader I may have shortcomings. Because of this, I tried to develop my people as much as I can in different areas like professionalism, and creating a good learning environment so that everyone is happy including students.”*

When asked how the headteacher supports him in his role as a deputy, the deputy headteacher B responded;

*“Since she stayed for so long as deputy, she is helping and supporting me by providing feedback and guidelines and collaboration in decision-making. She always tells me, she sees more of the deputy than the head even if she is there as the head, I must be able to see her as deputy more than as the head”*

He added;

*“She shows me a lot of the areas.”*

Additionally, they provide an orientation program like in school B, for the new academic calendar and sometimes for the new teachers about school responsibility in general. They rely on creating an atmosphere of openness and trust in conversation to improve teachers’ teaching practices. They believe this approach has significant importance in contributing to the success of students’ academic performance. This has been notable in how the headteacher effectively communicates the goals and plans to the teachers and students, as commented by teacher 1B;

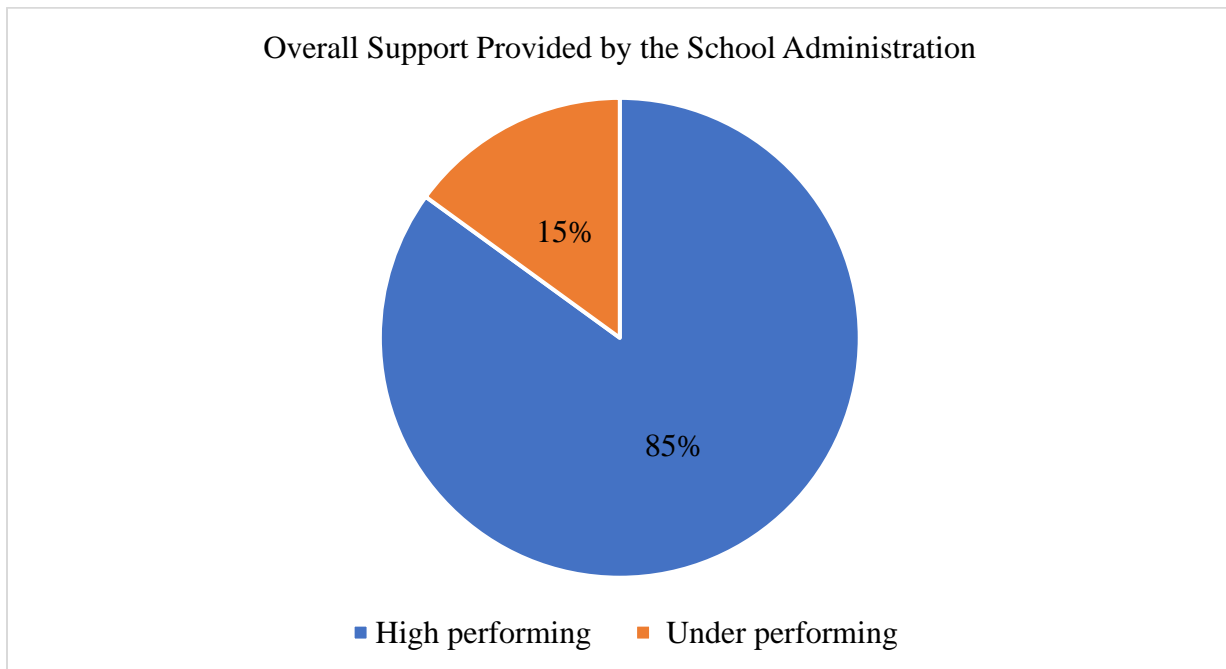
*“There are orientation sessions, and she is incorporating the visions and goals into the curriculum for better understanding.”*

In contrast, the headteachers in both schools, headteacher E and headteacher H, exercise strict supervision by focusing on rigorous supervision and inspections. Besides, observing frequent inspections of ongoing lessons, the headteachers insist that teachers submit their lesson plans.

Additionally, the headteachers emphasised the supervision of ongoing lessons unannounced to ensure compliance. When asked about how she monitors the effectiveness of the teaching methods, the headteacher H replied;

*“I visit classes without notifying the teachers or students, about if the methods are effective, I would say some are not that effective because in most classes I find students sleeping.”*

The study found that lacking enough time for instructional tasks, headteachers in these schools feel uncomfortable and reluctant to have difficult conversations about how teachers can improve their teaching practices. Headteachers believe teacher autonomy is one of the drawbacks in providing instructional support since teachers always believe their practice or way of doing is the best way. Generally, the study found that in high-performing schools, the administration rendered support services to teachers in managing workload (Figure 4.1). This was seen less in underperforming schools failing to eradicate the academic disparities. This study shows a statistically significant association between administration support and academic performance ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.47$ , 95% CI: 6.1-19.1).



**Figure 4.1. Showing overall support provided by the school administration**

#### 4.2.2 Democratic Leadership Style

Democratic leadership style was among the leadership styles discovered during the study. Headteachers believe in the capabilities and skills of the teachers. In high-performing schools, teachers are intensely involved in many organisation activities. When asked about why he prefers democratic mostly to the other styles of leadership, the headteacher A responded;

*“The world is evolving and you can look at Zambia at some point was a British colony that was more of authoritarian leadership but now we have more of the influence of America and so if you go by these other leadership styles aaah there is usually resistance because you have to make to understand rather than using force. It is an understanding that makes people comply. Democratic leadership ensures that before you do something there is consensus in understanding this direction.”*

Deputy headteachers in these schools were found to adopt similar approaches in their day-to-day duties. For example, the deputy headteacher B collaborates with the other teachers to inspect the ongoing learning process. He commented,

*“With me, I don’t prefer observing teachers alone. Let’s say I am a mathematics teacher and I am going to observe a teacher of English; I will be biased. I would rather go with one language teacher. My concentration will be observing the learners and that one will be observing the teachers, contents, and if there is a plan for the lesson.”*

Similarly, the influence of democratic leadership style extends beyond classroom observation. For instance, the deputy headteachers A and D include teachers and students in the decision-making process. The headteachers underlined that this approach minimises opposition and ensures actual engagement from everyone reaching an open consensus among team members. When asked about challenges in addressing academic disparities, headteacher A commented that:

*“Leadership style has a part; if a leadership style is poor, there is usually resistance. People may pretend to do work while they are not working.”*

He added that:

*“It usually finds that, if the leadership style is wrong, the leader works alone; others pull down, but they pull down in a style you may not know. The Democratic is the best one as*

*it ensures everybody is motivated and there is no pretending, as you know if people are not happy, they will voice up.”*

Headteacher D also stated;

*“It’s not just about managing tasks but about bringing everyone together to think creatively. When teachers collaborate, they combine their strengths and insights, leading to more effective and innovative solutions to the challenges we face. This way, we not only solve problems but also improve the overall learning experience for our students.”*

He further explained;

*“By working together, we find new ways to tackle issues that might have seemed impossible individually. The collective creativity that comes from collaboration is what drives our school forward.”*

Besides the fact that headteachers E and H exclude students from the decision-making process, there is limited staff involvement in decision-making. Policies are communicated top-down, creating a hierarchical structure discouraging open communication and collaboration. Teachers observed resisting new initiatives imposed hindering the implementation of new strategies. Teachers not only resist changes but also restrain creativity and innovation, as they feel their ideas are not valued or considered.

Regarding the approach to school management strategy, headteacher H noted;

*“Well, our mission is for the learners to feel safe in the learning environment. Previously we’ve had cases where our students wouldn’t feel safe on the school premises, but we are getting closer to our goal since we started becoming strict with rules and punishment.”*

However, teacher H1 commented on this issue, saying,

*“The headteacher uses strict guidelines and penalties.”*

Another teacher (teacher H2) added,

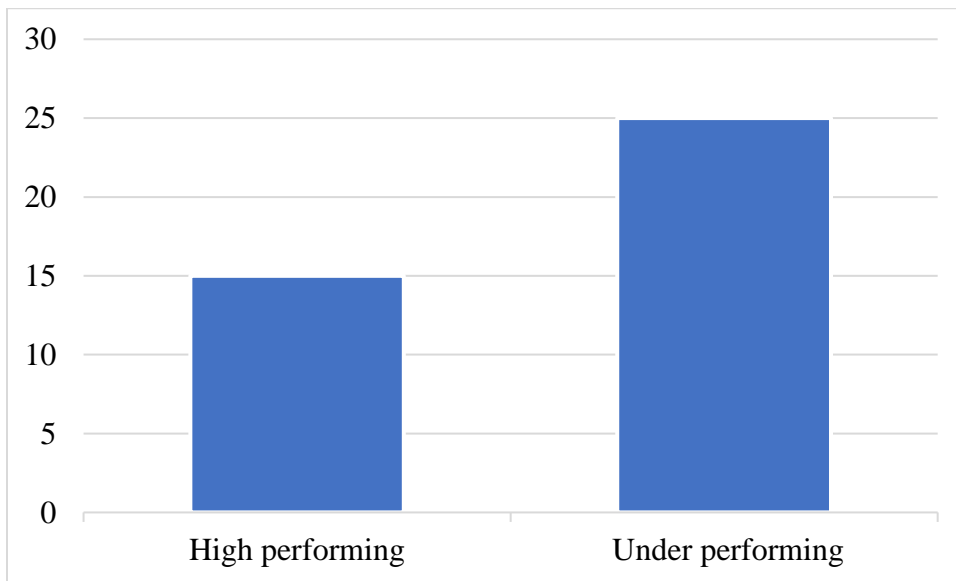
*“The problem is that the headteacher wants to do everything on her own, and she doesn’t believe in teachers’ opinions. Even if you come up with better ideas, she is always crushing*

*and commanding to follow what the Ministry of Education insists. So sometimes you feel no need to stress yourself just do the way she wants.”*

He continued,

*“Teaching is an art. We are supposed to be trusted whichever ways and methods we want to use unless they are against the teachers’ guidelines rather than sticking with the old methods.”*

According to the results of this study, more teachers in underperforming schools admitted to having conflicts/challenges in addressing academic disparities as compared to teachers in high-performing schools (Figure 4.2). This study reveals that there is a statistically significant association between having challenges in addressing academic disparities and the academic performance of the school ( $p < 0.003$ ) ( $X^2:0.01$ , 95% CI: 5.2-17.4).



**Figure 4.2. Teachers admitted if there were any challenges in addressing academic performance**

### 4.2.3 Situational Leadership Style

It was observed from this study that leadership is impacted by environmental changes both within and outside the school. For example, recently the deputies of schools B and C have been promoted and relocated to the new sampled school.

Both headteachers in high-performing schools emphasised the necessity of situational leadership, adapting their leadership practices to the context and needs of the moment. Headteachers in these schools believe any leader must be able to implement different approach since some approach may not work for a given situation. Headteacher A gave his opinion about this approach, he responded,

*“Depending on the situation sometimes you may need to use authoritarian because you may see the work requires some authority so if you are biased on one style of leadership in some situations you may find yourself stuck.”*

This resonated with the view of headteacher C who believes in motivating and maintaining the morale of the teachers whenever she decides to implement any new ideas. She alluded,

*“When introducing a new initiative, especially one that may disrupt normal routines, it is important to approach with enthusiasm and confidence. I make it necessary to highlight the benefits and long-term positive impacts, and I personally engage with my staff, making them understand the importance of the changes, and showing them that I believe in the change we are about to undertake. By doing so, I can foster a sense of shared vision and commitment, which is essential for the smooth adoption of any new policy or practice.”*

This view was supported and appreciated by the teachers, as reflected in the response from teacher C1 when asked about the unique qualities of the headteacher, she described:

*“Very flexible, adapting to the environment, and using dialogue for mutual understanding.”*

In contrast, the headteacher F maintains a rigid and authoritarian leadership style, showing little adaptation to changing needs or contexts, as the voice raised by one of its teachers says,

*“The headteacher relies on fear and authority to motivate staff to align with the school’s vision and goals.”*

Supported by teacher F1 who added,

*“The headteacher uses an authority approach as she imposes decisions on the staff.”*

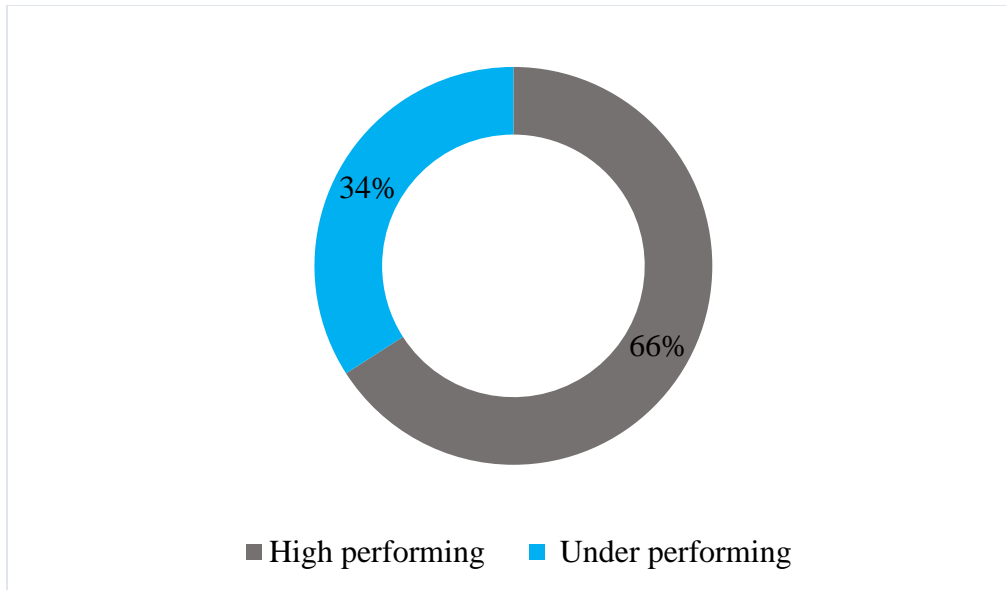
The headteacher isn't open-handed and transparent intimidating the teachers, which results in teachers stopping to bring bad news or any news for fear of getting blamed for it, and the morale of the teachers is deprived. Teacher F2 commented on this issue saying

*“The problem is the headteacher wants to do everything on her own; she doesn't believe in teachers' opinions. Even if you come up with better ideas, she always crushes and commands you to follow what the Ministry insists. Sometimes you feel no need to stress yourself.”*

Another teacher (teacher F2) supported this statement, and suggested the best way to bridge academic disparities, saying;

*“Good teaching needs creativity and flexibility. We should be free to use different methods to meet our students' needs, as long as we follow the basic rules of education.”*

Additionally, in high-performing schools, headteachers involvement in the academic performance of students was rated high as compared to that in underperforming schools (Figure 4.3). This involvement was significantly associated with academic performance ( $p < 0.002$ ) ( $X^2:1.37$ , 95% CI: 2.1-16.8). This involvement contributes to better management of academic disparities by ensuring that students receive the support they need to succeed, while in underperforming schools, a lack of such involvement may contribute to widening the gap between high- and low-achieving students.



