

The Influence Of School Management Styles On Students' Performance In Secondary Schools In Kabarole District

Okuel Isaac¹, Dr. Sekiswa Peter²

1, 2 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

The quality of school leadership and management is widely regarded as one of the most significant school-level factors influencing students' academic performance, yet secondary schools within the same district often exhibit markedly different performance outcomes despite operating under similar policy, curriculum, and resource conditions, a disparity frequently attributed to differences in the management styles employed by head teachers. This study examined the influence of school management styles on students' performance in secondary schools in Kabarole District, guided by objectives that sought to establish the management styles predominantly employed by head teachers, assess the level of students' academic performance across sampled schools, determine the relationship between specific management styles (autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire) and students' performance, and identify other school-level factors that mediate this relationship. A descriptive correlational research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted, with data collected from a sample of 156 respondents comprising head teachers, teachers, and students drawn from twelve secondary schools, using questionnaires, interviews, and analysis of official examination performance records. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and path analysis (AMOS). Results showed that the democratic management style was the most prevalent (mean = 3.87) and was significantly and positively correlated with students' performance ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), while the autocratic style was significantly negatively correlated with performance ($r = -0.487$, $p < 0.01$); the laissez-faire style showed a weak, non-significant correlation ($r = -0.142$, $p > 0.05$). Regression analysis showed that management style dimensions jointly explained 46.8 percent of the variance in students' performance ($R^2 = 0.468$). Path analysis revealed that teacher motivation significantly mediates the relationship between democratic management style and students' performance, with a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$) alongside a significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.334$, $p < 0.01$), yielding a total effect of 0.613. The study concludes that management style, particularly the democratic approach, exerts a substantial influence on students' performance, operating both directly and through its effect on teacher motivation, and recommends leadership training for head teachers emphasizing participatory management, deliberate strategies to enhance teacher motivation, and closer monitoring of management practices by the district education office.

Keywords: School management styles, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, students' performance, teacher motivation, secondary schools, path analysis, Kabarole District

Introduction

The performance of students in secondary schools has long been a subject of intense interest to educational researchers, policymakers, parents, and communities, given its far-reaching implications for individual life chances, national

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

human capital development, and broader socioeconomic progress (Julius & Desire, 2025). Among the many factors that have been identified as influencing students' academic performance, including individual student characteristics, family background, availability of instructional resources, and the quality of teaching, the management style employed by school head teachers has increasingly been recognized as a critical, though sometimes underappreciated, determinant of overall school effectiveness (Julius & Nancy, 2026b). School management style refers to the characteristic manner in which a head teacher exercises authority, makes decisions, communicates with staff and students, and coordinates the various activities and resources of the school in pursuit of its educational objectives, and educational leadership scholarship has traditionally classified such styles along a continuum ranging from autocratic, where decision-making authority is concentrated in the hands of the head teacher with minimal staff or student input, through democratic, where decision-making is participatory and staff are actively involved in shaping school policies and practices, to laissez-faire, where the head teacher adopts a largely hands-off approach and delegates substantial autonomy to staff with limited direct oversight (Nelson, 2024). In Uganda's decentralized education system, secondary school head teachers exercise considerable discretion over the day-to-day management of their institutions, including staff supervision, allocation of teaching resources, discipline management, and the general school climate, all of which are shaped significantly by the management style they adopt, making the study of this relationship particularly relevant within the Ugandan secondary education context (Julius et al., 2026).

Kabarole District, located in the Rwenzori sub-region of Western Uganda, is home to a mix of government-aided and privately owned secondary schools that, despite operating under a common national curriculum and similar examination requirements set by the Uganda National Examinations Board, exhibit considerable variation in their annual Uganda Certificate of Education and Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education performance outcomes, a pattern that has prompted concern among district education officials, parents, and school inspectors regarding the underlying causes of this disparity (Julius & Audrey, 2025). While differences in resource endowment and student intake characteristics undoubtedly contribute to this variation, education officials within the district have increasingly pointed to differences in head teachers' management styles as a significant, and potentially more actionable, contributing factor, given that management style, unlike resource endowment or student background, is a variable that can in principle be influenced through targeted leadership training and support (Julius & Audrey, 2025). This study is therefore motivated by the need to move beyond anecdotal observation and generate rigorous, context-specific empirical evidence on the extent to which different school management styles employed by head teachers in Kabarole District are associated with variation in students' academic performance, with a view to informing more effective school leadership development interventions within the district and comparable settings in Uganda.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the Ministry of Education and Sports' considerable investment in curriculum development, teacher training, and the provision of instructional materials to secondary schools across Uganda, students' performance in national examinations in Kabarole District has remained persistently uneven across schools, with some institutions consistently

