

The Influence of Authentic Leadership on Teacher Performance in Public Primary Schools in the Greater Banjul Area, the Gambia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how authentic leadership influences teacher performance in public primary schools of The Gambia. Leadership plays an important role in shaping teacher engagement and dedication, especially in challenging settings. Drawing from Avolio and Gardner's Authentic Leadership Theory and Marzano's teacher performance model, the research analysis policy documents, academic literature, and institutional reports through qualitative thematic analysis.

The analysis uncovers a significant gap between policy and practice: although the importance of leadership is acknowledged by national frameworks, school leaders are left without a clear direction due to the absence of clear values-based models. The Implementation of authentic leadership is hindered by systemic obstacle, such as resource shortages, overburden support systems, and inadequate leadership training.

The research concludes that promoting authentic leadership serves as a contextually appropriate approach to enhancing teacher performance in schools in The Gambia. It is recommended that authentic leadership principles are incorporated by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education into national competency standards for school leaders, develop extensive leadership training programs, and change the system of the cluster monitor from compliance-focused to roles centred on coaching and mentorship, thereby supporting both instructional leadership and the well-being of teachers.

Keywords: authentic leadership, teacher performance, educational leadership, school effectiveness, The Gambia

INTRODUCTION

Education systems worldwide increasingly recognize that leadership quality plays a critical role in shaping teacher performance and student outcomes. Within the dynamic environment of public primary schools, leadership effectiveness extends beyond administrative competence—it embodies authenticity, transparency, and moral integrity. In The Gambia, the quest to improve educational standards in the Greater Banjul Area underscores the urgent need for leadership models that motivate, empower, and sustain teacher professionalism amidst limited resources and systemic challenges. Authentic leadership, which emphasizes self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing, offers a value-based framework for fostering trust and engagement among teachers (Dastgerdi et al., 2023; Long et al., 2024)

Despite growing global interest in authentic leadership, its contextual influence on teacher performance in sub-Saharan African education systems, particularly in The Gambia, remains underexplored. Teachers in public primary schools often contend with high workloads, limited instructional materials, and inconsistent professional support, factors that may erode their motivation and efficacy. A persistent concern in the Gambian context is that teacher performance inconsistencies persist even under various leadership development initiatives.

Empirical studies conducted in Asia and Europe have demonstrated that authentic leaders who model consistency, integrity, and moral stewardship foster environments that enhance teacher confidence, professional identity, and job satisfaction. However, empirical evidence specific to The Gambia's educational context is limited, thereby justifying the need for a localized investigation.

This study aims to fill this research gap by examining how authentic leadership influences teacher performance in public primary schools in the Greater Banjul Area. The findings are expected to inform policy directions for

leadership training and teacher development programs, contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable educational improvement through authentic and empowering leadership practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Authentic Leadership

Despite receiving a considerable scholarly attention over the past decade, authentic leadership still lacks a universally accepted (Gardner et al., 2011). However, according to (Pope, 2024), authenticity is seen as a continuous journey of self-discovery and alignment between one's ideals, values, and actions (Pope, 2024). According to (Guenther et al., 2024), authentic leadership has to do with accepting, and the comprehension of one's thoughts, feelings, needs, desires, and beliefs, with it being deeply embedded in personal authenticity. In research done by (Corriveau, 2020) and (Crawford et al., 2020) have also made an emphasis on self-awareness, integrity, and purpose as vital aspects of authentic leadership. Further research has also highlighted the essence of character traits like accountability, courage, and integrity in ensuring continued followership and trust (Long et al., 2024). Authentic leadership has also been linked to numerous positive results, such as enhanced employee performance trust, team performance, engagement, and positive emotions. (Long et al., 2024; Zeb et al., 2020)

An authentic leadership model that integrates positive psychological abilities with ethical perspectives was developed by (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This model is characterized by four key dimensions: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. The culture of trust, transparency, and ethical decision-making within organisations are cultivated by these dimensions, thereby fostering integrity, shared values, and a productive, harmonious work environment. Self-awareness, a crucial component of authentic leadership, involves self-reflection and aligning one's actions with personal values. It goes beyond merely understanding oneself to also include recognising one's role within the team (Bracht et al., 2021; Steffens et al., 2021). Internalized moral perspective, a vital element, relies on fundamental ethical principles to ensure consistency in behaviour. In the long run, ethical theories like deontology, rule utilitarianism, and virtue ethics can be ingrained, thereby influencing the moral identity of an authentic leader (Alavi, 2024). The third component, balanced processing, emphasises making decisions that are fair and impartial. Relational transparency encourages open communication to faster trust-based connection, starting with leaders and reaching followers. (Rego et al., 2021). Nonetheless, it only truly becomes a relational dynamic when it evolves into a reciprocal interaction. (Zheng et al., 2024).