**Figure 4.3. Showing teachers' admittance to headteacher involvement as high**

#### **4.2.4 Servant Leadership Style**

The study observed that not only are teachers excluded in decision-making, but there is negligence of their welfare in most schools. However, there were exceptions. For example, despite being instructional the headteacher D prefers servant leadership as he commented;

*“You see, with the servant leadership style, it’s all about putting others first and listening to what they need. The leader is there to support and uplift everyone, not just to boss people around. It’s about helping people grow and succeed, so they feel valued and motivated. This way, the whole team works together more smoothly, and everyone feels they’re playing a crucial role in the success of the group.”*

The headteacher B necessitates the needs of the teachers and students, ensuring their well-being, and fostering a supportive and caring school environment. This has been reflected in the teachers’ comments when asked about the unique practices of the headteacher. One of the teachers (teacher B2) responded,

*“The good relationships and caring for the welfare of the subordinates”.*

Another teacher (teacher B3) supported this by adding that:

*“Knowing and understanding the welfare of the teachers.”*

Additionally, the study found that in high-performing schools, both headteachers and deputy headteachers are empowering and developing their teachers by demonstrating humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship. Unlike, underperforming schools, school leaders in high-performing acknowledge mistakes leading to openness to feedback. For example, the deputy headteacher C described the way she addressed teachers' mistakes that may lead to challenges or conflicts in addressing it; she said,

*“Teachers make their argument but there are no challenges or conflicts only they fall into the way of reasoning, I engage them and share different opinions and drawbacks through questions and discussions and they conclude this is the best way to do it.”*

She also added,

*“Even for the case of the lesson plan, I look at it, and based on that I ask teachers concerning the lesson plan can someone be able to teach when they are absent? What do you think you should do to improve your lesson?”*

In contrast, there is a noticeable absence of servant leadership elements in underperforming schools. When asked about how she managed the school, headteacher E responded;

*“Hmm, that’s a tricky question, but I would say I am more of a transformational leader since I want to transform the school and groom tomorrow’s leaders.”*

The focus remains on compliance and performance metrics rather than the holistic welfare of teachers and students. The teachers in these schools believe the headteacher is demanding the output of the teachers and neglecting their welfare and the situation. Teacher G2 says,

*“Needs to balance between the welfare of the students and teachers matters”*

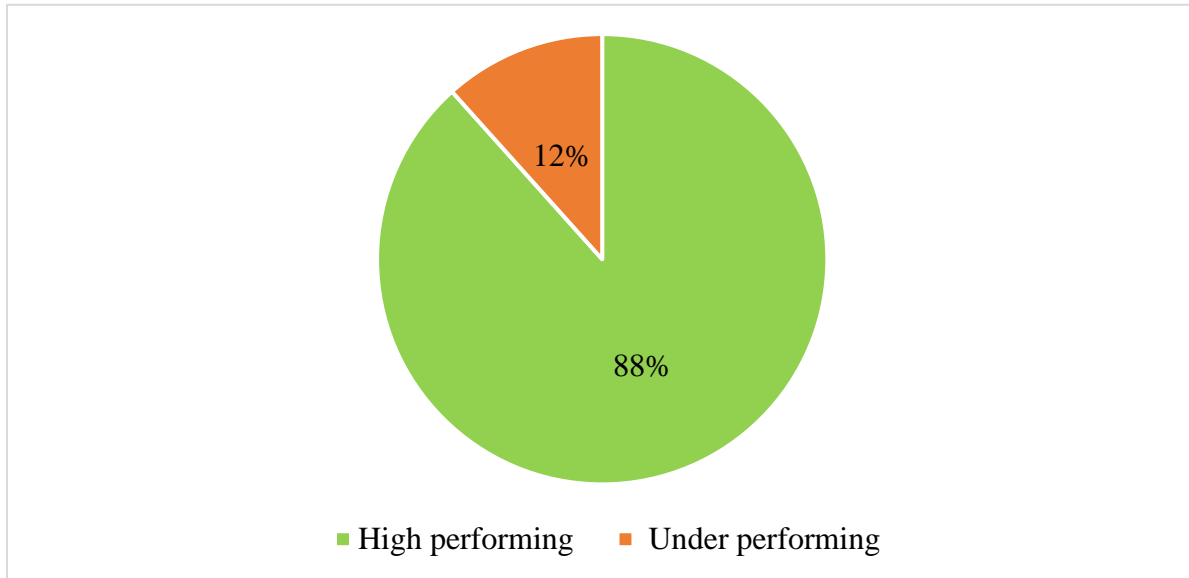
The response was emphasised by teacher G3 who believed the headteacher doesn't pay much attention to students than to teachers. He says,

*“He is focusing too much on teachers' mistakes and shortcomings and leaving behind the welfare of the students.”*

Teacher H1 stated,

*“I think the headteacher here faces many problems about the teachers than academics.”*

The study established that the well-being and morale of teachers were seen to be supported more by the headteachers in high-performing schools compared to underperforming schools where this support was less (Figure 4.4). This study revealed that there was a signification between support of students' well-being and overall school performance ( $p < 0.001$ ).



**Figure 4.4 Shows the number of teachers who rated the headteacher's support for the well-being and morale of teachers as high.**

Further on, according to the responses of the students who participated in this study, in high-performing Schools, 40 students indicated that they are always feeling motivated to learn, 16 often, 30 sometimes, while 14 of respondents indicated that they are rarely motivated. On the contrary, in Underperforming Schools, 23 of students indicated that they are motivated, 10 often, 42 sometimes, and 25 rarely motivated to learn at school. This study revealed that there was a signification between support of students' well-being and overall motivation to learn at school ( $p < 0.011$ ).

### **4.3 Contribution of Leadership practices toward the Academic Disparities between High-performing and Underperforming Public Schools**

#### **4.3.1 Communication of Vision and Strategic Plans**

One teacher from school F (teacher F1) stated when asked about the way the headteacher communicates the goals and strategic plans to teachers, he says,

*“The headteacher’s communication about the school’s goals and plans is not always timely, leading to delays in implementation and confusion among the staff.”*

Teacher H2 supports this sentiment, saying;

*“There is a lack of opportunities for two-way communication between the staff and the headteacher, which hinders our ability to provide feedback and suggestions.”*

When asked about the challenges in addressing gaping academic disparities in school E, teachers believe the way school leaders communicate the vision and goals, hinders the efforts in eradicating the performance gaps. One teacher highlighted the challenge of resolving, academic gaps, stating that,

*“The headteacher’s communication about the school’s goals and plans is often unclear and inconsistent, making it difficult for us to understand what is expected of us.”*

Teacher H3 added,

*“The headteacher relies on fear and authority to motivate staff to align with the school’s vision and goals.”*

In contrast, school A addresses these challenges through smooth effective communication as explained by the deputy headteacher A, she elaborated;

*“You have to talk to a person calmly to make them understand with the world revolving now, there is a need to update the teaching methods. If you keep the old method, sometimes you lose the children.”*

Furthermore, teachers in school G are seeking further improvement in communication that can avoid misunderstandings between teachers and the administration. One of the teachers believes that teachers are also problematic. She commented;

*“Seems there is no clear understanding between teachers and the administration. Teachers also complain about everything.”*

Meanwhile, the study found a noticeable smooth flow of information in high-performing schools from the administrative office to teachers and students (Figure 4.5). When asked about how she ensures an effective communication network, the headteacher of school B responded that;

*“First of all, I don’t rely on myself to do that. The deputy and I make sure information is reaching the people using different methods like staff meetings monthly and briefings depending on the nature of the information and whether it is urgent or not. The deputy also supervises department meetings and this I encourage to be done weekly but you know sometimes teachers are busy or have problems it can go 2 weeks or monthly, and on some occasions, those meetings are held by the HODs.”*

Teachers in high-performing schools are satisfied with the way the school leaders feed the information to them. One teacher (teacher A3) in school A commented,

*“The headteacher communicates the school’s vision by making sure that all members of staff have the vision in their teaching files which acts as a reminder of the school vision.”*

The deputy headteacher in this school also responded by stating the frequency of discussions with the headteacher regarding MOE agendas and directives, revealing,

*“Yes...all the time. I am fully engaged and updated in every decision that is made.”*

A similar response was noted from the deputy headteacher C who said;

*“She ensures that all staff are actively involved in the decision-making process and that the school’s strategic plans are communicated clearly during regular meetings.”*

In addressing the issue of how she provides feedback to the teachers, the deputy headteacher noted;

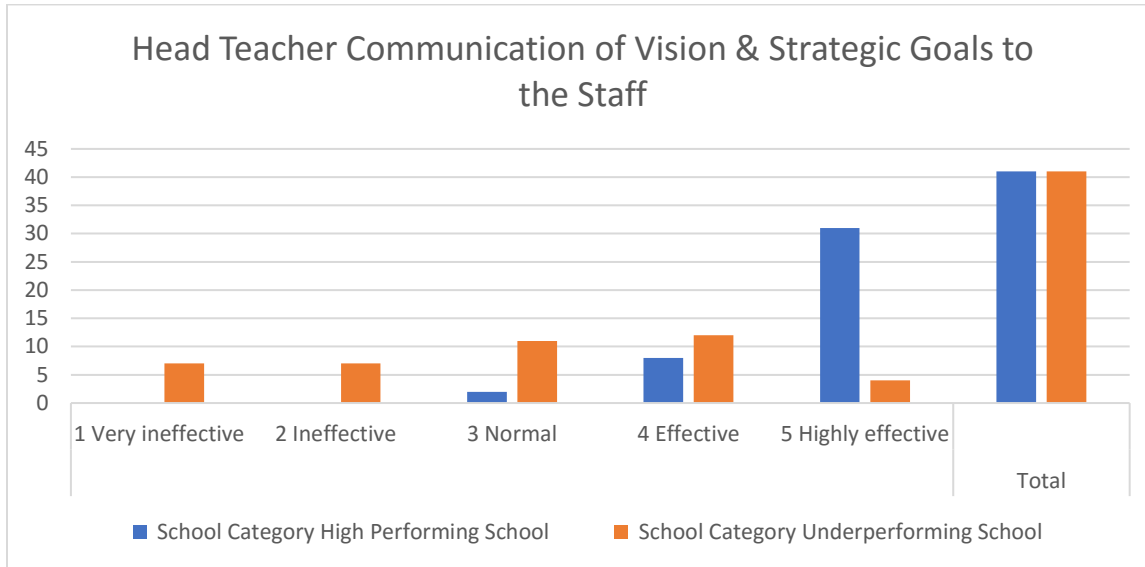
*“Of course, even just in the corridor, we discuss with the teacher to be able to see if what he/she doing is making sense to the learners. I don’t even take long in one class. I am very mobile. I can just for the lesson for 5 minutes and be able to tell. This teacher is just offloading or this teacher is giving learners time.”*

The headteachers in high-performing schools attributed to facilitating two-way means of communication prioritising teachers in getting rich information from them. This was reflected in the response of teacher D2 alluding;

*“Our headteacher is very open to communication, he involves us in decisions and clearly explains the school’s vision and strategies in staff meetings.”*

When asked about how he resolves disagreements or conflicts in decision-making, the deputy headteacher of school B responded;

*“We usually talk about it the two of us in a calm manner. We exhaust everything in one sitting.”*



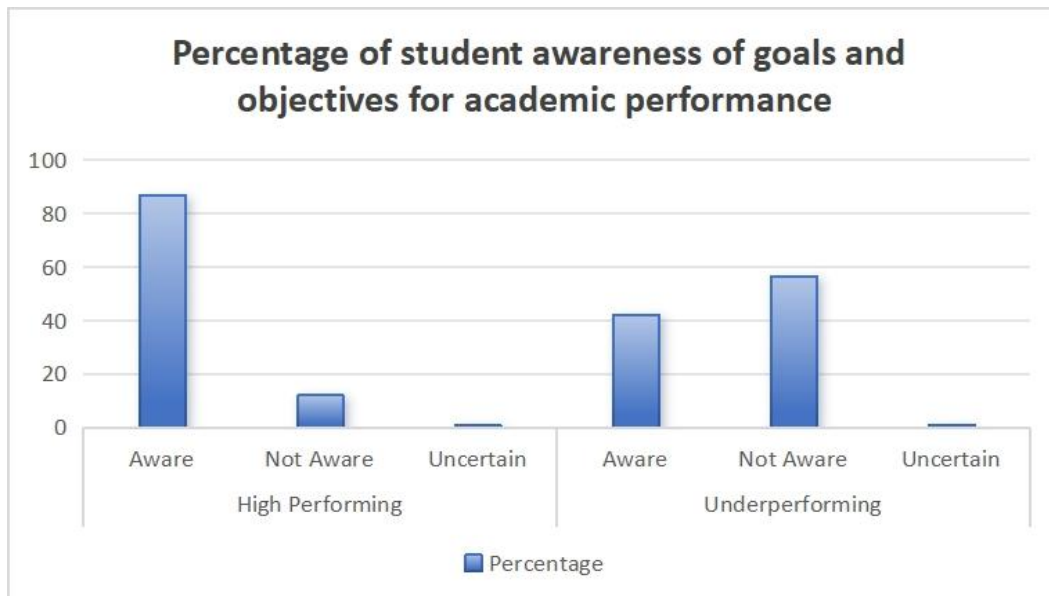
**Figure 4.5 Teachers Rating Headteacher Communication Effectiveness**

A clear disparity emerged in teacher perceptions of headteacher communication efficacy between high-performing and underperforming schools. High-performing schools exhibited significantly higher rates of teacher satisfaction with leadership communication regarding school vision and strategic goals. The data reveals a significant contrast in teacher perceptions of headteacher communication effectiveness between high-performing and underperforming schools. In high-performing schools, a substantial majority of teachers (75.6%) rate the communication of vision and strategic goals as ‘Highly Effective’, with no teachers deeming it ‘Ineffective’ or ‘Very Ineffective’. Conversely, in underperforming schools, only 9.8% of teachers view the communication as ‘Highly Effective’, while a notable 34.2% of teachers consider it either ‘Ineffective’ or ‘Very Ineffective’. The responses in underperforming schools are more varied, with a significant portion (26.8%) rating the communication as ‘Normal’, indicating a less consistent and less favorable perception of leadership communication in these schools. High-performing schools predominantly employed staff meetings as a highly effective method for communicating the school's vision and goals. Additionally, orientations and workshops were

commonly utilised to reinforce these messages. Conversely, underperforming schools relied heavily on staff meetings, brief meetings, and memos, which were perceived as less effective communication channels (Figure 4.5).

There was a significant association between effective communication by leadership and academic performance with a  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.26$ , 95% CI: 6.3-54.2). More teachers from high-performing schools knew about the school’s vision and strategic plans than those from underperforming schools. Teachers from high-performing schools viewed head teacher communication of the vision and strategic plans to be more effective than teachers from underperforming schools ( $p = 0.035$ ).

Further on, according to the responses of the students who participated in this study, in high-performing Schools, 87% of respondents indicated that they are aware of the school’s goals and objectives that have been set for academic performance, while 12% of respondents indicated that they are not aware. Only 1% of respondents were uncertain. On the contrary, in Underperforming Schools, 42.3% of respondents indicated that they are aware of the school’s goals and objectives, whereas 56.7% of respondents indicated that they are not aware. Similar to High Performing Schools, 1% of respondents were uncertain (Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6: Percentage of student awareness of goals and objectives for academic performance**

This indicates a significant disparity in the awareness of school goals and objectives between high-performing and Underperforming Schools. In High-performing Schools, the majority of respondents are aware of the academic goals, while in Underperforming Schools, there is a considerable lack of awareness. According to the student's responses, there was a statistically significant association between students being knowledgeable of the goals and objectives of the school and its performance ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.49$ , 95% CI: 5.1-18.5).

#### **4.3.2 Frequent Meetings**

The study found that school leaders in both high-performing and underperforming schools conduct meetings but only differ in how often the meetings are undertaken (Figure 4.7). The headteachers in high-performing schools conduct frequent meetings to ensure that the school's vision and strategic plans are successfully communicated to teachers. This approach signifies that all members of the school community especially students are aligned with the school's aim and objectives, as explained by teacher A3, she says,

*“It is very rare that a week or a month passes without staff meetings. He used the meetings to explain his agendas and sometimes to remind our responsibilities.”*

Another teacher from school B (teacher B2) shared a similar statement stating;

*“The regular meetings allow us to stay focused on our goals and provide feedback, which helps in aligning our efforts with the school's strategic plans.”*

This differs from school E, where communication is top-down and uncommon. Meetings are held solely to handle present challenges, lacking a strategic emphasis. Nevertheless, on certain occasions, there is a delay in conducting the meetings and the efficiency as teacher E1 stated,

*“The headteacher rarely communicates the school's Vision and goals to the staff, we always stack with the confusion and lose direction.”*

The approach to communication by the headteacher in school H was seen as problematic, as she sometimes resorts to publicly accusing the teachers without any clear reason. Instead of fostering a supportive and motivating environment for teachers, the headteacher undermines the teachers' authority and morale, leading to a negative atmosphere that can further hinder academic

performance. This was noted from the teacher's comment about the means of communication provided by the headteacher. She said;

*“The headteacher sometimes might come to school instead of motivating and assisting teachers, but he may start accusing teachers in front of students for no reason.”*

The study found that the headteachers in high-performing schools managed to conduct the staff meetings every week regardless of the challenges encountered in a week or otherwise. This was noted from the response by one of the teachers in school D. One teacher (teacher D3) commented;

*“Having staff meetings every Monday and reminding teachers of their job purpose.”*

Another teacher B3 remarked;

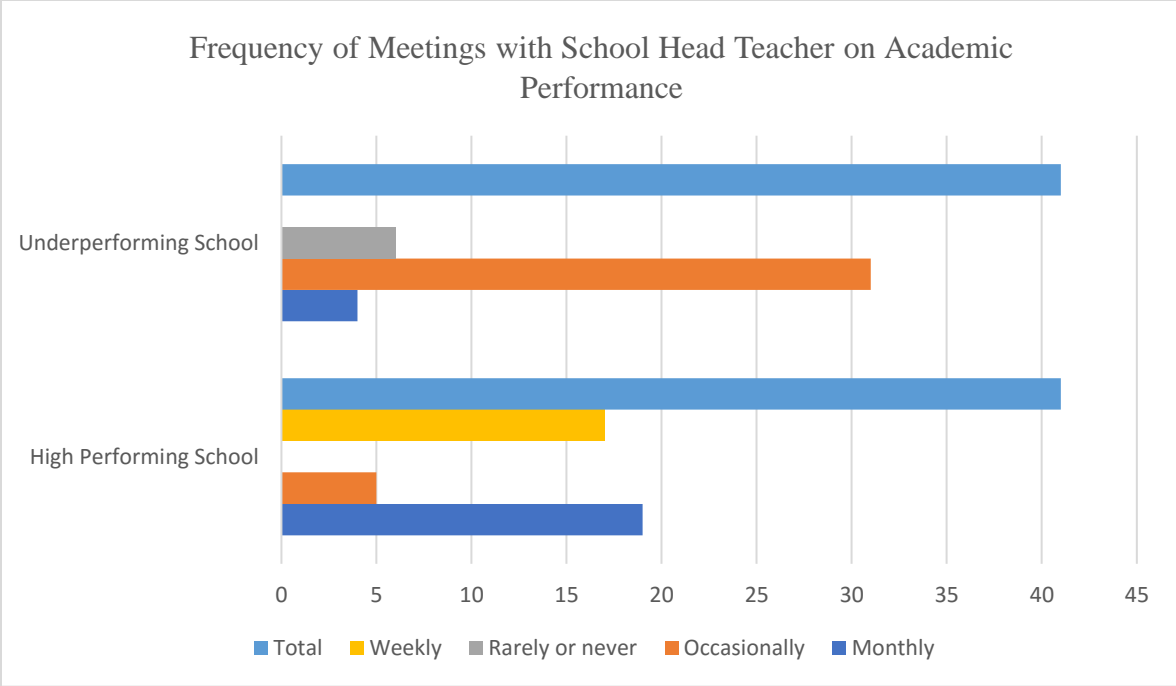
*“We have staff meetings weekly to ensure that everyone is updated and focusing on the school’s objectives.”*

However, teachers in school H noted seeking further communication improvement saying that;

*“The headteacher communicates the school's vision and goals through occasional staff meetings and emails, but I feel there is a need for more concrete actions to support these goals”.*

Teacher H4 pointed out;

*“Emails and memos are not enough; we need more direct engagement and follow-up to ensure we are all working towards the same objectives.”*



**Figure 4.7 Teachers describing the frequency of meetings with the school head**

The table above illustrates the frequency of meetings with the school head about academic performance in different school categories. In high-performing schools, 19 respondents had monthly meetings, 5 had occasional meetings, and none reported 'rarely or never' or weekly meetings. In underperforming schools, 4 respondents met monthly, 31 occasionally, 6 'rarely or never,' and 6 weeklies. This highlights a significant disparity in meeting frequency between high and underperforming schools

**4.3.3 Regular Briefings and Assemblies**

It is found in this study that high-performing schools believe in different ways of conducting meetings not relying solely on staff general meetings. The deputy headteachers in high-performing schools usually conduct regular briefings through short meetings with teachers or class by class, bringing togetherness. They also explain in assemblies, whenever the matter needs more attention. For example, the deputy headteachers at schools B and D utilise daily assemblies and regular staff briefings to communicate goals and strategic plans. This continuous communication reinforces the school’s mission and ensures everyone is on the same page. This has been seen from the teachers who confirmed that there are different meetings done by the school heads.