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

producing strong results while others, operating under seemingly comparable resource and policy conditions, continue to register poor and often declining performance, a pattern that has raised concern among the District Education Office regarding the adequacy of current school leadership practices (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Preliminary observations and reports from school inspectors within the district suggest that this disparity may be closely linked to differences in the management styles adopted by head teachers, with some schools reportedly characterized by rigid, top-down decision-making that limits teacher initiative and morale, others by more participatory and consultative approaches that appear to be associated with stronger staff commitment and school climate, and yet others by a notably hands-off leadership approach that has in some cases been linked to weak coordination and declining discipline (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). However, despite these observations, there is a scarcity of systematic, locally grounded empirical research within Kabarole District that rigorously establishes the specific nature and strength of the relationship between school management styles and students' academic performance, as well as the mechanisms, such as teacher motivation, through which this relationship may operate (Christopher et al., 2022). This evidentiary gap leaves district education officials, school governing bodies, and head teachers themselves without a clear, evidence-based rationale for prioritizing particular leadership development interventions, and it is this gap that the present study seeks to address by systematically investigating the influence of school management styles on students' performance in secondary schools within Kabarole District.

Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of school management styles on students' performance in secondary schools in Kabarole District.

Specific Objectives

The study is guided by the following specific objectives: to establish the school management styles predominantly employed by head teachers in secondary schools in Kabarole District; second, to assess the level of students' academic performance across the sampled secondary schools; to determine the relationship between specific management styles, namely autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire, and students' academic performance; and to examine the mediating role of teacher motivation in the relationship between school management style and students' academic performance, with a view to recommending measures for improving school leadership practice within the district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of this study draws primarily on Lewin, Lippitt, and White's classical leadership styles theory, which originally identified three distinct styles of leadership, namely autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire, based on the degree to which a leader centralizes or shares decision-making authority with subordinates, and which has since been extensively applied within educational leadership research to examine how head teachers' characteristic approaches to authority and decision-making shape school climate, staff behavior, and ultimately student outcomes (Bwire et al., 2020). This is complemented by Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics model and broader theories of employee motivation, which suggest that participatory management practices, such as those characteristic

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

of the democratic leadership style, tend to enhance employees' sense of autonomy, task significance, and psychological ownership of their work, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation, a mechanism that has been extended in educational leadership literature to explain how democratic head teacher practices may translate into higher teacher motivation and, subsequently, more effective teaching and improved student performance(Winny et al., 2023). Distributed leadership theory further offers a relevant lens for this study, emphasizing that effective school leadership is not the sole preserve of the head teacher but is distributed across multiple actors within the school community, suggesting that management styles which actively involve teachers and other stakeholders in decision-making, consistent with the democratic style, are more likely to harness this distributed leadership capacity than styles that concentrate authority narrowly(Christopher et al., 2022).

