ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of principals’ leadership styles on students’ academic achievement in K.C.S.E in Meru South District. Specifically, the study sought to determine the extent the principals’ use of autocratic leadership style influences students’ academic achievement; the principals’ use of democratic leadership style to influence students academic achievement; the influence of the principals’ use of laissez faire leadership style on students’ academic achievement as well as determining the influence of principals’ personal factors such as age, professional qualification and experiences on students’ academic achievement in KCSE. Past studies in the literature review support that poor performance is due to incompetence on the part of the principal. As such a principal, one should possess the much required leadership qualities such as commitment and dedication in order to steer the education institution towards the right direction. For this, a principal requires the necessary professional knowledge, training and experience.

The study was conducted using the ex-post facto design where the principals leadership styles and students academic achievement were assumed to have occurred and could not therefore be manipulated by the researcher. The target population consisted of the 44 public secondary schools in Meru South which had Form one to Form four classes. This study targeted the schools that had done KCSE for at least two years. Teachers and headteachers were the target respondents for this study. Random sampling was used to select 20 schools and then purposive sampling techniques to select the principals of the selected schools after the random sampling. This sampling gave a matrix of 120 respondents consisting of 20 principals’ and 100 teachers. A questionnaire was used as the tool for collecting the data from both the teachers and principals. These questionnaires were designed based on the objectives of the study and on the literature review. The instruments were piloted in two secondary schools in Meru South, which were not included in the actual study. At the same time, the researcher used the split half method to enhance instrument reliability. For this study the reliability co-efficient for the headteachers’ questionnaire was 0.87 while that of teachers was 0.91 thus the research instruments were reliable. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS while qualitative data was organized into themes and patterns based on analysis of meanings and implications emanating from respondents information and documented data on academic performance. Quantitative results of data analysis were presented in mainly tables, bar-graphs and pie-charts.

The study therefore concluded that the democratic type of leadership style was necessary to adopt to improve students’ performance. Linking the results of this study to the school leadership, it is expected that, the older the principal, the more the leadership skills and experience they will have. This enables them to adopt the best leadership style that is largely participatory that authoritative. In addition to this, a principals’ academic achievement highly contributes the students’ academic achievement. The study also established that, the lowest academic achievement was consistently experienced in those schools with principals below 5 years of experience. As part of recommendations, principals should use democratic form of leadership as this type of leadership style involves all the other parties in the school and thus creates a better environment for teachers to work well, and enhance higher academic performance in K.C.S.E. Moreover, principals should adopt democratic leadership style which enabled all stakeholders and personal to participate in school administration. Principals should use democratic form of leadership as this type of leadership style involves all the other parties in
the school and thus creates a better environment for teachers to work well, and enhance higher
academic performance in K.C.S.E. Principal use autocratic and laissez fair leadership enacts,
dictatorship and free reign will never encourage teachers and students to work hard, hence
contributing to failure in KCSE academic performance. Given the scope and limitations of this
study, the researcher recommends A replica of the study to be performed in primary schools to
determine whether the same variables derived from this study would be the same as those at
primary level. The study should also cover other districts apart from Meru South District to
provide comparison in findings.