One teacher from School B (teacher B4) highlighted the effectiveness of this approach:

*“Several staff meetings, Department meetings, and sometimes one-to-one meetings. Which helps keep everyone informed and on track.”*

A teacher from School D (teacher D3) echoed this sentiment, stating:

*“The regular briefings and assemblies are crucial for maintaining a consistent understanding of our goals and expectations.”*

In contrast, deputy headteachers in schools F, G, and H reported that due to time constraints, they failed to hold frequent meetings, and briefings, and provide feedback on time, and instead relied on occasional meetings to provide general feedback. The headteacher F recorded saying;

*“We try to observe lessons and give feedback. But with time constraints and varying degrees of staff cooperation, it’s not always thorough. Some teachers are more open to feedback, which affects how well our strategies work overall.”*

Based on the high number of students leading to less teachers-student ratio, school leaders believe that they are too much supposed to deal with the administrative tasks in the office leaving less time in direct contact with the teachers and students. This sporadic approach leads to less consistent communication and alignment with the school's strategic objectives compared to the practices at schools B and D.

Teacher G4 expressed frustration with this approach:

*“We rarely have time for proper meetings, and when we do, it's usually to address immediate issues rather than long-term goals.”*

Another teacher from School E (teacher E4) added:

*“The lack of regular briefings makes it hard to stay connected with the school’s vision and what we need to achieve.”*

This sporadic communication in underperforming schools’ contrasts sharply with the more structured and frequent interactions in high-performing schools.

#### **4.3.4 Involvement in Decision-Making**

There are apparent differences between high-performing and underperforming schools in how the school leaders involve and consider them in any decision undertaken at school. In high-performing

schools, there is clear inclusion of the teachers and students in discussing the opinions, feedback, and structural formulation of plans whereas the heads in underperforming schools, teachers' and students' opinions are often massively neglected (Figure 4.8).

The headteacher C emphasised this alignment by ensuring the necessity of involving all stakeholders, including teachers and students in the input of strategic plans, as highlighted by one of its teachers asked about how teachers are involved in the decision-making, he said,

*“Through proper involvement in decisions and strategic plans and clear stating all the plans through meetings.”*

Similarly, headteacher A strongly involves his deputy in all decision-making ensuring a collaborative approach. She reported when asked about the involvement of the head, she said;

*“Whenever the head comes back from the heads' meetings we sit down as a school and discuss how are we going to implement the agendas. We agree together and move on.”*

Furthermore, school E's decision-making is centralised with minimal involvement of the teachers or students leading to a lack of engagement and commitment to the decisions made, as noted by teacher E3,

*“We have Staff meetings but they are dominated by the school head's opinions, we don't have enough room for collaborative discussion or feedback”*

Another teacher (teacher E5) commented;

*“The school head does involve me in decision-making processes, but I feel there could be more transparency and collaboration.”*

The same response was noted by other teachers in schools G added;

*“Communication from the head is often one-sided, with little room for the input of discussion from staff”*

Also, teachers in school G noted suggesting the best ways in resource management based on the inclusion of the teachers in decision making. They commented;

*“Before budgeting, there should be engagement of subject teachers.”*

Another teacher (teacher G5) added;

*“Teachers must be listened to since they are the ones who know the demand of the resources rather than the school head.”*

The statement was supported by the teacher in school H (teacher H2) who said;

*“Teachers not involved in the decisions concerning the welfare of the students, especially academic performance.”*

It was further found that the deputy headteachers A and D strongly involve students in the decision-making process through planning and student council meetings. The deputy headteachers believed the student council is too effective to include the opinions of the students rather than rely only upon the class teachers compared to school C which occasionally involves student councils as emphasised was put to use class teachers collecting the opinions from the students. The deputy headteacher in school A, says;

*“Student council, in particular, allows us to hear directly from the students, ensuring their voices are fundamental to our school’s development.”*

The sentiment was supported by the deputy headteacher D, who said,

*“The student council meetings provide a platform for students to express their ideas and concerns, which we might miss if we only consulted teachers or class teachers.”*

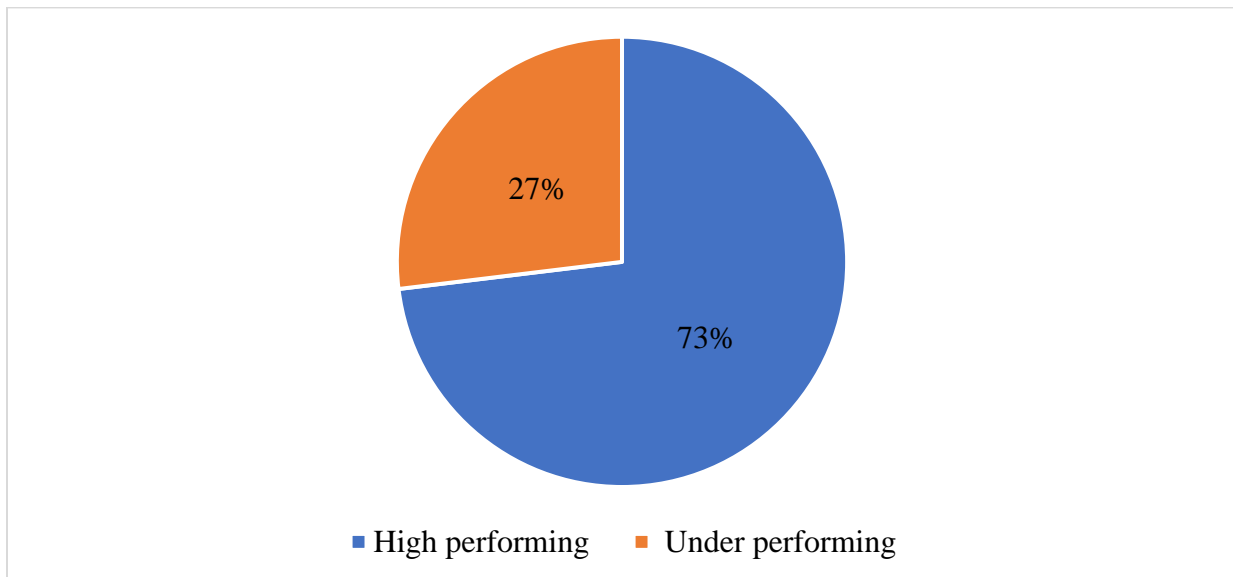
Meanwhile, the headteacher B when asked about how she seeks the opinions of the students, she commented that;

*“I can declare it is hard to be involved but we are trying our best. For instance, we use student government whenever necessary but assurance is from the class teachers. Each class teacher has to come up with their opinions because there are specific meetings between class teachers and the dean of students here.”*

In high-performing schools, most teachers (73.6%) reported that the school head involves them in decision-making processes. This suggests that teachers in these schools feel more engaged and invested in the school’s success. However, in underperforming schools, a vast majority of teachers (93.1%) said that the school head does not involve them in decision-making. This lack of

involvement could contribute to disengagement among teachers, which may impact student achievement. This study reveals that teacher involvement in decision-making was higher in high-performing schools than in underperforming ones. Additionally, there was a significant association between the participation of teachers in decision-making and academic performance ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:1.07$ , 95% CI: 4.7-33.6).

Furthermore, the study found that more students in high-performing schools indicated that they felt involved in decision-making in their schools than students from underperforming schools. This study reveals that there is a significant association between students' involvement in decision-making and the performance of the school ( $p < 0.001$ ).



**Figure 4.8.** *Students who felt they were involved in decision-making at school*

#### **4.3.5 Delegation of Tasks**

The headteacher A frequently delegates tasks, empowering staff and promoting a collaborative environment. When asked about why other school leaders don't entertain the delegation of tasks, the deputy headteacher A commented;

*“Sometimes leaders feel that delegation reduces their authority. If the delegated tasks are completed efficiently, the importance of the leaders in the work setting would decrease.”*

She further added,

*“Some leaders still believe, it takes too long to explain the task. Utilising the time taken to explain the task can rather be used to complete it themselves.”*

The deputy headteacher C commented on the best way to delegate the responsibilities, as she commented;

*“Based on teachers’ strengths and interests we match their expertise and professional development goals. This happened previously we allocated some teachers to supervise some extracurricular activities but at the end of the none did anything. So, interest is also important in doing so.”*

Conversely, the deputy headteachers B and D involves subject teachers in supervising and monitoring the other teachers’ teaching methods through class observation. Similarly, at schools A and C, apart from the department, some teachers are assigned specific tasks such as supervising clubs. The deputy headteacher believes that school administrators can develop their teachers’ leadership skills by purposefully sharing ownership of the work.

It was further found that some head teachers are reluctant to delegate. The headteachers get stuck with tasks, that are way below their abilities, and more important tasks are left behind. For instance, the headteacher H, connoted teachers are not willing to be assigned the tasks resulting in delays in the accomplishment of the tasks.

Additionally, the headteachers E and F, believe that lack of enough time, a smaller number of teachers, and teachers’ skills, hinder the school from empowering most of the duties to the teachers. The deputy headteacher F responded to the question asked about how she handles delegation of duties, she replied;

*“We try to delegate tasks, but with the high teacher-student ratio and teachers being so busy, it’s challenging. Many tasks end up incomplete because there’s just not enough time or manpower.”*

The statement was echoed with the reply from headteacher G, who commented;

*“We do try to delegate duties among staff, but the teacher-student ratio is quite high. This makes it challenging to provide individual attention or conduct remedial classes. We don’t have enough facilities or classrooms, especially with the need for afternoon classes. So,*

*incorporating these services effectively becomes difficult. It's something we wish we could improve, but the constraints make it a tough situation."*

On the other hand, teachers complain that their school leaders do not entrust them with different duties and responsibilities reflecting when the teachers suggest ways to improve the efficiency in learning resource provision, one teacher in school H (teacher H1) added;

*"There should be a delegation of duties administration cannot do everything on its own."*

Supported by the other teacher in school E (teacher E1), he alluded that,

*"The responsibility should be left to the head of the department, not the headteachers."*

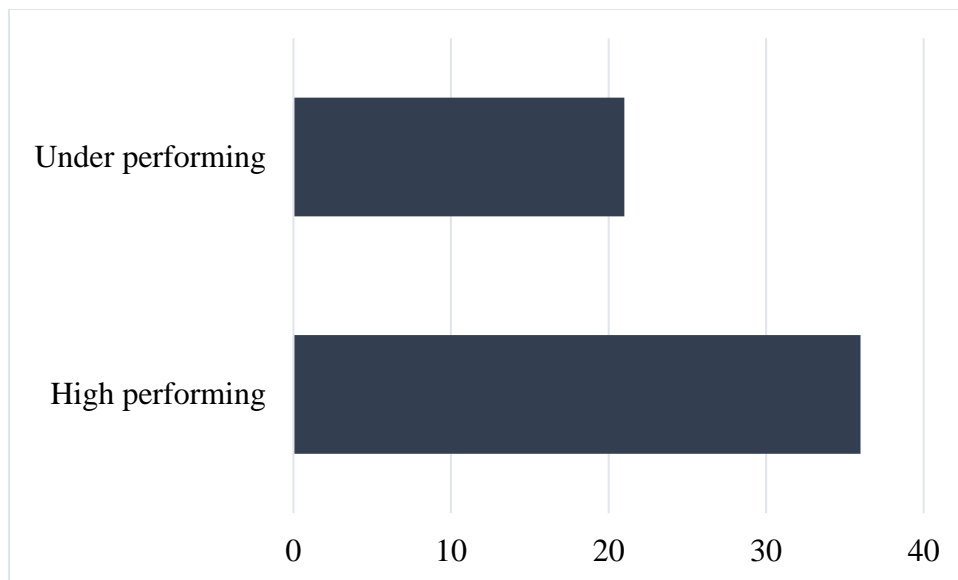
The researcher found that teachers in underperforming schools seek improvement in the delegation of tasks for improvement in resource management. This was reflected in the comment from the teachers in school G commented;

*"Budget should be prepared by the department, not the academic office."*

Another teacher (teacher G2) added;

*"In our school, the headteacher takes on everything themselves, leaving us with little responsibility. It's frustrating because we feel disconnected from the school's progress."*

The collaboration with head teachers in high-performing schools was rated highly by teachers than in underperforming schools (Figure 4.9). This study reveals a significant association between collaboration between headteachers and teachers, and academic performance ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.34$ , 95% CI: 5.7-49.8).



**Figure 4.9 Teachers who highly rated the level of collaboration and teamwork with the headteacher**

#### **4.3.6 Instructional Support and Professional Development**

This study’s findings indicated that headteachers in high-performing schools rely on giving rights to teachers to innovate unique teaching methods to enable exciting learning processes. Teacher A commented,

*“Our leaders encourage us to use innovative and effective teaching practices to engage students and enhance outcomes.”*

Another teacher (teacher A4) added,

*“They encourage innovative teaching practices.”*

Similarly to teachers in school D commented;

*“The school leadership supports us in adopting innovative approaches to boost student achievement and participation.”*

This was supported by another teacher (teacher A6) stated;

*“We’re encouraged to implement creative strategies in the classroom, which makes learning more engaging for our students.”*

When asked about strategies for bridging the gap between high-performing and struggling students, one teacher in a high-performing school C, teacher C5, responded,

*“To remove the gap between students with low and high academic performance, I use differentiated instruction and provide targeted support to struggling students.”*

Another teacher (teacher C6) added,

*“To encourage students to take an active role in their education, I use a variety of teaching methods, including group work, discussions, and hands-on activities.”*

Additionally, another teacher in school A, teacher A8, mentioned,

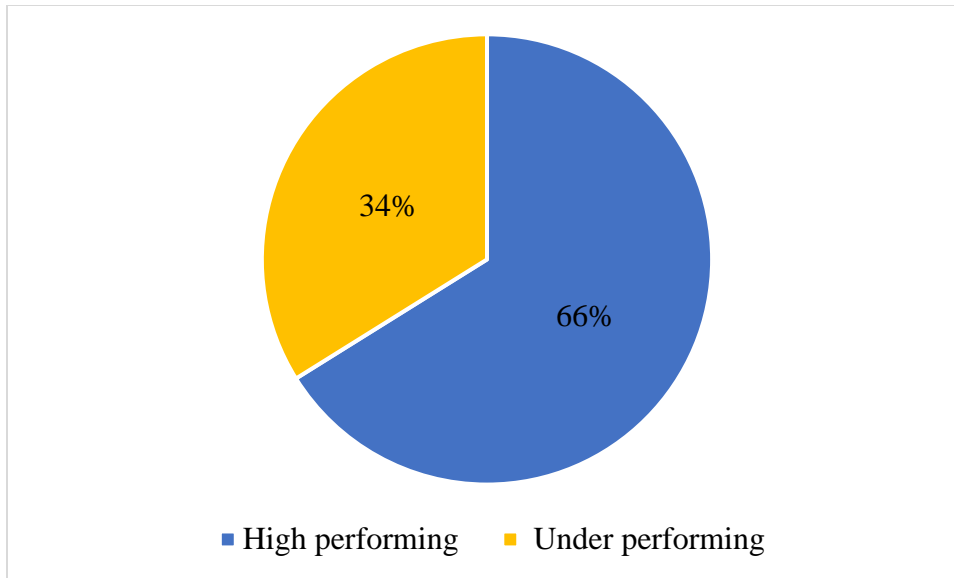
*“Peer teaching helps students teach each other, building a sense of confidence and motivation.”*

This sentiment was echoed by teacher B3 from another high-performing school B, who commented,

*“We influence and use other students to motivate their peers through teaching each other”.*

In contrast, there is a lack of systematic approach to providing instructional support to the teachers in underperforming schools. Unlike the structured CPD meetings and seminars organised by the headteachers in high-performing schools, underperforming schools fail to offer professional development opportunities consistently. There is formality and straightforwardness in the teaching methods demanded by the school leaders due to fearing failure, leaving behind no room for new methods innovated by teachers.