Empirical studies conducted across various educational contexts have generally found a positive association between participatory or democratic leadership styles and school performance outcomes(Isaac et al., 2023). Research conducted in Kenya and Tanzania on secondary school leadership has documented that head teachers who adopt consultative, participatory management approaches tend to preside over schools with higher staff morale, lower teacher turnover, and better examination performance compared to schools led by more autocratic head teachers, a pattern attributed to the positive effects of participatory management on teacher job satisfaction and commitment(Julius & Kazaara, 2026). Studies conducted within the Ugandan secondary education context have similarly found that schools whose head teachers involve teachers in decision-making regarding curriculum implementation, resource allocation, and student discipline tend to report stronger academic outcomes, while schools characterized by highly centralized, autocratic management have been associated with lower staff morale and, in some cases, higher rates of teacher absenteeism, both of which have documented negative effects on instructional quality and student performance(Julius & Nancy, 2026a). At the same time, some scholars have cautioned against an overly simplistic characterization of the laissez-faire style as uniformly detrimental, noting that in schools with highly experienced and self-directed teaching staff, a degree of managerial autonomy can be beneficial, though the same studies emphasize that in contexts with less experienced staff or weaker institutional systems, laissez-faire management is more commonly associated with poor coordination, inconsistent enforcement of school policies, and consequently weaker student outcomes. A smaller but growing body of literature has specifically examined the mediating role of teacher motivation in the relationship between management style and student performance, generally finding that management style does not affect student performance solely through direct administrative mechanisms such as resource allocation, but substantially through its effect on teachers' motivation and consequent instructional effort and commitment, a finding that provides the empirical basis for the mediation model examined in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive correlational research design, employing a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data, in order to comprehensively examine the relationship between

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

school management styles and students' academic performance within secondary schools in Kabarole District (Maiga et al., 2021). The target population comprised head teachers, teachers, and senior four and senior six students from government-aided and privately owned secondary schools within the district, and a sample of twelve secondary schools was purposively selected to ensure representation of schools with varying levels of academic performance based on recent Uganda National Examinations Board results, as well as a mix of government-aided and private ownership (Nafiu et al., 2017). From within these twelve schools, a total sample of 156 respondents was drawn, comprising 12 head teachers, 84 teachers, and 60 students, selected using a combination of purposive sampling for head teachers and stratified random sampling for teachers and students, proportionate to the size of each school's staff and student population (Abiodun Nafiu, 2012).

Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires administered to teachers and students, designed to capture perceptions of the prevailing management style within their school along the autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire dimensions, as well as teachers' self-reported levels of motivation, complemented by semi-structured interview guides used to conduct in-depth interviews with head teachers regarding their self-perceived management approach and their views on the challenges of school leadership within the district. Students' academic performance was measured using official Uganda Certificate of Education and Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education aggregate performance data obtained from each school's examination records for the three most recent examination cycles, providing an objective, non-self-reported measure of the study's outcome variable. The validity of the questionnaire instruments was established through expert review and pilot testing, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs returning coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.7. Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS version 26 using descriptive statistics to characterize the prevalence of different management styles, teacher motivation levels, and students' performance across sampled schools, and using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between management style dimensions and students' performance. A path model was further estimated in AMOS to test the hypothesized mediating role of teacher motivation in the relationship between democratic management style and students' performance, generating standardized path coefficients for direct and indirect effects (Muhamad et al., 2023). Qualitative data obtained from head teacher interviews were analyzed thematically and used to enrich and contextualize the quantitative findings. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant university and district education authorities prior to data collection, and informed consent was obtained from all adult respondents, with parental/guardian consent and student assent obtained for all student participants, and confidentiality of individual school and respondent identities was strictly maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS**6.1 Response Rate**

Of the 156 questionnaires administered, 148 were correctly filled and returned, giving a response rate of 94.9 percent, comprising 12 head teacher interviews, 80 teacher questionnaires, and 56 student questionnaires, all deemed adequate for analysis.

Descriptive Statistics**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents****Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 148)**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Category of respondent	Head teachers	12	8.1
	Teachers	80	54.1
	Students	56	37.8
School ownership	Government-aided	8	66.7 (of 12 schools)
	Private	4	33.3 (of 12 schools)
Head teacher's years of experience	Less than 5 years	3	25.0 (of 12 head teachers)
	5–10 years	5	41.7
	Above 10 years	4	33.3
Teachers' years of service at current school	Less than 3 years	22	27.5 (of 80 teachers)
	3–7 years	35	43.8
	Above 7 years	23	28.7

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Table 1 presented the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The findings showed that the respondents comprised head teachers, teachers, and students, providing perspectives from different levels of the school management and learning structure. Out of the 148 respondents, 12 (8.1%) were head teachers, 80 (54.1%) were teachers, and 56 (37.8%) were students. Teachers constituted the largest proportion of respondents, followed by students, while head teachers represented the smallest proportion. The relatively large proportion of teachers was appropriate because teachers were directly involved in implementing school management decisions, interacting with school leadership, motivating learners, and facilitating teaching and learning processes. Their responses therefore provided important evidence concerning the management styles practiced by head teachers and the extent to which such styles influenced teacher motivation and students' performance. The inclusion of students was also important because students were the primary beneficiaries of the teaching and management processes within schools, and their performance provided an important outcome through which the effectiveness of school management

could be assessed. The head teachers, although fewer in number, provided the management perspective regarding leadership practices and decision-making within the schools.