In high-performing schools, there was frequent support for the professional development of the teachers (Figure 4.10). However, this growth support was occasional or not seen in underperforming schools, with a significant association between growth support of the teachers and academic performance ( $p < 0.002$ ) ( $X^2:0.17$ , 95% CI: 4.3-26.1)..



**Figure 4.10.** Shows teachers who admitted to being professionally supported by the headteacher

#### 4.3.7 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Despite both schools, high-performing and underperforming, employing CPD programs, there are differences in managing and implementing the program resulting in varying levels of efficiency among schools. High-performing schools have the CPD every week in the timetable. The challenges and weaknesses encountered during the class observation, and teaching files are solved through CPD programs. Schools B and D for instance, do their CPD program weekly as each department has a different day for it. This was noted by the deputy headteacher B when asked if there is ongoing professional development. She responded;

*“Yes of course. Every week teachers in each department undergo CPD and it is in the timetable.”*

Similarly, the deputy headteacher A responded with the same question admitting;

*“CPD is conducted in each department, and for the external professional development if there is enough budget, we also take the head of the department with a teacher.”*

Additionally, it was observed that in school B, during that program expertise in each topic especially those challenging topics teaches fellow teachers how to teach those topics easily

whereas schools A and C, also have a fixed timetable for CPD, where teachers learn different ways of developing professionally. Furthermore, the study found that in high-performing schools, HODs also participate diligently in monitoring the program to ensure its effectiveness.

In contrast, in underperforming public schools, CPD opportunities are undertaken generally not departmental-wise, and are sometimes limited and sporadic. There is a lack of structured programs to support teacher development. Nevertheless, headteachers in underperforming schools believed that it is difficult to sharpen the teachers' teaching methods because of their reluctance to develop new skills. The headteacher F stated;

*“It is quite a struggle. We try to discuss the benefits of new methods with them, but some still hold onto the old ways. This resistance slows down progress and makes it harder to implement changes.”*

#### **4.3.8 Resource Management**

The Ministry of General Education procures materials and equipment for all subjects and distributes them in secondary schools. Although the government is willing to provide necessary resources to her schools, there are ongoing challenges in resource management in public schools.

The study found that the key factors hindering school leaders in public schools from delivering the necessary resources are; lack of proper budgeting, improper utilisation, and the way resources are maintained (Table 4.1). Despite some other school leaders trying to follow all those factors effectively in eradicating the causes of ineffective delivery of resources, the study further revealed that a high number of students still strains available resources, making it difficult to meet the demands of all learners adequately. This was recorded by the headteacher of the school F stated about the challenges in resources management; she stated;

*“Yes, managing materials has been a challenge. With our limited resources, we try to distribute them fairly, but it doesn't always go as planned. This can affect how well students learn and the support they get.”*

**Table 4.1 A showing students' responses about resources provided**

School Category	School Category	Average	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	Total
	High Performing School	14	27	55	2	2	100
	Underperforming school	35	0	8	37	20	100
	Total	49	27	63	39	22	200

The table above shows a distinct difference in the availability of study materials between high-performing and underperforming schools. In high-performing schools, 27% of students rated the availability of books and study materials as ‘Excellent’ and 55% as ‘Good’, highlighting effective resource support that likely contributes to their success. On the other hand, underperforming schools had no students rating the availability as ‘Excellent’, and only 7.7% rated it as ‘Good’. A significant portion rated it as ‘Poor’ (37.5%) or ‘Very Poor’ (19.2%). Students from high-performing schools reported better availability of resources (Table 4.2) like books and study materials, with a significant association between resource availability and school performance with  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.07$ , 95% CI: 1.1-29.8). Conversely, more students from underperforming schools faced challenges accessing study materials, which was significantly associated with overall school performance with  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.03$ , 95% CI: 3.9-16.5).

**Table 4.2 A table showing the responses from students on whether they face any challenges in accessing books and other study materials.**

School Category	Student Response		Total
	No	Yes	
High Performing School	71	29	100

Underperforming school	9	91	100
Total	80	120	200

The table above represents students' responses concerning whether they face any challenges with their access to books and other study materials. It reveals a significant disparity in access to books and study materials between high-performing and underperforming schools. In high-performing schools, 71% of students report no challenges in accessing these resources, whereas 29% do face challenges. In contrast, only 8.7% of students in underperforming schools do not encounter difficulties, with a substantial 91.3% facing challenges.

The headteachers in high-performing schools strongly believe in strategic planning as each department needs to structure their budgets stating all the required materials annually. For example, the headteacher A involves careful planning to ensure the optimal use of government-provided resources similar to School B.

Schools C and D managed to overcome a lack of enough materials concerning over-enrollment and limited materials through the usage of strategic resource allocation to maintain school facilities and support the teaching process, as the headteacher C adhered;

*“We regularly review resource allocation with the HODs based on needs because each department has different needs, we create enough budgets and strategically fit into the plans.”*

Meanwhile, in schools G and H, resource planning is too reactive rather than strategic. The school struggles with resource shortages and lacks a clear plan to address these issues.

Teachers in underperforming schools believe that the administration is accountable for improper management of resources, as they are not involving teachers in planning resources fairly and in terms of budgeting. One teacher in school E (teacher E6) commented

*“Before budgeting, there should be an engagement of subject teachers”*

The statement was supported by another teacher in school F (teacher F2) who said,

*“I think before budgeting and providing the materials, teachers should be asked”.*

Another teacher in school G, teacher G1, added;

*“Teachers must be listened to since they are the ones who know the demand of the resources rather than the school head”*

Other teachers believe that the school leaders do not trust them as teacher H4 complained;

*“Trustful to the teachers and understanding the demand from them”*

In high-performing schools, resources such as books are managed by departments, allowing students to borrow them whenever necessary. This structured approach ensures resources are used effectively to support student learning while in underperforming schools, there is a clear poor allocation of resources caused by improper management. There is no structured system for distributing resources, leading to shortages and inefficiencies. This ineffective allocation of resources has raised complaints from teachers. One teacher in school G, teacher G7, commented;

*“The school must be transparent in terms of allocation, budget, and spending of the resources”*

Teacher G1 added;

*“Should be equal and fairly distributed and this could be done better by the HODs, not the administration”*

Meanwhile, other teachers discussed the distribution based on the nature of the subjects, with teacher E2 saying,

*“Emphasise should be given to subjects that need more materials like labs, scientific tools as science cannot be the same with the other subjects”*

Some teachers believe the task of distributing and planning should be done by the HODs, not the administration as teachers from school G recorded saying;

*“Giving funds to departments to buy resources”.*

Another teacher, teacher G8, in the same school added;

*“The responsibility should be left to the head of the department, not the headteachers”*

This statement is supported by teacher G2 who goes deep into challenging the academic office saying;

*“Budget should be prepared by the department, not an academic office”*

The study established the strategies employed by headteachers included: recording all materials and equipment in the stock books, collecting the department budgeting before finalised by the financial committee for the general school budget to procure materials or equipment; monitoring the use of resources in schools and proper interaction with teachers; support staff and pupils. When asked about how they maintain the resources, the headteachers in high-performing schools give different opinions. The deputy headteacher A stated;

*“It is necessary to record and monitor these materials. They aren’t mine. it is for the Government. I record all the materials and equipment in the stock books and whenever someone wants to get the materials or equipment there must be stages to follow; first authorisation needs to come from the head of a department and then either me or the head. Thereafter, a memo should be given to the store officer for issuing.”*

The headteacher B believes in the cooperation and sharing of responsibility with each subordinate in the school in maintaining the school’s resources. She said;

*“I believe I can’t be able to move all over the school alone. I together with the deputy normally educate teachers and students on the importance of taking care of the school properties. Also, class teachers are involved in reporting broken or missing equipment and they, are getting the information from the students and I encourage compensation for the students who break the equipment carelessly.”*

The statement echoed by the response from the headteacher D, stated that;

*“Managing the entire school requires teamwork. I collaborate with the deputy and class teachers to instill responsibility in students, ensuring they take care of our school’s resources and understand the importance of reporting any issues.”*

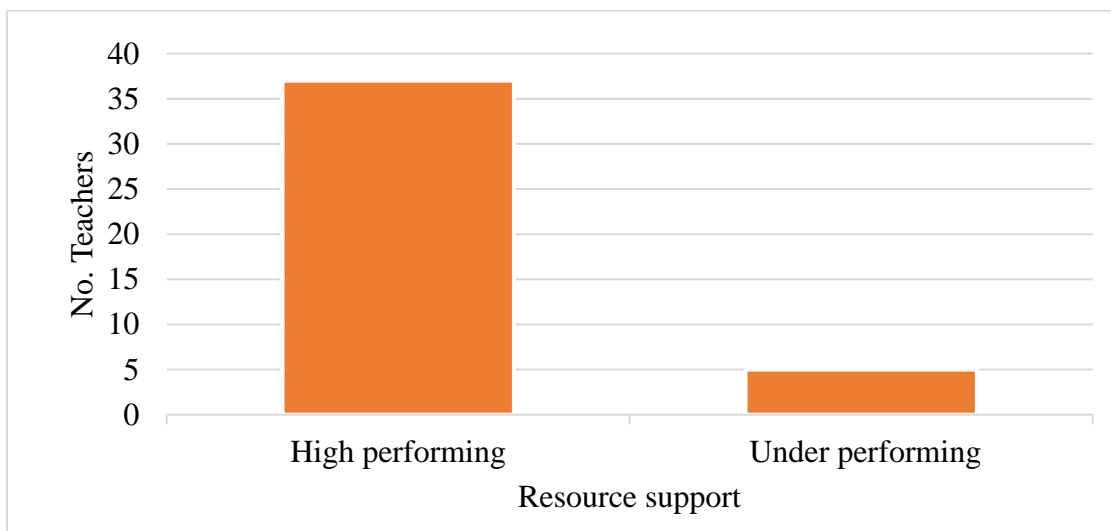
Meanwhile, the headteacher C delegates the responsibilities fully to the head of departments. She said;

*“Heads of departments need to check the materials and equipment every day. In the morning and afternoon before knocking they have to check the cupboards and other equipment and if there is missing something, the specific teacher in a department will be called for more clarification.”*

She also added,

*“Sometimes to make the job easy on the HODs we encourage the teacher on duty to cooperate with the HOD whenever something happens on school property.”*

Teachers in high-performing schools indicated that there was sufficient resource support provided as compared to teachers in underperforming schools who indicated that there was little or no support (Figure 4.11). This study reveals a significant association between sufficient resource support in helping students achieve their academic goals and school performance ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.01$ , 95% CI: 6.1-19.7).



**Figure 4.11 Showing resources support**

#### **4.4 Potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public schools**

##### **4.4.1 Handling Disparities in Academic Performance**

Public schools are often faced with the challenges of differences in understanding among their students, this is due to the nature of students to have different understandings arising from the environments and various factors such as health, economic, social, and nature of the students. This

leads to different results in schools just because there are different ways to fight these reasons. In this study, it has been successfully accepted that among the reasons that lead schools to different results is a way to fight struggling students. The following are ways that have flourished in high-performing schools that lack or have inconsistent programs for underperforming students that lead to disparities in academic performance.

#### **4.4.2 Remedial Programs**

This method has been observed and is widely used in these high-performing schools. The study observed that deputy headteachers are the champions in this program as they encourage teachers to be able to identify students with various challenges in studies, especially students who are in exam classes. School A has implemented remedial programs and parent-teacher meetings to address academic performance disparities. These initiatives support struggling students, helping them improve their performance. These students who are found to have various academic problems are given their special time and the parents have to give a small amount of money to cover the extra time used by the teachers to cover the patches that the students have.

Similarly, the headteacher C actively engages parents in addressing student academic performance issues through discussion with them after teachers identified challenging areas for their children. Also, the headteacher invites parents to discuss their child's progress and collaborates with them to implement remedial classes outside normal school hours. Unlike School A, the study found that parents in School C don't opt to pay any extra money for these remedial programs.

Unlike schools A and C, Schools B and D have been seen to use the method of the whole class in doing this program instead of a few students. Each class has its extra time day where the students get time to study and teach each other, and also the teachers use the time to finish their topics where there are challenges, in exam classes such as grade 9, it is compulsory to stay all days of the week to match the pace of studies.

This method has been seen to be more successful in these schools than in underperforming schools because many classes are empty in the afternoon due to the absence of afternoon sessions. Also, good communication between the leadership and the teachers makes both the teachers and students realise the value and importance of this program.

Various reasons lead to underperforming schools not having a strong remedial program. Having many students leads to afternoon sessions that limit classes for remedial. For example, headteacher E believes that high-performing schools are successful in performance because of low student enrollment. She said,

*“OK, our schools are not performing well, but the students we are admitted to unlike other schools are creamy and all students in this area are ambitious to go to those schools, we remain only with low students. Also, for my school I have the highest enrollment as you can see from this chart every year I receive more students, tell me how can I have remedial while all classes full from morning to afternoon”?*

She added,

*“And there is also a time when we are trying to have remedial programs but the nature of our students also does not value it so we are left with a few students who have more goals and we are trying fighting to make sure they are successful.”*

A similar comment was noticed by headteacher F, who said;

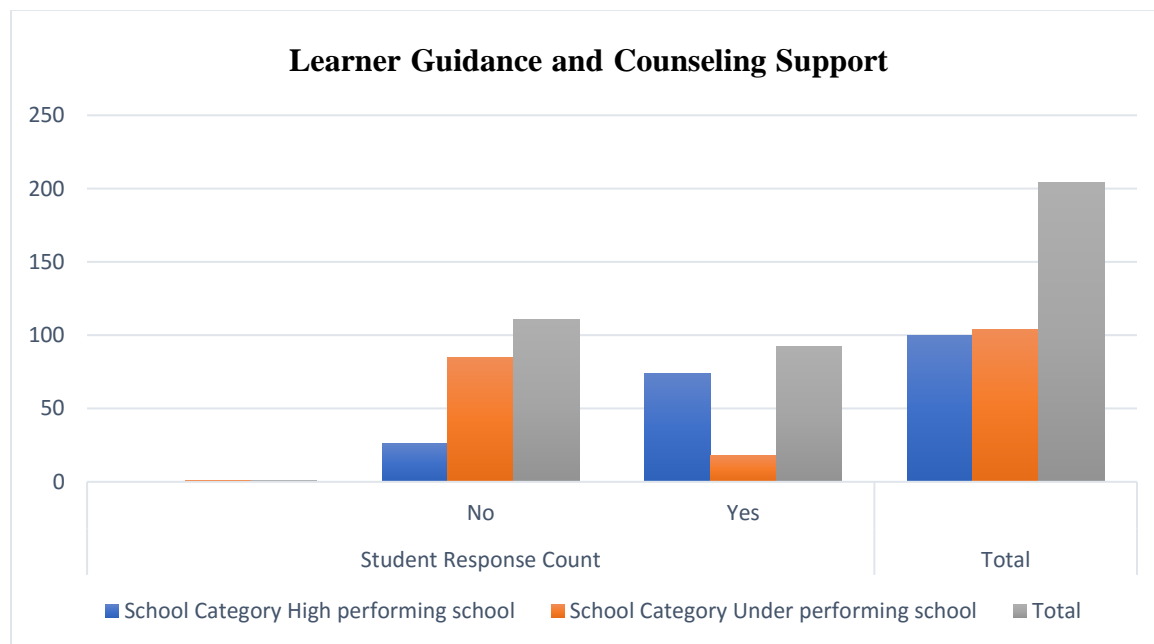
*“Ah, we do want to provide remedial and guidance services for those who need extra support. But you see, the teacher-student ratio here is quite high. This means it’s hard for us to give individual attention or run effective remedial classes. Plus, we don’t have enough facilities or classrooms. The need for afternoon classes just adds to the problem. So, incorporating these services properly is a real challenge. It’s something we wish we could improve, but the constraints make it quite difficult.”*

Also, the study found that in underperforming schools, generally remedial programs are minimum held and the emphasis is placed on exam classes only. These students receive special preparation and remedial programs meanwhile regular classes do not benefit from such initiatives. For example at school F, students in the exam class get a chance in a different place from the school although it was not made clear whether it is for payment or not.

#### **4.4.3 Guidance and Counseling**

A higher proportion of students from high-performing schools indicated that they received support to improve their academic performance as compared to students from underperforming schools

(Figure 4.12). As indicated in the graph, 74% of students in high-performing schools receive additional support, such as counseling and special education, indicating effective support systems that likely contribute to their success. In contrast, only 17.3% of students in underperforming schools receive similar support, with 81.7% lacking these services. This disparity suggests that the absence of adequate support in underperforming schools may be contributing to their lower academic performance. The current study revealed that there was a significant association between student academic support and the school performance p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:0.11$ , 95% CI: 5.1-23.1).