With regard to school ownership, the findings indicated that 8 (66.7%) of the 12 schools were government-aided, while 4 (33.3%) were private schools. This indicated that the study was predominantly represented by government-aided schools. The higher representation of government-aided schools provided an opportunity to assess management practices within institutions operating under public education structures, while the inclusion of private schools enabled the study to capture experiences from schools operating under a different administrative and organizational context. The distribution was therefore useful in generating a broader understanding of management styles and their relationship with teacher motivation and students' performance across different school ownership arrangements. However, since government-aided schools constituted two-thirds of the schools included in the study, the findings were likely to reflect more strongly the experiences and management conditions prevailing within government-aided schools.

Regarding head teachers' years of experience, the results showed that 3 (25.0%) of the 12 head teachers had less than five years of experience, 5 (41.7%) had between five and ten years of experience, while 4 (33.3%) had more than ten years of experience. This finding indicated that the majority of head teachers had substantial experience in school leadership, with 75.0% having served as head teachers for at least five years. Such experience was important because experienced head teachers were likely to have developed familiarity with school administration, staff management, decision-making processes, conflict resolution, and strategies for motivating teachers. The presence of head teachers with more than ten years of experience also suggested that the study captured views from highly experienced school leaders who had potentially observed changes in management practices and teacher performance over a considerable period. At the same time, the inclusion of head teachers with less than five years of experience allowed the study to capture perspectives from relatively newer school leaders who might have adopted different approaches to school management.

The findings further showed that teachers differed in their length of service at their current schools. Specifically, 22 (27.5%) of the 80 teachers had worked at their current schools for less than three years, 35 (43.8%) had served for between three and seven years, and 23 (28.7%) had worked at their current schools for more than seven years. The largest proportion of teachers had therefore served between three and seven years. Overall, 72.5% of teachers had

worked in their current schools for at least three years, suggesting that most respondents had sufficient experience with the management practices, working environment, and organizational culture of their respective schools. This was important because teachers with longer periods of service were more likely to have experienced and evaluated the leadership approaches of their head teachers over time. Consequently, their responses could provide meaningful information regarding how different management styles were associated with teacher motivation and school performance.

Descriptive Statistics for Study Constructs

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Management Styles, Teacher Motivation, and Students' Performance (5-point Likert scale, unless stated)

Construct	Indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Autocratic management style	Head teacher makes decisions without staff consultation	3.24	1.01	Moderate
	Overall autocratic index	3.05	0.93	Moderate
Democratic management style	Head teacher involves staff in decision-making	3.98	0.72	High
	Overall democratic index	3.87	0.76	High
Laissez-faire management style	Head teacher provides minimal supervision/direction	2.68	1.09	Moderate
	Overall laissez-faire index	2.61	1.02	Moderate
Teacher motivation	Overall teacher motivation index	3.71	0.80	High
Students' performance	Mean school aggregate score (standardized index, 0–100)	62.40	12.85	Moderate–High

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Table 2 presented descriptive statistics for the major study constructs, including autocratic management style, democratic management style, laissez-faire management style, teacher motivation, and students' performance. The findings provided an indication of the extent to which different management styles were practiced in the schools and the prevailing levels of teacher motivation and students' academic performance. The interpretation was based on the five-point Likert scale for the management and teacher motivation measures, while students' performance was measured using a standardized school aggregate score ranging from 0 to 100.

The findings regarding autocratic management style showed that the statement that the head teacher made decisions without consulting staff had a mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 1.01, which was interpreted as moderate.