**Figure 4.12 Students receiving additional support**

Generally, this study has observed that high-performing schools have close monitoring of students, especially the close cooperation of teachers, class teachers, and the guidance and counseling department. For example, in school C, observed that there is an implementation of a mentorship program in which a struggling student is paired with a senior student or senior teacher.

When asked about how he ensures that students from diverse academic backgrounds have equal access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and enrichment programs, deputy headteacher B, commented,

*“They undergo guidance and counseling, and rules and regulations are attached to the acceptance letter”*

He also encourages teachers to know the welfare of the students in and out. Through this, teachers and students are supposed to arrive earlier, and then teachers assess the welfare and situations of the students before starting the class to figure out if there will be any problems that may hinder the learning of the students in the class.

In school, A and D, guidance and counseling are mostly on a large scale rather than a few students but whenever needed struggling students are taken to the guidance and counseling department for more guidance. The deputy headteacher A commented on how they motivate students in academic performance. She said,

*“The school brings in old students and most of them are prominent people to motivate students”*

She added,

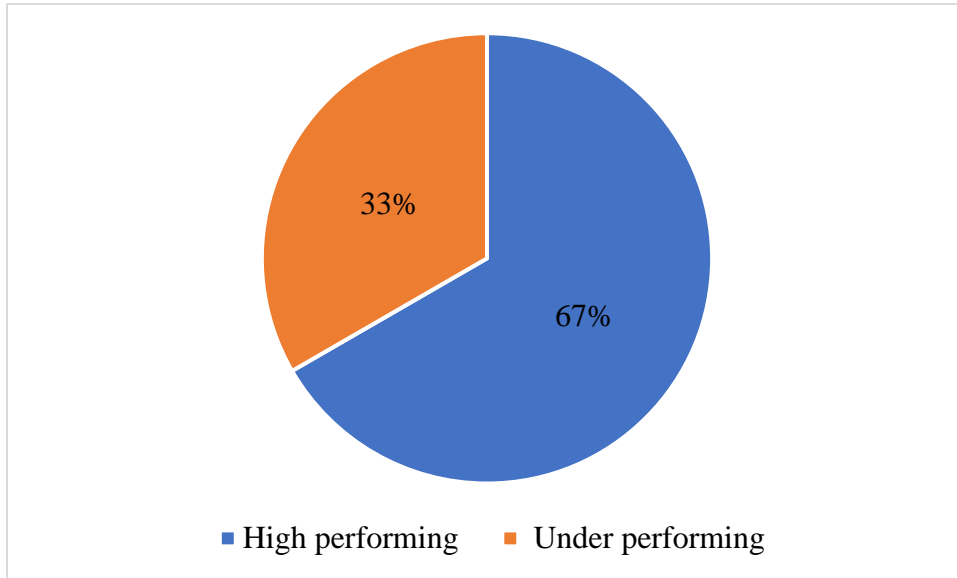
*“In assembly, we talk to the students and tell them the importance of studying, we encourage them whatever they want to be a doctor is a doctor you won't be labeled as a doctor from a poor family, you are all doctors.”*

The situation has been different in underperforming schools, the study observed there is a lack of emphasis on guidance and counseling, treating it as an optional rather than integral. Students lack support and motivation due to the absence of structured support and counseling services making these schools fail to address numerous challenges faced by the students, impairing their ability to understand and succeed both inside and outside the learning environment. This results in a lack of motivation and ineffective in whatever programs are implemented contributing to low academic performance, especially for those struggling students.

#### **4.4.4 Extracurricular programs**

It is revealed that the biggest motivation for students in public schools is to have different programs out of the class. This makes students love being at school and increases the competition between them and when it happens, they go to compete with other schools. They continue carrying the loyalty of competition for their schools that may bring results in their studies. Figure 4.13 depicts the count of responses from teachers regarding the presence of extracurricular programs/support services in high-performing and underperforming schools. 41 teachers from high-performing schools reported the presence of extracurricular programs/support services while only 7 out of 41 teachers from underperforming schools did the same. This indicates a significant gap in the

provision of such services, with 34 teachers indicating the absence of these programs. The study revealed that there were more extracurricular activities or support services to enhance student learning experience in high-performing schools as compared to underperforming schools.



**Figure 4.13: Showing the responses from the teachers concerning the presence of extracurricular programs**

Moreover, the statistical analysis supports this observation. There is a significant association between the presence of support services for students and school performance, with a p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ) ( $X^2:1.01$ , 95% CI: 2.6-13.4).

The study found that there are many extracurricular programs such as jets, sports, chess, production unit, NASAZ, drama, debate, arts, agriculture, music, etc. being held in public schools, although the problem is a difference in emphasis in the implementation among these schools. In the study, it was discovered that there is less emphasis on the implementation of these programs. For example, school E is only “history” it's no longer working. Similarly in school F where there is no follow-up of these programs, despite being on the timetable. In school G, there is confusion concerning the role of the teachers in extracurricular programs. Teachers believe only a few teachers are the ones involved and responsible for the programs but they fail to manage the programs. The teacher G3 commented;

*“It is only said that we have clubs, but it is not true. I have never seen those programs take place. We don’t even have time for these clubs, but the timetable is there.”*

The statement was disagreed by the other teacher (teacher G4) who said,

*“The teachers are the ones who don’t want to do the program.”*

Conversely, in high-performing schools, extracurricular programs are implemented according to timetables, ensuring regular participation and engagement from students. For example, in school B, the researcher observed students actively participating in programs like fine arts during designated club times. Similarly, in school A, there are well-organised sports activities and drama clubs that run smoothly, demonstrating a high level of student involvement and enthusiasm. Schools C and D also exemplify the effective implementation of extracurricular activities, with vibrant chess and debate clubs that foster critical thinking and teamwork among students.

The structured and consistent approach to these activities in high-performing schools fosters a sense of community, encourages student involvement, and enhances their overall school experience. This engagement not only boosts students’ motivation but also positively impacts their academic performance as they develop diverse skills and a strong sense of school pride. Such a comprehensive approach to extracurricular activities sets a standard that, if emulated by underperforming schools, could help bridge the gap in academic disparities.

#### **4.4.5 Challenges in Addressing Academic Disparities**

#### **4.4.6 Resistance to Change**

The study found that both high-performing and underperforming schools encountered resistance to change from the teachers but the means to address this challenge differ from school to school. In the case of school A, the study noted teachers resisting new teaching methods implemented by the deputy headteacher. They believe their methods work better than the new ones advised. For example, there is an issue about notes being written by the students instead of the teachers during class and sometimes notes are provided later after the teaching period.

This approach is supported by the observation done in school B in which the deputy headteacher believes only engagement and discussion could end the resistance to change from the teachers. When asked about how he overcomes challenges in implementing the directives from MOE, he said,

*“Whenever I find challenges in implementing the directives, I encourage teachers to sit and check on themselves like what’s wrong because all directives aren’t made to jeopardise academic performance. Why am I finding the challenges? why my learners don’t fit in the directives because we have to fit on the directives and not directives fit on us. Interpret the directives wisely and then decide how you are going to implement them wisely.”*

Teachers in school C have been seen to be compatible with any changes required for their presence, especially in teaching methods. This is due to the good professional relations that exist between the school leaders and them influenced by a good system of information delivery and coordination of mistakes encountered by teachers, different in school F, where teachers believe school heads mistreat them during daily inspections.

One teacher commented;

*“The head interferes too much with the work of the teachers ”*

while another teacher added,

*“Scientific ruling demoralises the willingness to work in various cases.”*

Teachers believe school leaders criticise rather than construct. On the other hand, in school E, teachers feel left alone in improving academic performance as one teacher commented,

*“I am a team of one, my administration really couldn’t care less what I teach. They only come when receive proposals from the MOE. My problem is I do feel alone on an island with nobody to work or collaborate with.”*

Meanwhile, teachers in school E were accused of disrupting the implementation of new programs aiming to address academic performance. This has been made clear by the deputy headteacher explained;

*“Most of the teachers here are so rigid to their teaching methods and whenever you advise them to make changes, we end up disagreeing. They always blame and label students that us administration taking low students instead of finding new ways to help the students.”*

The same challenge was addressed by the deputy headteacher in school F who said;

*“Well, there’s been a few issues. One big challenge is staff resistance. Not everyone is quick to accept new methods or changes. And then, we also have limited resources. With not enough resources, it’s tough to keep things running effectively. So, while we try our best, these challenges make it difficult to be consistent.”*

The same response was heard from the headteacher in school E alluded to the comment that;

*“The main problems are staff resistance to new methods and inconsistent application of changes. We also have issues with resource allocation, which impacts how well our strategies work.”*

The statement was disagreed by one of the teachers who believes that the administration failed to build the bridge between the new changes, success, and the teachers. He commented,

*“There is a disconnect between the administration’s vision and the reality of our daily challenges in the classroom.”*

#### **4.4.7 Nature of the students and over-enrollments.**

When discussing the challenges faced by the school, the headteachers highlighted several key issues affecting the management of students and the overall learning environment including over-enrolments. The headteacher E remarked;

*“There are so many factors as I said before. Sometimes enrollment of students is high in number compared to the number of teachers so this makes it difficult to manage them, especially during teaching and learning for example you can see the class can accommodate 45 students but in ours, we keep 78 students to minimise the stream so as we can reduce the number of streams to make easy for teachers to manage.*

She added;

*“We have few numbers of teachers compared to the number of students, and other students are coming from a difficult environment where sometimes they cannot afford three meals per day and you can see we don’t offer even lunch at our school so this makes learning so difficult.”*

Contrary to the allegations suggesting that high-performing schools exclusively admit ‘cream’ students only, both deputy headteachers in high-performing schools have refuted this assertion. They underscore that their students originate from diverse backgrounds, necessitating the school to build the same school culture to accommodate every student. The comment from deputy headteacher of school A clarified this by saying;

*“We receive a mix of students; it’s not just smart students coming here. The target is not to blame the child. As a teacher, whether a student is good or bad, you must find a way to help the child progress to the next level.”*

She added,

*“We assess the weaknesses and strengths of each child, and based on that assessment, we assign subjects that we believe they will eventually excel in.”*

The same comment noted by the deputy headteacher C, says;

*“Of course, what’s so special about us we do receive mixed students though for grade 9 we tried ourselves to get creamy students, but yeah, we have a mix of them.”*

She also added a comment on the ways her teachers ensure the uniformity in delivery of the learning process, she said;

*“Teachers don’t rely on blaming or labeling their students but cooperate with the school leaders in identifying the students’ challenges, the goal is to free them from a bad academic situation.”*

The deputy headteacher B concluded about some schools being favoured by being allocated with the creamy students, he concluded;

*“No, it is not true. As far as I know, it is a fair game.”*

This has been different in school H where teachers believe that the nature of their students’ drawback their success in education. They believe high-performing schools are favored with bright students. They were heard saying,

*“We have problems coping with the syllabus because of our students sometimes. It takes time for them to catch up with the lesson.”*

Another teacher also commented,

*“Other schools favored the bright students but look at us our students are the ones who failed to be admitted at those big schools”*

These comments from these teachers disagreed with the deputy headteacher B, who believes there is fair game, he echoed these sentiments, saying

*“I believe there is no dumb or dull learner. There is always a way for a teacher to develop the best solution for each student.”*

He also added,

*“We do receive struggling students but I believe there is no child who can’t learn. Give me any child and I will give you the smart student with his/her smart results”.*

The deputy has got the child who failed the exam 3 times but once he started dealing with him, he gave the outstanding results. When discussing how she encourages teachers to help struggling students rather than labeling and ignoring them, the deputy headteacher C noted;

*“It is not the role of the teacher to make someone get the knowledge? That’s our role nothing else. A teacher must not expect only good students but yeah of course as human beings we don’t want stress or difficulty that can’t make us deviate from our natural role. So, we do encourage them the necessity of helping children, recognise their efforts, and reward them whenever necessary.”*

Similarly, the deputy headteacher D, believes the nature of the students and environment can’t limit the success of the students instead school leaders need to create an environment that fosters engagement and motivation through recognition and rewards. She added,

*“I came from the rural area and we were doing better and you can be shocked they are doing things better as teachers than in town. The problem is our job is too monotonous.”*

In contrast, underperforming schools E and F face different challenges. Teachers often complain about student behavior, which hampers their ability to take ownership of their learning. One teacher in school F, teacher F1, stated,

*“We struggle to get students to take ownership of their learning when there’s a lack of discipline in the classroom.”*

Another teacher in school G, teacher G9, added,

*“It is very difficult to do that when there are constant disruptions in class, like talking out of turn or not following instructions. These disruptions make it challenging to maintain a productive learning environment.”*

Furthermore, students’ backgrounds were also found to be an additional challenge. Noted by one teacher in school H, teacher H3, commented,

*“Students ‘backgrounds are also a challenge.”*

On the other hand, another teacher, teacher H6, concluded that;

*"It's challenging to encourage students to take an active role in their education when they don't see the value in learning."*

Different from underperforming schools, teachers in high-performing schools take the challenges of students' diverse issues and fully focus on addressing the challenges rather than relying on blaming and labeling the students. This supports and motivates struggling students resulting in improvement in academic performance.

#### **4.4. Summary of the Chapter**

The chapter presented the findings on leadership approaches and their influence on academic disparities in high-performing and underperforming public schools. The main leadership styles employed by the headteachers were identified, along with the various leadership practices attributed to them, illustrating their influence on academic disparities. Additionally, the chapter discussed the specific strategies used by headteachers to address these disparities. Lastly, it highlighted the challenges faced by headteachers in tackling academic inequalities and how their approaches to overcoming these challenges varied.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the findings from data collection and their relation to the theory, and literature review. The study investigated the leadership practices in public schools in comparison between high-performing and underperforming public schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. The discussion was conducted based on the findings established in each theme and subtheme about the research objectives, which sought to answer the following research questions.

- a) What are the main leadership styles used by the headteachers in high-performing and underperforming selected public secondary schools?
- b) How do leadership practices contribute to the academic disparities in high-performing and underperforming public secondary schools?
- c) What are the potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public secondary schools?

#### 5.2 Main leadership styles attributed by the headteachers in high-performing and underperforming schools

It was evident that despite headteachers facing challenges in eradicating academic disparities in public schools, their leadership styles are the most significant obstacle in addressing the issue. This finding of leadership style playing a major part in academic discrepancies, the majority of the headteachers who participated in the study strongly agreed that leadership styles determine the academic performance of the school because it will either create a friendly environment for teaching and learning or will not create a friendly environment at all. For example, the instructional leadership style at some schools, emphasised support and professional development, and appeared to create a more positive school climate and improve teacher morale. Teachers felt valued and supported, which likely contributed to higher student performance. Conversely, the strict supervisory approach at other schools, highlighted by frequent inspections and formal reports fostered a more tense atmosphere. Teachers at these schools felt less autonomy and support, potentially negatively impacting their teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. The findings concur with the conclusions of the studies of Chunda (2022); and Howard and Knight (2022), who

found a strong correlation between leadership styles and academic performance. Similarly, the study of Mumba (2022) established that whether democratic or autocratic, leadership styles had both positive and negative effects on the teacher's performance that were likely to influence academic performance directly. However, the findings contradict the findings of Bugyei and Aidoo (2022), who reported that despite the headteachers performing above average in terms of their leadership skills, and with highly motivated teachers, the academic performance of the pupils in the Anomabo Education Circuit was not promising. Furthermore, the study by Gyasi, et al. (2016), added that even though respondents agreed that a leadership style can affect academic performance, unless the headteachers are well equipped with knowledge and skills in leadership, they would not know if they have any influence on academic performance. This study observed that the role of the deputy headteachers in their daily monitoring of teaching methods through ongoing classroom observation, and providing individual feedback and support showed a direct extension of the headteachers' commitment to high-quality instruction and professional development. This alignment contributed to the school's overall academic performance as this addressed individual teacher needs. Hence, a lack of knowledge about leadership skills among headteachers in public schools stimulates the ongoing academic disparities. The theory of academic performance emphasising that teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and motivation are critical components in driving learning outcomes. Therefore, there is a great need for headteachers in public schools to have broad knowledge of leadership, integrating it into the usage of different leadership practices aims to gaping disparities in academic performance and foster ongoing student growth.

Headteachers in high-performing schools embraced instructional leadership by monitoring teaching methods through structured and informed ongoing classroom observation, providing workshops, and orientation programs, and adhering to one-on-one coaching and mentoring sessions in shaping teaching practices resulting in gaping academic disparities. This agreed with the findings of Ahsan et al. (2019), Kanchele (2022), Luke and Osoro (2019), and Phiri (2022) which showed that regular supervision through monitoring and evaluating the teaching methods was the pillar of enhancing learners' academic performance. Meanwhile, headteachers in underperforming schools were often found to be reluctant to engage in consistent monitoring. In cases where supervision was enforced, it tended to be strict and inspection-driven, rather than formative. This suggests a more rigid approach that may lack the developmental aspect necessary

to improve teaching quality. Relating to the theory of academic performance and Fielder's contingency theory, the lack of enough and consistent instructional support in underperforming schools is believed to be the cause of unexcited teaching methods resulting in an unpleasant learning environment. Hence, headteachers in public schools need to stressing in providing consistent instructional support.