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

Similarly, the overall autocratic management index had a mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.93, also indicating a moderate level of autocratic management. These findings suggested that autocratic practices existed within the schools, but they were not the dominant management approach. The moderate mean implied that respondents experienced situations in which head teachers made decisions with limited staff consultation, although such practices were not consistently or overwhelmingly prevalent. The standard deviation of 0.93 further indicated a moderate degree of variation in respondents' perceptions, suggesting that experiences of autocratic leadership differed across respondents and possibly across schools. The findings therefore indicated that while some head teachers exercised centralized decision-making authority, autocratic leadership was not the predominant management style reported in the study.

In contrast, the findings indicated that democratic management style was highly practiced in the schools. The indicator stating that the head teacher involved staff in decision-making recorded a mean of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 0.72, which was interpreted as high. The overall democratic management index also recorded a high mean of 3.87 with a standard deviation of 0.76. These findings demonstrated that staff participation, consultation, and involvement in decision-making constituted a relatively prominent feature of school management. The high mean suggested that teachers generally perceived their head teachers as involving them in decisions affecting school operations. The relatively low standard deviation further suggested a considerable degree of consistency in respondents' perceptions of democratic management. The dominance of democratic management over autocratic management was particularly important because participatory leadership can create opportunities for teachers to contribute ideas, feel valued within the institution, and participate in decisions that affect their professional responsibilities. The finding therefore suggested that the schools generally adopted a participatory rather than purely centralized approach to management.

The results concerning laissez-faire management style indicated that this approach was practiced at a moderate level. The statement that the head teacher provided minimal supervision or direction had a mean score of 2.68 and a standard deviation of 1.09, while the overall laissez-faire management index recorded a mean of 2.61 and a standard deviation of 1.02. Both measures were interpreted as moderate. This suggested that head teachers generally provided some level of supervision and direction, although there were instances where teachers may have been given considerable autonomy in carrying out their responsibilities. The relatively high standard deviations indicated that perceptions of laissez-faire management varied more substantially among respondents compared with democratic management. This variation could imply that some schools or individual head teachers allowed teachers greater independence, while others maintained closer supervision. The moderate level also suggested that laissez-faire leadership was present but was not the dominant management approach in the schools under investigation.

The findings on teacher motivation showed a relatively high level of motivation, with an overall mean score of 3.71 and a standard deviation of 0.80. This finding suggested that teachers generally demonstrated positive levels of

motivation within their schools. A mean above the midpoint of the five-point scale indicated that respondents tended to agree with statements reflecting positive teacher motivation. The standard deviation of 0.80 suggested moderate variation in teachers' responses, meaning that although motivation was generally high, the experience was not completely uniform across all teachers. The relatively high level of teacher motivation was particularly noteworthy given that the study examined management styles as potential influences on teacher motivation. The finding suggested that the prevailing management environment, particularly the relatively high level of democratic management, may have provided conditions that supported teacher involvement, recognition, participation, and commitment to school responsibilities. Nevertheless, descriptive statistics alone did not establish causality; the actual contribution of each management style to teacher motivation would require further inferential analysis.

Finally, students' performance recorded a mean standardized school aggregate score of 62.40 with a standard deviation of 12.85 on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. This result was interpreted as moderate to high performance. The mean score indicated that, on average, schools attained a performance level slightly above the midpoint of the standardized scale. However, the relatively large standard deviation of 12.85 demonstrated substantial variation in performance across schools. This implied that while some schools achieved considerably higher aggregate scores, others performed below the overall mean. Such variation was important because it suggested that school-level factors, including management practices, teacher motivation, teaching conditions, learner characteristics, and institutional resources, may have differed across the schools and potentially contributed to differences in academic outcomes. The moderate-to-high performance level therefore indicated that the schools were generally achieving reasonable academic outcomes, although there remained room for improvement.

Inferential Statistics

Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Autocratic style	1.000				
2. Democratic style	-0.421**	1.000			
3. Laissez-faire style	0.187	-0.298*	1.000		
4. Teacher motivation	-0.456**	0.588**	-0.211	1.000	
5. Students' performance	-0.487**	0.612**	-0.142	0.601**	1.000

Note: *Correlation significant at 0.05 level; **significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), n = 148 (school-level indicators aggregated to individual respondent level).

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The correlation results show that the democratic management style is significantly and positively correlated with both teacher motivation ($r = 0.588$, $p < 0.01$) and students' performance ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), while the autocratic style is significantly and negatively correlated with teacher motivation ($r = -0.456$, $p < 0.01$) and students' performance ($r = -0.487$, $p < 0.01$) (Nelson et al., 2022). The laissez-faire style shows a weak, non-significant correlation with students' performance ($r = -0.142$, $p > 0.05$), though it is significantly negatively correlated with the democratic style ($r = -0.298$, $p < 0.05$).

6.3.2 Regression Analysis

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results — Dependent Variable: Students' Performance

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	48.116	4.201		11.453	0.000
Autocratic style	-3.812	1.204	-0.241	-3.166	0.002
Democratic style	6.945	1.318	0.401	5.270	0.000
Laissez-faire style	-0.892	1.109	-0.058	-0.804	0.423

Model summary: $R = 0.684$, $R^2 = 0.468$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.457$, $F(3, 144) = 42.19$, $p = 0.000$

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The overall regression model was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and explained 46.8 percent of the variance in students' performance ($R^2 = 0.468$), with the democratic style emerging as the strongest significant predictor ($\beta = 0.401$, $p < 0.001$), followed by the autocratic style, which had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.241$, $p < 0.01$), while the laissez-faire style did not retain statistical significance ($\beta = -0.058$, $p = 0.423$) once the other two styles were controlled for (Nelson et al., 2023).

6.4 Path Analysis (Structural Model)

A path model was estimated in AMOS to test the hypothesized mediating role of teacher motivation in the relationship between democratic management style and students' performance.

Table 5: Standardized Path Coefficients

Path	Standardized β	C.R. (t-value)	p-value	Decision
Democratic style $\rightarrow$ Teacher motivation	0.588	7.02	0.000	Significant
Teacher motivation $\rightarrow$ Students' performance	0.475	5.94	0.000	Significant
Democratic style $\rightarrow$ Students' performance (direct)	0.334	4.12	0.000	Significant
Democratic style $\rightarrow$ Teacher motivation $\rightarrow$ Performance (indirect)	0.279	—	0.001 (bootstrap)	Significant
Total effect (Democratic style $\rightarrow$ Students' performance)	0.613	—	0.000	Significant

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

Model fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 1.76$, GFI = 0.943, CFI = 0.961, RMSEA = 0.055 — acceptable model fit.

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The path analysis confirms that democratic management style influences students' performance both directly ($\beta = 0.334$) and indirectly through its effect on teacher motivation ($\beta = 0.279$), with teacher motivation functioning as a partial mediator; the total effect of democratic management style on students' performance ($\beta = 0.613$) is considerably larger than the direct effect alone, indicating that a substantial share of the benefit of democratic leadership for student outcomes is channeled through its positive effect on how motivated teachers feel in their work.

Qualitative Findings

Interviews with head teachers of the highest-performing schools in the sample consistently described deliberate efforts to involve teachers in curriculum planning, timetabling, and disciplinary decision-making, and several attributed strong staff retention and commitment directly to this participatory approach. In contrast, head teachers of schools with weaker examination performance more frequently described centralized decision-making structures, citing concerns about staff capacity or time constraints as reasons for limiting consultation, while two head teachers whose schools exhibited characteristics of the laissez-faire style acknowledged struggling with inconsistent enforcement of academic policies, a pattern that qualitative respondents linked to the weaker (though not statistically significant) performance association observed for this style in Table 3.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the theoretical expectation, grounded in Lewin, Lippitt, and White's leadership styles framework and subsequent motivation theory, that participatory, democratic management approaches are associated with more favorable school and student outcomes than centralized, autocratic approaches, as demonstrated by the significant positive correlation between democratic style and students' performance ($r = 0.612$, Table 3) and the significant negative correlation for the autocratic style ($r = -0.487$). The path coefficients in Table 5 add important explanatory depth to this relationship by showing that only 0.334 of the total 0.613 effect of democratic management style on students' performance operates directly, with the remaining 0.279 transmitted indirectly through teacher motivation, lending strong support to the distributed leadership and job-characteristics-based theoretical mechanisms proposed in the literature review, namely that participatory management enhances teachers' sense of autonomy and ownership, which in turn translates into greater instructional effort and improved student outcomes, rather than democratic leadership affecting performance through direct administrative channels alone (Julius & Nancy, 2026a).