Despite the finding that some of the headteachers in underperforming schools claimed to use the democratic style, they failed to embrace it in practice. In contrast, the analysis found that the majority of the headteachers in high-performing schools embrace the practices of the democratic style of leadership even if some of them are not democratic. The teachers expressed beliefs that the world is evolving and democratic leadership ensures that there is a consensus before you do something or take a particular direction. For the success of the schools' programs, headteachers in these schools, exercise collaborative efforts with the teachers in different school activities such as monitoring the ongoing classroom observation and other school activities. The findings were consistent with the findings of Chepkonga et al. (2015), who pointed to the conclusion that headteachers who employed a democratic leadership style had their schools perform above average because they were supportive of all school programs. This collaboration creates a supportive structure in the success of school programs resulting in student achievement in academic performance. Furthermore, the headteachers in high-performing schools underlined that this approach minimises opposition and ensures actual engagement from everyone reaching an open consensus among team members rather than just a few seeming to cooperate. This participative approach proved to increase teachers' morale and effectiveness in work which in turn contributes to academic performance. The findings agreed with the findings of Kapela et al. (2021) and Mumba (2022), which revealed that leaders who involve others in decision-making promote teamwork, accountability, and creativity, which in turn allows teachers to fully engage in the teaching and learning process to enhance pupils' expectations. These elements are critical components of the theory of academic performance, which posits that positive beliefs, attitudes, and motivation among both teachers and students are essential for enhancing student expectations and academic success. By fostering an environment where collaboration and collective decision-making are prioritised, headteachers in high-performing schools create a culture that not only motivates teachers but also inspires students to achieve higher academic standards. Therefore,

headteachers in underperforming schools have to emphasize the strong collaboration and inclusion of the teachers' and students' voices.

The finding that the headteachers in high-performing schools believing bias on one type of leadership style makes headteachers in underperforming schools stuck on their management practices relates to Fielder's (1960) contingency theory of leadership suggesting that headteachers need to stress adapting their leadership practices to the current needs and context to ensure effective management and avoid reliance on a single leadership approach. The findings of Chunda (2022), Igwe et al. (2017), and Jama (2023) who concluded that there is no single leadership style that is effective unless they are combined and work depends on the situation concur with the finding of the current study. The monotonous approach of the headteachers seen in this study, fostered ongoing academic disparities in underperforming schools. To address significant academic disparities, headteachers in underperforming schools must adapt their managerial practices by strategically blending leadership styles. Kanchele (2021), reported that situational leadership styles yielded mixed results, both high and low, leading to teacher dissatisfaction due to difficulties in adapting to the approach. However, Jama (2023) advised that when applied effectively, situational leadership can lead to improved outcomes. This agrees with the results of this study which observed that schools with low performance yield, employed a single mode of leadership style.

It was evident that in high-performing schools, both headteachers and deputy headteachers are empowering and developing their teachers by demonstrating humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship. This results in a strong sense of togetherness and understanding of each measure within the school. Furthermore, such approaches foster a collaborative school culture as teachers feel valued as expressed by various teachers interviewed. This then has a positive impact on student performance, and the overall school environment becomes more conducive to learning and innovation. The findings of this study relate to the findings of Rashid and Shirima (2024) and Van Dierendonck, (2011) revealed that servant leaders successfully contributed to creating work environments that foster fulfillment and dedication among teachers by prioritising empathy, active listening, and support for professional development to them. Also, the tendency of the headteachers in underperforming schools to focus on compliance and performance metrics rather than the holistic welfare of teachers and students always creates resistance that slugging

behind the learning process affects academic performance. As seen from the results, the headteachers in underperforming schools often prioritised short-term academic targets and compliance with regulations over the broader well-being of their teachers and students. The result of this rigid focus on performance metrics could have led to increased pressure, stress, and lack of cooperation among teachers. Because the teachers felt unsupported, they may have resisted new initiatives (even though good) and this may have ultimately affected student outcomes. The finding correlates with the findings of Mulonga et al. (2024), who found that headteachers managed to have high performance because they worked on the teachers' welfare for them to deliver maximally. Therefore, the ongoing teacher resistance in public schools resulted mainly from the negligence of the teachers' welfare. Based on the theory of academic performance, headteachers in public schools should necessitate the provision of humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship.

The finding that headteachers in underperforming schools exercising an authoritative leadership style, emphasising a hierarchical structure where they oversee the entire school operation and delegate tasks to teachers in a specific, controlled manner in disagreement with the theory of academic performance, minimises confusion and ensure uniformity by having all teachers follow a standardised teaching approach. Despite these efforts, they always face challenges from the teachers which in turn affects student academic achievements. The finding disagreed with the findings of Mulonga et al (2024), and Igwe et al (2015) who found that headteachers in high-performing schools minimally used an authoritative style in certain situations where direct guidance is necessary, particularly with inexperienced or unruly teachers, outlining tasks and providing strict oversight to ensure tasks are completed correctly. Meanwhile, the studies of Chafwa (2012) and Oyugi and Gogo (2016) strongly agreed with the current study and concluded the impact of the authoritarian management style on teacher performance was described by respondents as negative, contributing to poor working relations, poor performance, and work dissatisfaction because it demanded immediate compliance, and lack flexibility and motivation. Based on the findings of this study, authority is believed to be the cause of unpleasant academic performance due to its leadership practices outcome. Therefore, there is a need to careful practicing of this approach in public schools.

### **5.3 Contribution of Leadership practices toward the Academic Disparities between high-performing and underperforming Public Schools**

It was evident that the top-down flow of information relying on fear and authority by the headteachers in underperforming schools hinders collaboration, strategic planning, and proactive measures needed to address long-term academic disparities, ultimately reinforcing the performance gaps. According to Britwum et al. (2022), Chafwa (2012), Msoffe (2017), Mwape (2013), and Oyugi and Gogo (2016) this approach creates antagonistic headteacher relations, demoralised and frustrated teachers at work. Usually, a rigid authoritarian leadership style can discourage open communication, innovation, and shared decision-making among teachers. The reliance of headteachers on fear and authority, may undervalue and disempower teachers as seen from the teachers' perspectives. Most teachers from underperforming schools revealed that they were reluctant to voice concerns or suggest improvements. As a result, this approach reinforces existing challenges which leads to declining performance seen in underperforming schools.

However, the revelation of a noticeable smooth flow of information involving two-way from the administrative office to teachers and students in high-performing schools involving different ways of conducting meetings not relying solely on staff general meetings compared to underperforming schools reinforced the school's mission and ensured everyone was on the same page. The effective dialogue and collaboration in high-performing schools, fosters a more inclusive decision-making process which enhances overall school performance. These findings concur with the findings of Yumba (2022) suggesting that improving communication between the headteachers and the teachers would greatly improve teachers' motivation to a large extent resulting in high academic performance achievements. Consequently, communication means by the headteachers of public schools resulting in different challenges in schools that foster academic disparities. According to the theory of academic performance, effective communication fosters positive beliefs, attitudes, and motivation among both teachers and students, all of which are critical components for academic success. Therefore, for better accomplishment of gaping academic performance disparities, headteachers need to overlook their communication skills, and structuring to ensure the effective communication of complex important information. Persistent communication challenges hinder efforts to bridge academic performance gaps. The lack of shared information and clarity about a school's direction, therefore, obstructs progress and academic success.

On the revelation that most teachers (73.6%) reported being involved in decision-making processes in high-performing schools, resulting in teachers feeling engaged and invested in the school's success compared to underperforming schools in which the majority of teachers (93.1%) believed not included in decision-making procedures. On this finding, lack of involvement in underperforming schools contributed to disengagement among teachers, which impacts student achievement. This was supported by the conclusion from the study of Luke and Osoro (2019) alluded that the leadership style of headteachers affects academic performance through non-participatory decision-making. These findings are supported by the finding of Phiri (2022) who found that negligence of teachers in decision-making in public schools was among the factors that contribute to the academic disparities compared to grant-aided schools. The findings concur with the findings of Chepkonga et al (2015), Chunda (2022), Kanchele (2021), and Kapela et al (2021). Additionally, it was evident that students in high-performing schools (73%) indicated that they felt more involved in decision-making in their schools than students (27%) from underperforming schools. On this finding, lack of involvement in underperforming schools contributed to disengagement among teachers and students, which impacts academic performance. According to the contingency theory of leadership, the headteachers' ability to adapt their leadership styles to include participatory decision-making in high-performing schools fosters an environment where teachers and students feel valued and engaged. Hence, headteachers in underperforming schools should adopt a more flexible leadership approach that emphasises collaboration and inclusivity in decision-making processes.

The finding that headteachers in high-performing schools frequently delegate tasks, empowering staff and promoting a collaborative environment not only improving efficiency but also encouraging professional growth among teachers leading to teaching effectiveness. According to the results of this study, headteachers, especially in underperforming schools, need to find a balance between taking total control and maintaining a grip on decision-making. By supporting departmentalisation, delegating responsibilities, and empowering teachers with decision-making authority, headteachers promote a more collaborative environment. This approach ensures that teachers develop the necessary skills to enhance their efficacy, ultimately leading to more effective teaching methods that address academic disparities. The studies of Andende (2016); Amos, Siamoo, and Ogoti (2022), and Seth and Ntirandekura (2022) strongly agree with the finding of the current study stating that increased teacher involvement in responsibilities and allocation of

activities enhances job satisfaction, leading to improved performance, greater effort, and a stronger sense of belonging. By the theory of academic performance, teachers' mindsets, and productive environments are crucial in academic performance improvement. Hence, headteachers can improve student outcomes by cultivating their leadership skills in their staff by intentionally sharing responsibility and ownership of tasks. Since decisions impact teachers differently based on their subject areas, it is crucial to ensure policies and school plans, are well-suited to support every teacher. From their views, teachers are critical because of their firsthand classroom experiences. These unique perspectives provide valuable insights that decision-makers must consider when developing effective education policies and strategies.

It was evident that headteachers in high-performing schools provide frequent support for the professional development of the teachers. This results in a confident teaching staff, as professional development opportunities help teachers stay updated on best practices while improving their teaching methods, and addressing the needs of their students. It also fosters a culture of continuous learning, enhancing teacher satisfaction, retention, and overall school performance. This subsequently contributes to better student outcomes and a more positive school environment. In supporting Fiedler's (1960) and Elger's (2007) theories, this supportive environment in high-performing schools enables teachers to use various teaching methods rather than relying on a single approach, creating an exciting learning environment leading to a high level of understanding from the students. Corroborating this fact, the study of Osagie and Momoh (2016), and Yumba (2022) found that this attitude was instrumental in developing the teachers' and students' self-efficacy which in turn enhanced student performance in external public exams. The challenges and resisting adapting new teaching methods were evident due to the lack of structured programs to support teacher professional development resulting in monotonous teaching methods resulting in ongoing academic disparities in underperforming schools. Therefore, to sharpen and combat outdated teaching methods there is a need for the headteachers in public schools to provide continuous professional development to their teachers in the schools. However, resistance to educational change among teachers is a significant problem contributing to academic disparities in public schools which seems to create one of the challenges to successfully implementing the change.

From this study's findings, it was evident that key factors hindering headteachers in public schools from delivering the necessary resources are; lack of proper budgeting, improper utilisation, and

the way resources are maintained. These findings supported by the study of Uchendu et al. (2013), showed that maintenance culture in both public and private secondary schools is poor; the school physical resources were not regularly done and maintained using the preventive, emergency, routine and fixed time management strategies. Despite some other headteachers trying to follow all those factors effectively in eradicating the causes of ineffective delivery of resources, the study is evident that over enrollments strains available resources, making it difficult to adequately meet the demands of all learners. From this study, there is a significant disparity which reveals that students in underperforming schools are 62.3% more likely to face challenges accessing educational materials compared to their peers in high-performing schools. This highlights a crucial issue that could affecting academic performance under-performing schools and is a key in the overall classification of schools. The finding concurs with the finding of Malambo (2012) stated that over enrollment leads to a high book-student ratio causing inadequacy availability of books in non-grant aided schools. This suggests that the lack of adequate study materials in underperforming schools may be a major factor in their lower academic performance. The findings were consistent with the findings of Kimeu et al (2016), Mfangavo (2015), and Mgozi (2021) who revealed that the inadequacy of books and study materials was the key source of low academic performance in the schools under study. The headteachers in high-performing schools strongly believe in strategic planning as each department needs to structure their budgets stating all the required materials annually and strategic usage of resource allocation to maintain school facilities and support the teaching process. The practice supported by the findings of Masnawati and Darmawan (2022) stated that educational leaders need to do careful planning to allocate resources appropriately. In contrast, resource planning is too reactive in underperforming schools rather than strategic. The school struggles with resource shortages and lacks a clear plan to address these issues. Therefore, to mitigate these shortages, the headteachers in underperforming schools need to exercise a proactive resource management plan, involving teachers and leveraging partnerships.

#### **5.4 Potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public schools.**

It was evident that factors such as having many students which leads to afternoon sessions limit the availability of class time for remedial activities in underperforming schools. This logistical challenge, combined with the unwillingness of the teachers and students due to motivation issues, and lack of proactive parental involvement, contrasts with high-performing schools in which

deputy headteachers play a central role in guiding teachers to identify and support students facing academic challenges. The numerous challenges that students face hinder their ability to comprehend lessons in the classroom, and the situation worsens when alternative interventions, like remedial programs, fail to provide the necessary support. This underscores the importance for schools to go beyond traditional classroom teaching and also emphasise guidance and counselling to address the broader needs of students. These findings align with Salfi's (2011) findings, which highlight the critical role of school leadership in involving parents and the community to foster academic success. The implementation of remedial programs similar to the findings of Kanchele (2021), and Maluma and Banja (2019), and regular parent-teacher meetings in high-performing schools not only targets struggling students but also reinforces the collaborative dynamic between schools and parents, as observed in Salfi's (2011) and Msoffe's (2017) studies. The lack of structural programs and engagement issues among teachers is vital in slugging behind improving remedial support to struggling students and overall academic outcomes in underperforming schools. Therefore, headteachers should not wait to implement remedial programs, there should be ongoing remedial programs before it is too late for the struggling students. For the large class-size schools, there should be structured remedial programs on weekends or during holidays.

This study observed that in most schools, guidance and counselling lacks ambitious continuity and motivation for teachers in its implementation. However, the revelation that the majority of the students in high-performing schools receive additional support such as counseling and special education compared to less support or not all in underperforming schools, indicates that the effective support provided in high-performing schools likely contributes to their success in academic performance. This approach in high-performance schools helped students to break free from the cycle of misunderstanding and brought forward a sense of purpose in achieving the school's goals. In contrast, underperforming schools which placed less emphasis on activities like guidance and counselling seemed to miss a critical component of student development. This finding supported by Edger's (2007) theory of academic performance highlights that deficits in the support system directly impact learning and performance, reinforcing a holistic approach to student development. Generally, this study has discovered that high-performing schools have close monitoring of students involving close cooperation of teachers, class teachers, and the guidance and counseling department, assessing and identifying students' welfare before class to identify potential learning obstacles and mentorship programs, similar to the studies by Banda (2016),

Ahsan et al. (2019), Chibomba (2023). The finding also aligns with the studies of Phiri (2022), and Malambo (2012) stipulated that the close supervision in grant-aided schools was the pioneer factor that made these schools outshine the public schools academically. Unlike the underperforming schools, there is less emphasis on guidance and counseling, treated as optional, leading to a lack of structured support for students. This absence hinders student motivation and prevents schools from effectively addressing challenges, contributing to poor academic performance, particularly among struggling students. Hence, to gap academic disparities in underperforming schools, there is a need for the headteachers to encourage psychological support to students rather than academic oriented.

Despite having various extracurricular programs in underperforming schools, the study discovered less emphasis on the implementation of these programs. Most of the schools lack follow-up of these programs, despite being on the timetable. This study found a correlation between school performance and extracurricular activities suggesting that schools offering more extracurricular programs and support services generally achieve better academic performance. It stresses the role these services play in creating a more enriching learning environment and promoting student success. However, the confusion concerning the role of the teachers in extracurricular programs was also evident prompted by the teachers' perception that only a few teachers are responsible and accountable similar to the finding of Andende (2016), resulting in less participation from most of the teachers. This is likely to contribute to an unpleasant learning environment, as students feel less motivated resulting in low academic performance. The study of Kochchar (2011) concurs with this finding and connotes that lack of participation in co-curricular activities can lead to low morale and performance of both teachers and learners in academic work. Conversely, in high-performing schools, extracurricular programs are implemented according to timetables, ensuring regular participation and engagement from the teachers and students. The structured and consistent approach to these activities in high-performing schools fosters a sense of community, encourages student involvement, and motivation, and enhances their overall school experience. The studies of Andende (2016), Mumba (2022), and Kakupa (2014) associate with this finding concluding that Co-curricular activities develop school spirit and morale which applies to both teachers and learners. As Edgar's theory (2007) suggests, this engagement not only boosts students 'motivation but also positively impacts their academic performance as they develop diverse skills and a strong sense of school pride. Hence, to gap academic disparities in underperforming schools, the

headteachers should motivate their students through strong follow-up and monitoring of these extracurricular programs.