The finding that the laissez-faire style showed only a weak and statistically non-significant association with students' performance, in contrast to the clearer and stronger effects observed for both the democratic and autocratic styles, is broadly consistent with the more nuanced position found in the literature, which suggests that the effects of laissez-

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

faire management are more context-dependent, potentially beneficial in schools with highly experienced and self-directed staff but detrimental where systems and staff capacity are weaker, a heterogeneity that may explain the comparatively weaker and non-significant average effect observed across the sampled schools in this study (Abiodun et al., 2022). The qualitative findings regarding the deliberate participatory practices adopted by head teachers of higher-performing schools, and the corresponding centralization or inconsistency reported in weaker-performing schools, provide rich contextual corroboration of the quantitative path analysis results, illustrating concretely how democratic management style is operationalized in practice and how the resulting effects on teacher morale and commitment are perceived by school leaders themselves (Julius & Kazaara, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented above, it can be concluded that school management style exerts a substantial and statistically significant influence on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Kabarole District, with the democratic management style associated with markedly better performance outcomes than the autocratic style, and with the laissez-faire style showing a comparatively weaker and less consistent association. The study further concludes that this influence operates through both direct and indirect pathways, with teacher motivation serving as a significant partial mediator of the relationship between democratic management style and students' performance, indicating that the benefits of participatory school leadership for student outcomes are substantially, though not exclusively, channeled through its positive effects on how motivated and committed teachers feel in carrying out their instructional duties. It is also concluded that the persistence of centralized, autocratic management practices in a number of the sampled schools represents a significant, and potentially addressable, constraint on students' academic performance within the district, underscoring the practical relevance of school leadership style as a target for educational quality improvement interventions alongside more traditional resource-focused approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the conclusions of this study, it is recommended that the Kabarole District Education Office, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports and relevant teacher training institutions, design and deliver targeted leadership development training for secondary school head teachers, with particular emphasis on participatory decision-making practices, delegation, and staff engagement techniques consistent with the democratic management style found in this study to be most strongly associated with positive student outcomes. It is further recommended that head teachers currently employing predominantly autocratic management approaches be supported through mentorship and peer-learning programs, potentially pairing them with head teachers of demonstrably higher-performing, more participatory schools within the district, in order to facilitate practical, context-relevant transfer of effective leadership practices. Given the significant mediating role of teacher motivation identified in this study, it is also recommended that school management committees and the district education office implement deliberate, low-cost strategies to enhance teacher motivation, such as recognition programs, opportunities for professional development, and more consistent and transparent communication of school decisions affecting teaching staff. The

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

study additionally recommends that school head teachers exercising a laissez-faire management approach be encouraged to strengthen basic administrative oversight and consistency in policy enforcement, particularly in schools with less experienced teaching staff, while preserving reasonable levels of professional autonomy for experienced and self-directed teachers. Finally, it is recommended that the district education office institute periodic, structured monitoring of school leadership and management practices, potentially through school inspection frameworks that explicitly assess management style alongside conventional inputs such as staffing and infrastructure, and that further research be conducted, ideally through a longitudinal design, to examine how changes in head teacher management style over time are associated with corresponding changes in teacher motivation and student performance within the same schools.

REFERENCES

- Lewin, K., Lippitt, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created “Social Climates.” *Journal of Social Psychology*.
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the Design of Work: Test of a Theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*.
- Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC). (2023). *Uganda Certificate of Education Results Analysis Report*. Kampala: UNEBC.
- Abiodun, N. L., Matovu, M. S., & Olanrewaju, R. O. (2022). Statistical Powers of Univariate Normality Tests: Comparative Analysis of 2016 Election Process in Uganda. *European Journal of Statistics*, 2, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.28924/ada/stat.2.6>
- Abiodun Nafiu, L. (2012). Comparison of One-Stage, Two-Stage, and Three-Stage Estimators Using Finite Population. *The Pacific Journal of Science and Technology*-166, 13(2), 166–171. <http://www.akamaiuniversity.us/PJST.htm>
- Bwire, F., Bagarukayo, E., & Muyinda, P. B. (2020). Online learning challenges in academia: The case of uganda. *CSEDU 2020 - Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Computer Supported Education*, 2, 484–489. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0009794504840489>
- Christopher, F., Moses, N., Enosh Muhindo, M., & Ruth Komunda, T. (2022). Employee Training and Organizational Performance: A Case Study of African College of Commerce and Technology in Kabale District, South Western Uganda. *International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research*, 6(5), 1–7. www.ijeais.org/ijapr
- Isaac, O., Kazaara, A. G., & Kazaara, A. I. (2023). *Assessment of the Effect of Workplace Conflict on Employees Performance and Organizational Productivity , a Case Study of Tororo General Hospital*. 7(3), 279–289.
- Julius, A., & Audrey, A. (2025). *The Impact of Inquiry-Based Learning on Student Engagement in Science Classrooms in Ugandan Secondary Schools : A Mixed- Methods Study*. 9(12), 220–228.
- Julius, A., & Desire, N. (2025). *An Evaluation of STEM Policy Implementation in Ugandan Secondary Schools : A*

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

- Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Institutions*. 9(10), 93–98.
- Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. G. (2026). *Navigating the AI Frontier : A Strategic Roadmap for Organizational Integration in the African Context*. 10(4), 311–320.
- Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. I. (2025). *Divine Dependency ? Critiquing Religious Fatalism and Unquestioning Obedience as Impediments to Development in Africa*. 9(12), 119–127.
- Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2026a). *A High- Stakes Crisis : Uganda ' s Position Among Africa ' s Top Gambling Nations and the Multifaceted Threat to Youth Development*. 10(4), 341–348.
- Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2026b). *Cultural Transfer or Contextual Adaptation ? A Critical Examination of Japanese Discipline and Its Potential Application in Uganda*. 10(4), 231–238.
- Julius, A., Rosebell, T., & Betty, M. (2026). *Custodians of the Curriculum : Mapping Training Material Ownership and the Imperative for Uniform Implementation of Uganda ' s Competency-Based Curriculum*. 10(6), 458–466.
- Maiga, I. H., Abiodun, N. L., & Mageto, T. (2021). Analyzing the Effects of Flexible Exchange Rate Regime on the Malian Economy Using a Dynamic Stochastic General Equilibrium Model. *International Journal of Mathematics Trends and Technology*, 67(12), 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.14445/22315373/ijmtt-v67i12p502>
- Muhamad, S., Irumba, A., & Bakaaki, P. (2023). *Organizational Culture, Job Satisfaction And Organizational Commitment In Renewable Energy Industry*. 8(6), 146–151. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376650821>
- Nafiu, L. A., Ph, D., Ibitayo, L. D., Ph, D., Muyombya, S. M., & Sc, M. (2017). *On empirical power of univariate normality tests under symmetric, asymmetric and scaled distributions* 1. 8(3), 381–387.
- Nelson, K. (2024). *Teachers Qualifications and its impact on Pupil ' s Academic Performance among selected Government Primary Schools In Kanungu District . An empirical Evidence of Nyakatare Primary School , Karuhinda Primary School and Kirima Primary school*. 8(4), 3–9.
- Nelson, K., Christopher, F., & Milton, N. (2022). *Teach Yourself Spss and Stata*. 6(7), 84–122.
- Nelson, K., Kazaara, A. G., & Kazaara, A. I. (2023). *Teach Yourself E-Views*. 7(3), 124–145.
- Ntirandekura, M., Ainebyoona, A., Registrar, D., District, B., & Commission, E. (2022). *Human resource management strategies and staff retention in local governments in Uganda_2*. 6(7), 89–103.
- Winny, N. D., Ariyo, D., Kazaara, G., Kazaara, A. I., & Deus, T. (2023). Effect Of Motivation On Employee Performance In Non-Government Organizations (NGOS): A Case Of Mbale City. In *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research* (Vol. 7). www.ijeais.org/ijamr
- Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda. (2022). *Education Statistical Abstract*. Kampala: MoES.
- Kabarole District Local Government. (2022). *District Education Office Annual Performance Report*. Fort Portal: Kabarole DLG.