It was evident that teacher resistance is among the challenges encountered by the headteachers in public schools in gaping academic disparities. Teachers opposing to adoption of new teaching methods believing their methods work better than the new ones advised. This contradicts the headteachers and deputy headteachers' efforts to improve academic performance in public schools. A similar factor was raised in the studies of Ahsan et al. (2019), and Lomba-Portela et al. (2022) confirmed that bringing changes in schools is a stressful and challenging task as the headteachers are often faced with stressful issues from the teachers. The methods of eradicating these challenges differ between high-performing and underperforming schools. In high-performing schools was evident addressing this challenge by the deputy headteachers engaging teachers calmly concurring with the finding of Andende (2016), and emphasising the need for modern teaching practices to keep up with changing educational demands in contrast to underperforming schools in which teachers believe school leaders criticise rather than construct correspondingly to the finding of Andende (2016) lack of involvement in problem-solving leads to high unsolved complaints and strikes thereby encumbering teachers' and school performance at large. Similarly, the study of Lomba-Portela et al. (2022) concluded it is indisputable that it is how changes are introduced that can generate greater resistance.

It was further evident that another challenge in addressing academic disparities in both high-performing and underperforming public schools is the nature of the students themselves. Factors such as students' backgrounds, willingness to engage in their studies, and overall academic preparedness have emerged as significant obstacles. These student-related challenges slow the efforts to bridge academic gaps, as they directly impact how effectively schools can implement strategies to reduce the disparities. The findings were similar to the findings of Maluma and Banja (2019), and Ogbu (2018) reported that the nature of the students directly impacted their academic performance. On further revelation, underperforming schools believed receiving students who are not as "cream" or academically gifted compared to those in high-performing schools enroll the brightest students, leaving them with a majority of average or underperforming learners, was the attribute struggle in achieving academic disparities eradication. This was supported by the findings of Maluma and Banja (2019), who found that cutting points in enrollment of the students and the

general level of an understanding of the learner contribute to disparities in academic performance. This perception creates a sense of disadvantage, with many underperforming schools believing that their efforts to improve academic outcomes are hindered by the fact that the most capable students often opt for high-performing institutions making the teachers even the headteachers reluctant to provide measures to help students, resulting to ongoing academic disparities in underperforming. Therefore, there is a need for underperforming schools to focus on tailored interventions and student support rather than blaming and labeling students

### **5.5 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the study's findings, guided by the three major research questions outlined in section 1.5 or 5.0. The discussion was structured around the key insights derived from the research, closely aligned with the study's purpose and objectives. The findings were examined about the existing literature and the theoretical framework that underpinned the study. In doing so, the chapter highlighted areas of convergence and divergence between the current study and previous research. Several findings from this study were consistent with those of earlier studies, reinforcing existing knowledge and theories regarding leadership practices and their impacts on academic performance. However, other findings revealed notable differences, offering new perspectives and insights that contribute to the body of literature. The chapter critically analysed these similarities and differences, providing a nuanced understanding of how leadership styles, practices, and challenges affect academic disparities within the context of high-performing and underperforming public schools.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 6.1 Overview

This chapter presents the summary of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations arising from the findings of the current study. The findings of this study resulted from the investigation of the leadership practices and their impacts on academic disparities by comparing high-performing and underperforming public schools in the Lusaka District, Zambia. This chapter is organised into two subsections: conclusions from key findings and recommendations.

#### 6.2 Conclusion from key findings

- i. This study observed that the main leadership styles used by the headteachers in underperforming was authoritarian or autocratic leadership style which provoked resistance by teachers and hampered collaboration and proactive planning. While, high-performing schools seemed to adopt democratic leadership, servant leadership, and situational leadership which embraced engaging teachers, and empowering them through humility, authenticity, and adaptability.
- ii. This study also understood that leadership practices like flexibility, teacher development, and effective communication, promoted a collaborative work environment in high-performing schools. However, in underperforming schools poor resource management, over-enrolment, and a lack of professional development programs, leading to monotonous teaching and insufficient student support were observed. Furthermore, high-performing schools ran structured remedial programs and guidance counselling which were not present in underperforming schools.
- iii. This study found that the potential areas for improvements in leadership practices within underperforming public secondary schools are embracing inclusiveness in decision-making processes, a need for emphasis on mentorship programs, consistent monitoring and frequent meetings for evaluation and feedback, and extracurricular activities enhance student motivation.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

- i. Headteachers in underperforming schools should prioritise instructional leadership by investing in regular professional development programs for teachers. By providing targeted training on modern teaching methods, these schools would possibly break free from old practices and improve overall teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.
- ii. Headteachers should also adopt a more democratic and collaborative leadership style, considering the welfare and development of the teachers, similar to those actioned in high-performing schools. Engaging teachers in decision-making, and creating a collaborative environment, reduces resistance to change from teachers. However, this approach must be accompanied by regular feedback, open communication according to the needs of both teachers and students.
- iii. Policy makers and schools as implementors should focus on creating strong support structures for programs like remedial programs, guidance counselling, extracurricular activities, and mentorship initiatives, especially in underperforming schools.
- iv. It will be beneficial to explore how the gender of a school leaders influence their effectiveness, particularly in terms of decision making, conflict resolution, and team management.

## REFERENCES

- Adlam, V. (2003). *Raising Expectations to Improve Student Learning and School Leadership*.
- Ahmad, M., & Dilshad, M. (2018). Leadership Styles of Public Schools' Heads in Punjab: A Teachers' Perspective. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 36(2), 907-916.
- Ahsan-Ur-Rehman, Khan, M. I., & Waheed, Z. (2019). School Heads' Perceptions about Their Leadership Styles.
- AIDP, & GoZ. (2015). *Policy Brief: Accelerating Human Capital Development to Optimise Zambia's Chances of Harnessing the Demographic Dividend*. African Institute for Development Policy. The Government of Zambia. Retrieved from [www.zambia.unfpa.org](http://www.zambia.unfpa.org)
- Andende, N. (2016). Headteachers' Leadership Styles and Their Effects on Teachers' Morale in Selected Primary Schools of Zambezi District in the North-Western Province in Zambia.
- Ary, D, Jacob, L.C & Sorensen, C. (2010). *Introduction to Research in Education*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. USA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Barber, M., Whelan, F., & Clark, M. (2010). *Capturing the Leadership Premium: How the World's Top School Systems are building leadership capacity for the Future*. London: Mckinsey & Company. retrieved from [www.mckinsey.com](http://www.mckinsey.com).
- Benjamin, M. (2014). Staffing for Success: Linking Teacher Evaluation and School Personnel Management in Practice. *Sage Journals*, 36(2), 207-227. Retrieved from [journals.sagepub.com](http://journals.sagepub.com)
- Best, J.W; Kahn, J.V. (1989). *Research in Education* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). Englewood, Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall.
- Britwum, F., Adjei, E., Amoah, S. O., Djan, E. T., Acheampong, H. Y., Aidoo, S., & Sefah, E. A. (2022, March). Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Styles and Achievement of Students in the Colleges of Education. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 6(3).

- Bugyei, G., & Aidoo, D. A. (2022). The Impact of Leadership Styles on Teacher Motivation in the Mfantseman Municipality of Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 14(1). Retrieved from [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org)
- Burkhauser, S. (2016, Sept 21). How Much Do School Principals Matter When It Comes to Teacher Working Conditions? 39(1).
- C.C. Uchendu (2013). Organisational Behaviour and Leader's Work Performance in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 4(2), 288-292.
- Chafwa, F. (2012). Impact of Management Styles Exhibited by School Heads on Staff Performance in Selected Government High Schools in Kawambwa District of Luapula Province. Med. Dissertation. University of Zambia.
- Chen, D., Ning, B., & Bos, W. (2022). Relationship between Principal Leadership Style and Student Achievement: A Comparative Study between Germany and China. *Sage*, 1-18.
- Chepkonga, M. T., Ogoti, E., Jepkoech, T., & Momanyi, M. (2015). Influence of Head Teachers' Democratic Leadership Style on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary . *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*.
- Chibomba, S.M, (2023). Environmental Factors Affecting the Performance of Teachers in Public Schools in Zambia: The case of Secondary Schools in Lusaka District.
- Chunda, R. (2022). The Effect Of Leadership Styles Of Headteachers On The Learner's Academic Performance In Selected Public Secondary Schools Of Mpika District. Lusaka: The University of Zambia. doi:<http://dspace.unza.zm/handle/123456789/7862>
- Christopher Banda (2016). An Assessment of Teachers' Competences in Career Guidance in Selected Schools in Solwezi District Zambia.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. USA: 4th Edition, SAGE Publication, Inc.
- Dawson, C. (2009). *Introduction to Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Anyone Undertaking a Research Project, 4th Edition*. UK: How To Content.

- Day, C., & Sammons, P. (2016). *Successful School Leadership*: Education Development Trust.
- Dirk Van Dierendonck (2011). Servant Leadership: A Review and Synthesis. *Journal of Management* 37(4), 1228-1261.
- Edeh Friday Ogbu, Ikechukwu Dialoke (2018). Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance of Selected Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Journal on Leadership* 6(2).
- Elger, D. (2007). Theory of Performance.
- Elli Masnawati, Didit Darmawan (2022). School Organisational Effectiveness; Educational Leadership Strategies in Resource Management and Teacher Performance Evaluation. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering and Technology* 2(1), 43-51
- Farooq, F., Mahmood, A., & Iqbal, J. (2022, december). Ensuring Students' Academic Achievements: A Case Study Examining Headteachers' Leadership Styles. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 4(4).
- Flick, U (2006). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. SAGE, London.
- Fraenkel, J.R, Wallen, N.E, & Hyun, H.H (2012). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York, NY 10020: The McGraw-Hill Companies. Inc.
- Gakenia, C., Katuse, P., & Kiriri, P. (2017, July). Influence of Strategic Leadership Style on Academic Performance of National Schools in Kenya. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 19(7), 9-24.
- Geraki, A. (2014). Roles and Skills Comparison among Principals in Greek schools: Application of Competing Values Framework. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 42(4), 45-64.
- Gift, M. (2022). Impacts of Principal Leadership Practice on Students' Academic Performance in Zambia.
- Gift Muyunda (2022). Continuous Professional Development: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers in Zambia. *Electronic Journal of Education, Social economics and Technology* 3(1), 1-7.

- Godwin, M., & Kabeta, R. M. (2015). The Effects of Headteachers' Leadership Styles on the Teacher Performance in Selected Mission and Public Secondary Schools of Muchinga Province Zambia.
- Jason A Grissom, Sean Nicholson-Crotty, James R Harrington (2014) Estimating the Effects of No Child left behind on Teachers' Work Environment and Job Attitudes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 36(4),417-436.
- Johnson, B & Turner, L.A (2003). *Data Collection Strategies in Mixed Methods*. In a Tashakkori & C. Teddie (Eds) *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behaviour Research* (pp 297-319). Thousand oaks, CA. SAGE.
- Gyasi, R. S., Xi, W. B., & Owusu-Ampomah, Y. (2016). The Effect of Leadership Styles on Learners' Performance. The Case of Asonomaso Nkwanta in the Kwabre District Assembly of Ashanti Region in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(29), 8-17.
- Howard, S. M., & Knight, D. (2022). Analyzing the Impact of Leadership Styles on Student Achievement in Alabama's Rural High Schools. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership*, 65-91.
- Ibrahim, A. H., & Orodho, J. A. (2014). Strategies Applied by the Board of Management to Enhance Students Academic Performance in National Examinations in Secondary Schools in Mandera County, Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*.
- Igwe, N. N., Ndidiamaka, O., & Chidi, A. F. (2017, Aug). Principals Leadership Styles and Students' Academic Performance in Enugu Metropolis: A Comparative Survey of Public and Mission Secondary Schools. *Archives of Business Research*, 5(8).
- IY Rashid, GH Shirima. Rural Based Primary School Teachers' Inculcated Servant Leadership Skills and Their Enhanced Capacity of Addressing Rural Education Challenges Through Edu-Heroes Initiative in Tanzania. *Taylor & Francis*.
- Jama, I. A. (2023). The Effect of School Leadership on Student's Academic Achievement: Case Study Bosaso Secondary Schools in Puntland. *Journal Evaluation in Education*, 36-39.
- Kabatesi, J. (2016). Leadership styles and students' academic performance in selected secondary schools a case study of Gasabo district Kigali, Rwanda. Kigali.

- Kambambovu, M. E. (2018). Assessment of Leadership Styles with Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools: A Case of Tabora Municipality. Dar es Salaam: The Open University of Tanzania.
- Kanchele, W. (2021). Influence of Headteachers' Leadership Styles on Learner Academic Performance in Selected Secondary Schools in Munyinga District of North Western Province, Zambia.
- Kapela, F. E., Kopoka, P., & Namusonge, G. (2021, March). The Contribution of Leadership Styles to Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Tanzania. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 10(3).
- Karim Ismail Mfangavo (2015). The influence of Student's Enrolment on Effective Utilisation of Available Teaching/learning Resources in the Community Secondary Schools: The Case of Arusha City Council.
- Kochchar S.K (2011). *School Administration and Management*. Sterling Publishers Pvt, Ltd.
- Litz, D., Juma, Q. A., & Carroll, K. S. (2017). School leadership styles among Educators in Abu Dhabi. *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development*, 18(2), 81-99.
- Lucia Lomba-Portela, Sara Dominguez-Lloria, Margarita Rosa Pino-Juste (2022). Resistance to Educational Change; Teachers' Perception. *Education Science* 12(5), 359.
- Luke, M. K., & Osoro, A. (2019, May). Leadership Styles of Headteachers and Their Impact on Students' Academic Performance in all Public Schools In Kenya a Case of Bungoma County. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 9(5).
- Makgato, M., & Mudzanani, N. N. (2018). Exploring School Principals' Leadership Styles and Learners' Educational Performance: A Perspective from High- and Low-Performing Schools.
- Maluma P, Banja M. K (2019). Factors Affecting Pupil Academic Performance at Grade 12 level of Selected Grant-aided Secondary Schools in Zambia. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Science Education*.

- Matthews Mulonga, Charity Meki-Kombe, Rachel Mabuku-Kabeta (2024). Management Practice and Leadership Styles of Female Headteachers in High Performing Secondary Schools in Kabwe Urban, Zambia.
- Mbera, P. G. (2015, July). Relationship between Leadership Styles Used by Headteachers of Public Secondary Schools and Students' Academic Performance. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 5(7), 226-239.
- Mbobola, A. (2014). A Comparative Study of the Effects of the Effectiveness of Trained Management Headteachers with those Untrained: A study of selected schools of Chongwe District.
- Mee, J. C. (2020). Leadership and Student Outcomes: A case study of a High-performing and Low-performing Secondary School in Klang Valley, Malaysia.
- Mengesha, T., & Tessema, T. (2019). Eritrean Education System: A Critical Analysis and Future Research Directions. *International Journal of Education*.
- MOE. (2022). *Educational Statistical Bulletin*. Lusaka: Ministry of Education.
- Msoffe, J. I. (2017). The Impact of Leadership Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Mwanza District, Tanzania.
- Muga, O. P., Onyango, A. G., & Jackline, N. (2017). Leadership Styles Practiced By Principals In Public Secondary Schools In Siaya, Kisumu, and Kajiado Counties, Kenya. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 3(9).
- Mugenda, O.M & Mugenda, A.G (2003). *Research Methods, Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*, ACT, Nairobi.
- Mumba, C. (2022). Headteachers' Leadership Practices and Their Effects on Teacher Performance in Selected Schools of Lusaka District in Zambia.
- Musyoka C & Dr Keguro O.H. (2023). What is the Role of Product Innovation and Performance of Public University in Kenya. *International Journal of Research in Education Humanities and Commerce Vol 4*. ISSN 2563-0333.

- Mwape, K. (2013). A Survey of Head Teacher's Leadership and their Effects on School Climate in Selected Schools in Northern Province. M.Ed. Dissertation. Lusaka: University of Zambia.
- Naseer A. Salfi (2011). Successful Leadership Practices of Headteacher for School Improvement: Some Evidence from Pakistan. *Journal of Education Administration* 49(4),414-432.
- Ngoma, C., & Chirwa, M. (2018). Urbanisation and Socioeconomic Development in Lusaka.
- Nicholas Ngozi Igwe, P., M, O. N., & Chidi, P. A. (2017). Principals Leadership Styles and Students' Academic Performance in Enugu Metropolis: A Comparative Survey of Public and Mission Secondary Schools. *Archives of Business Research*.
- Njogu, I. N. (2022, June). Leadership Styles Of Female And Male Public Secondary School Principals And Their Relationship to Students' Academic Performance In Selected Counties In Kenya. Nairobi: Kenyatta University.
- Nwajiaku, K. O., Cheah, K. S., & Sakiru, O. K. (2022). Impact of Principal Leadership Styles on the Effectiveness of Schools: A Revisiting Review of the Literature. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 34(4), 59-68.
- Obama, M. O., Akinyi, L. E., & Orodho, J. A. (2016). Principals' Leadership Style and Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in HomaBay County, Kenya. Rongo University. doi:<http://repository.rongovarsity.ac.ke/handle/123456789/666>
- Onesmo Amos, Peter Siamoo, Even Ogoti (2022). Influence of Delegation of Responsibility in Participative Leadership Style on Improving the Quality of Education in Public Secondary Schools in Arusha Region, Tanzania. *British Journal of Education*, 10(7), 1-19.
- Osagie, R. O., & Momoh, U. (2016). Principals' Leadership and Student Performance in Senior Secondary Schools in Edo State, Nigeria. *Educational Planning*, 23(3), 17-28.
- Oyugi, M., & Gogo, J. O. (2019). Influence of Principals' Leadership Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Awendo Sub-County, Kenya. Maseno University. doi:<https://repository.maseno.ac.ke/handle/123456789/3112>
- Pandey, P & Pandey, M.M (2015). *Research Methodology: Tools*. Romania; Bridge Centre.

- Paul, H. J., & Toyin, A. O. (2017, April). Investigation on the Influence of Leadership Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Selected Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Gasabo District, Kigali, Rwanda. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 7(2), 18-26. Retrieved from [www.iosrjournals.org](http://www.iosrjournals.org)
- Paul Kakupa (2015). Exploring School Effectiveness in Challenging Contexts: A study of Selected Day Secondary Schools in the Western Province of Zambia.
- Paul, M. H., & Toyin, M. O. (2017). Investigation on the Influence of Leadership Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Selected Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Gasabo District, Kigali, Rwanda. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 18-26.
- Peter Amei, E Piliyesi & J, Anyona (2020). Principals' Instructional Supervisory Role on Student Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools of North Pokot Sub County, Kenya. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*, 4(10), 92-113.
- Phiri, E. (2022). Influence Of Head Teachers' Leadership Styles On Pupils' Academic Performance In Selected Public And Grant Aided Secondary Schools In Eastern Province Of Zambia. Lusaka: The University of Zambia. doi:<http://dspace.unza.zm/handle/123456789/7874>
- Qiuyan, H. (2022, September). The Crucial Impact of Leadership Style Towards Academic Achievement in China. *Journal of Digitainability, Realism & Mastery*, 1(4), 69-79.
- Ratego, S. (2015). Influence of Secondary School Principals' Leadership Styles on Students' Performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in Gatundu North Sub County, Kenya. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Richard, M. (2022, January). Leadership Styles Of School Heads And Their Relationship To School Performance. *Global Scientific Journals*, 10(1).
- Robert N. Lussier, P., & Achua, DBA, C. F. (2010). *Leadership Theory, Application, & Skill Development* (4th ed.). South-western: South-Western CENGAGE Learning.
- Robinson, T. (2010). Examining the Impact of Leadership Style and School Climate on Student Achievement. Virginia.

- Robinson, T. (2010). Examining the Impact of Leadership Style and School Climate on Student Achievement. Old Dominion University.
- Shuttleworth, M (2008). Case Study Research Design, <http://explorable.com/casestudy-research-design>.
- Simunza, I. (2021). Headteachers' Management Styles in Presiding Over Administrative Issues: A Case in Selected Public Schools of Lusaka.
- Sompa, M. (2015). Management Strategies of Interpersonal Conflicts between Teachers and Headteachers in Selected Secondary Schools of Lusaka Province of Zambia.
- Surya, W., & Yunus, J. (2012). Principal Leadership Styles in High-Academic Performance of Selected Secondary School in Kelantan Darul Naim.
- Wilfred M Kimeu (2016). Influence of Principal's Leadership Strategies on Students' Performance of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in Public Day Secondary Schools, Mutitu Sub-County -Kitui, Kenya.
- Yahya, S. A. (2015). Leadership Styles, Types and Students' Academic Achievement In Nigeria. Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
- Yolande Miller-Grandvaux & Karki Yoder (2002). A Literature Review of Community Schools in Africa. USAID, Bureau for Africa, Office of Sustainable Development.
- Yumba, A. (2022). Military Headteachers' Leadership Styles and Their Implications for Teacher Motivation and Pupil Performance in Selected Army-Aided Schools of Lusaka District. University of Zambia.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR THE HEADTEACHERS

#### Preamble

This research is meant for academic purposes. It will try to investigate the leadership styles of the school heads and their impacts on academic disparities. Kindly answer these questions as honestly and precisely as possible. Responses to these questions will be treated as confidential.

#### Kindly answer the following question.

1. Gender
2. i) Which leadership style do you use frequently?  
b) Have you noticed any specific leadership styles that have contributed to the success of students' academic performance? If yes, how often are you using it?
4. i) How well is the level of awareness and understanding of the school's vision and strategic plans for teachers and students?  
ii) How do you ensure that the school's vision and strategic plans are effectively communicated and understood by all members of the school community and that their efforts align with the goals and objectives of the school?  
iii) Do you involve deputy headteachers, teachers, and students in the decision-making process to create a shared vision and ownership of academic success? If so, how often?
3. Do you receive directives from the MOE on how to improve academic performance disparities? If yes, how often do you involve teachers and students in achieving those directives?
4. What strategies do you use to motivate and engage the teaching staff in implementing the MOE agendas and directives?
5. How do you seek feedback from the teaching staff regarding their understanding and alignment with the MOE agendas and directives?
6. Do you encourage the delegation of tasks at different levels? If yes, what strategies or programs do you employ to ensure that teachers receive ongoing professional development and support?
7. Do you meet with the deputy headteacher and teachers to discuss students' academic performance progress? If yes, how often?

8. How do you motivate your teachers and students to continue working hard for the success of the school?
9. How do you manage the resources given by the Government in your school?
10. Are there any specific initiatives or programs you have implemented in your school to address academic performance disparities? If so, can you mention those programs, what challenges you encountered and how did you overcome them?
11. How does the school track and monitor students' academic performance? How often?
12. How does the school address any student performance disparities identified through assessments?

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR THE DEPUTY HEADTEACHERS**

### **Preamble**

This research is meant for academic purposes. It will try to investigate the leadership styles of the school heads and their impacts on academic disparities. Kindly answer these questions as honestly and precisely as possible. Responses to these questions will be treated as confidential.

### **Kindly answer the following questions:**

1. Gender
2. i) How often are you monitoring and evaluating teaching methods?  
ii) How do you assess and monitor the teaching methods used by the teachers in your school?  
iii) Which criteria do you use to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods of your teachers?  
iv) How do you provide feedback to teachers based on your assessment of their teaching methods?  
v) In your opinion what are the key challenges in monitoring and improving teaching methods?
5. What steps do you take to ensure that the goals and objectives set by the headteacher are effectively communicated and implemented among the teaching staff?
6. i) How often does the headteacher discuss with you the MOE agendas and directives?  
ii) How do you ensure that the agendas and directiveness from the MOE are effectively communicated to the teaching staff?
7. i) Do you get involved in the decision-making by the headteachers? If yes, how often?  
ii) How do you and the headteacher handle disagreement/conflicts in decision-making?
8. i) How do you ensure that students from diverse academic backgrounds have equal access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and enrichment programs?  
ii) How do you ensure that students and teachers are engaged and motivated to achieve academic success?
9. How do you ensure that resources are allocated fairly and equitably among all students and teachers?
10. Do you believe in the delegation of duties and responsibilities to teachers? If yes, how do you allocate teaching assignments and responsibilities to teachers?

11. Is there ongoing professional development for your teachers? If yes, which criteria you are using to select teaching staff to receive ongoing professional development and training?
12. How does the headteacher support you in your role?
13. How would you describe the overall relations and cooperation between you and the headteacher?
14. Can you provide an example of recent initiatives where you and the headteacher worked closely together to improve academic performance disparities?

## APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE TEACHERS

### Preliminaries

This research is meant for academic purposes and intends to determine the relationship between head teachers' leadership styles and school academic performance. Kindly answer these questions as honestly and precisely as possible. Responses to these questions will be treated as confidential.

1. Are you aware of the school's vision and strategic plans?

Yes

No

ii) On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the effectiveness of the headteacher in communicating the school's vision and goals to the staff? (1 being ineffective, 5 being highly effective) .....

iii) Can you provide an example of how the headteacher communicates the school's vision and goals to the staff? .....

2. How often do you have meetings with the school head about academic performance?

Rarely or never

Occasionally

Monthly

Weekly

Daily

3. Does the school head involve you in decision-making processes to create a shared vision and ownership of academic success?

Yes

No

If yes, how often are you involved in decision-making?

Extensively

Minimally

Moderately

Not at all

4. How would you rate the level of the heads of school involvement in the academic performance of the students in your school?

High

Moderate

Low

5. How often does the school head support your growth and development as a teacher?

Rarely or never

Occasionally

Monthly

Weekly

Daily

6. In your opinion, are there any conflicts/challenges in addressing academic performance disparities in the school? If yes, please describe. ....

7. How would you rate the level of school leadership in effectively communicating academic goals and expectations to teachers?

High

Moderate

Low

8. How do you encourage students to take an active role in their education and strive for academic improvement? .....

9. How do you assess students' academic progress and identify areas where they may need additional support? .....

12. Do you feel that the school provides sufficient resources and support to help students achieve their academic potential?

Yes

No

If no, could you advise and suggest the best way the allocations of the resources could be done for effective teaching methods? .....

10. Are there any extracurricular programs/support services provided by the school to enhance students' learning experiences?

Yes

No

If yes, could you please list them .....

11. How would you rate the overall support provided by the school administration in terms of helping you manage your workload and resources?

- Very supportive
- Supportive
- Neutral
- Not very supportive
- Not at all supportive

12. To what extent does the headteacher support the well-being and morale of teachers?

- Strongly supports
- Moderately supports
- Slightly supports
- Does not support

13. How would you rate the level of collaboration and teamwork promoted by the headteacher among teachers? (1 being very low, 5 being very high) .....

14. What are the teaching methods you are using to remove the gap between students with low and high-performing academic performance? .....

15. What unique things school heads are doing different from heads of the other schools either to the teachers or students that facilitate high academic performance? .....



## APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE STUDENTS

### Preliminaries

This research is meant for academic purposes and intends to determine the relationship between head teachers' leadership styles and school academic performance. Kindly answer these questions as honestly and precisely as possible. Responses to these questions will be treated as confidential.

1. Do you know the school has goals and objectives that have been made for academic performance?

Yes

No

If not, how do you think knowing these objectives and goals could improve your academic performance?

Positive results

Negative results

No impacts

2. Do you feel that you are involved in decision-making at the school, such as setting academic goals or planning activities?

Yes

No

3. How often do you feel motivated to learn at school?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

4. Do you receive additional support (eg. counseling, special education) to improve academic performance?

Yes

No

5. How would you rate the availability of books and study materials provided by the school for your studies?

Excellent

- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very poor

6. Do you face challenges in your studies due to access to books or study materials?

- Yes
- No

7. How do you rate the overall learning environment in your school?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very poor

8. How do you describe the teaching methods used by your teachers?

- Very effective ( I understood well)
- Normal (Sometimes I understood sometimes not)
- Ineffective ( I don't understand teachers)

9. Are there any teaching methods that you feel are not good for your learning?

- Yes
- No

**APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM**

**The University of Zambia, School of Education Dept of EPSSE**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**REF: REQUEST FOR CONSENT AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I am Kibwana Sultan, a student at The University of Zambia pursuing a Master of Education in Educational Administration and Management. I am requesting you to take part in my research as a participant. The research is about; "Leadership Styles and Their Impact on Academic Disparities: A Comparative Study in High and Underperforming Public Schools Lusaka, Zambia". Your participation is going to help me come up with information regarding the matter mentioned above. Be assured that the information you will share with me remains confidential and only for academic purposes. Your consent to this request will go a long way.

Yours Faithfully,

..... Kibwana Sultan – Researcher/Student

**Consent by participant**

Having read or heard the information concerning this research, I hereby consent by virtue of office/position/parent to be one of the participants. In this regard, I reserve the right not to answer particular questions if necessary.

Name: .....

Sign: .....

Date: .....

## APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



### THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES

---

Great East Road Campus | P.O. Box 32379 | Lusaka10101 | Tel: +260-211-290 258/291  
777 Fax: (+260)-211-290 258/253 952 | E-mail: [director.drgs@unza.zm](mailto:director.drgs@unza.zm) | Website:  
[www.unza.zm](http://www.unza.zm)

### APPROVAL OF STUDY

***IORG No. 0005376***

***HSSREC IRB No. 00006464***

**REF NO. HSSREC-2023-AUG-009**

28<sup>th</sup> August, 2023

Mr Kibwana Sultan

The University of Zambia

P.O. Box 32379

**LUSAKA**

Dear Mr Kibwana

**RE: “INVESTIGATING LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC  
DISPARITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN HIGH AND  
UNDERPERFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA”**

Reference is made to your submission of the protocol captioned above.

The HSSREC resolved to approve this study and your participation as Principal Investigator for a period of one year.

Specific conditions will apply to this approval. As Principal Investigator it is your responsibility to ensure that the contents of this letter are adhered to. If these are not adhered to, the approval may be suspended. Should the study be suspended, study sponsors and other regulatory authorities will be informed.

<b>REVIEW TYPE</b>	<b>ORDINARY REVIEW</b>	<b>APPROVAL NO. HSSREC-2023-AUG-009</b>
Approval and Expiry Date	Approval Date: 28 <sup>th</sup> August, 2023	Expiry Date: 27 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024
Protocol Version and Date	Version - Nil.	27 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024
Information Sheet, Consent Forms and Dates	<input type="checkbox"/> English.	To be provided
Consent form ID and Date	Version - Nil	To be provided
Recruitment Materials	Nil	Nil
Other Study Documents	- Questionnaire - Interview Guide	
Number of Participants Approved for Study		

## **Conditions of Approval**

- No participant may be involved in any study procedure prior to the study approval or after the expiration date.
- All unanticipated or Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) must be reported to HSSREC within 5 days.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by HSSREC prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address.
- All protocol deviations must be reported to HSSREC within 5 working days.
- All recruitment materials must be approved by HSSREC prior to being used.
- Principal investigators are responsible for initiating Continuing Review proceedings. HSSREC will only approve a study for a period of 12 months.
- It is the responsibility of the PI to renew his/her ethics approval through a renewal application to HSSREC.
- Where the PI desires to extend the study after expiry of the study period, documents for study extension must be received by HSSREC at least 30 days before the expiry date. This is for the purpose of facilitating the review process. Documents received within 30 days after expiry will be labelled “late submissions” and will incur a penalty fee of K500.00. No study shall be renewed whose documents are submitted for renewal 30 days after expiry of the certificate.

- Every 6 (six) months a progress report form supplied by The University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee as an IRB must be filled in and submitted to us. There is a penalty of K500.00 for failure to submit the report.
- When closing a project, the PI is responsible for notifying, in writing or using the Research Ethics and Management Online (REMO), both HSSREC and the National Health Research Authority (NHRA) when ethics certification is no longer required for a project.
- In order to close an approved study, a Closing Report must be submitted in writing or through the REMO system. A Closing Report should be filed when data collection has ended and the study team will no longer be using human participants or animals or secondary data or have any direct or indirect contact with the research participants or animals for the study.
- Filing a closing report (rather than just letting your approval lapse) is important as it assists HSSREC in efficiently tracking and reporting on projects. Note that some funding agencies and sponsors require a notice of closure from the IRB which had approved the study and can only be generated after the Closing Report has been filed.
- A reprint of this letter shall be done at a fee.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by HSSREC by way of an application for an amendment prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk (but must still be reported for approval). Modifications will include any change of investigator/s or site address or methodology and methods. Many modifications entail minimal risk adjustments to a protocol and/or consent form and can be made on an Expedited basis (via the IRB Chair). Some examples are: format changes, correcting spelling errors, adding key personnel, minor changes to questionnaires, recruiting and changes, and so forth. Other, more substantive changes, especially those that may alter the risk-benefit ratio, may require Full Board review. In all cases, except where noted above regarding subject safety, any changes to any protocol document or procedure must first be approved by HSSREC before they can be implemented.

Should you have any questions regarding anything indicated in this letter, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at the above indicated address.

On behalf of HSSREC, we would like to wish you all the success as you carry out your study.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. J.I. Ziwa

**DR. J. I. Ziwa**

**CHAIRPERSON**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA HUMANITIES AND**

**SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE - IRB**

cc: Director, Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies

Assistant Director (Research), Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies

Assistant Registrar (Research), Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies

All correspondence should be addressed  
to the District Education Board Secretary

Telephone: 0211-240250/240249/955 623749  
E-mail: desbsisk@yahoo.co.uk



*In reply please quote*

**DEBS/LSK/101/1/29**

**REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

**DISTRICT EDUCATION BOARD SECRETARY  
P.O. BOX 50297  
LUSAKA**

12<sup>th</sup> October, 2023

The Headteacher

.....School  
**LUSAKA**

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON  
INVESTIGATING LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR IMPACT ON  
ACADEMIC DISPARITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN HIGH SCHOOLS  
AND UNDERPERFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA**

I am pleased to forward to you self-explanatory minutes from the Provincial Education Officer dated 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2023 informing you of your research project in all students of Zambia.

I am pleased to inform you that permission has been granted for you to conduct a research in Public schools in your District.

Kindly welcome him and give him all the necessary support accordingly and that the learners are not disturbed.

  
Ian Miyoba (Mr.)  
**DISTRICT EDUCATION BOARD SECRETARY  
LUSAKA DISTRICT**