Teacher Performance

Teacher performance involves the ability of educators to impart knowledge, facilitate learning, and establish dynamic environments conducive to student growth. It involves teachers' skills in delivering information, supporting educational processes, and fostering engaging settings for student development. In today's educational landscape, teachers are tasked with cultivating societal skills and imparting knowledge, techniques, and practical abilities (Martínez & Fernández, 2021). Teacher performance is characterised by proficiency in instruction, classroom management, and the creation of an engaging learning environment. Methods for evaluating teacher performance include assessing student achievements, conducting classroom observations, and gathering feedback from peers and supervisors (Long et al., 2024).

Teacher performance can be enhanced through strategies, such as professional development and supportive environments (Boeskens et al., 2020) Theoretical frameworks like evaluation theory, social cognitive theory, and cognitive learning theory provide varied insights into understanding teacher performance. Marzano's model aims to improve teacher evaluations by focusing on student growth and development (Marzano, 2017). It emphasises key behaviours across four domains: Standards-Based Planning, Conditions for Learning, Standards-Based Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Standards-Based Planning involves comprehending and prioritizing standards and proficiency scales, using curriculum maps for year-long planning, and following the instructional cycle steps (Marzano, 2017).

While Conditions for Learning relates to establishing a supportive learning environment, emphasising safety, calmness, foresight, and fostering a growth mindset (Wahono et al., 2020); Standards-Based Instruction is a teaching approach grounded in skill mastery standards, backed by research, evidence, and practical experience,

and focused on student learning (Berner, 2021). (Tatto, 2021) also argued that Professional Responsibilities include maintaining subject expertise, recognising student needs, preparing lessons, grading, and complying with relevant laws. Teachers are also expected to exhibit professionalism in their interactions. By addressing these domains, Marzano's model aims to enhance teaching effectiveness, foster teacher development, and boost student outcomes.

Previous Research Linking Authentic Leadership to Teacher Performance

Numerous studies have demonstrated that authentic leadership has substantial impact on teacher performance in various educational context. Research indicates that authentic leadership boost teacher performance by 40.4% in Islamic boarding schools, underscoring the significance of the leadership styles of principals in promoting teacher commitment and effectiveness. Muryati et al., (2024) Similarly, it has been shown that authentic leadership enhances the performance of lecturers in higher education, with perceived organizational support acting as a key mediator (Hadiyanti et al., 2025). Bahzar (2019), study in Islamic secondary schools further supports this, revealing that authentic leadership practices, grounded in Islamic values, lead to better teacher performance through improved decision-making and communication processes (Bahzar, 2019)

Additionally, a positive link between authentic leadership and teacher performance in secondary schools was confirmed, highlighting the necessity for principals to exhibit authentic leadership traits to enhance teaching quality (Abidin & Latif, 2021). In their study, Ahmad et al (2024), observed that there is a strong link between authentic leadership and heightened job motivation among teachers, indicating that effective leadership plays a crucial role in creating a motivated and high-achieving educational setting (Ahmad et al., 2024). These findings highlight the essential impact of authentic leadership in boosting the performance of teachers and followers, thereby playing a vital role in the overall effectiveness of schools and the success of organisations. By understanding and applying authentic leadership practices, there can be notable improvement in teacher performance, which in turn enhances student outcomes and foster school development. Recognizing the interconnectedness of different components within the educational system and incorporating these findings into organizational policies and management strategies are key steps toward advancing the performance of teachers the effectiveness of schools.

Educational leadership in the Gambia

In the Gambia, educational leadership is shaped by a complex mix of mentoring, local governance, and educational policies that play a significant role in teacher development and democratic participation. Effective mentoring is seen as essential for building the leadership skills of student teachers, with successful programs needing qualified mentors and supportive school leaders to create a conducive learning environment. (Barrow, 2023). School management and school leadership are differentiated by the 2011 School Management Manual, describing management as the use of systematic methods to facilitate effective teaching and learning, while leadership focuses on personality and vision. However, in the Gambia, these terms are practically used interchangeably. Overall, educational leadership in The Gambia requires a comprehensive approach to addresses these interconnected challenges and opportunities (UNESCO, 2024).

Headteachers collaborate with various stakeholders, including Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs), and sub-committees, each playing vital roles in school governance. Previously known as Parent Teacher Association Committees, The SMCs perform many management tasks alongside headteachers, regularly reporting to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) through Regional Offices and to communities through PTAs.(MoBSE, 2011). Crucial supervisory support is also offered by the Regional Education Directorates and cluster monitors. Cluster monitors, attached to REDs, are tasked with overseeing curriculum implementation, teaching and learning materials, and the physical environment of schools within their clusters. They are required to visit schools at least twice monthly, reviewing lesson notes, observing classroom instruction, and examining administrative issues. (GCCPC, 2024; MoBSE, 2019).

Educational leadership in The Gambia operates within a complex environment marked by ambitious policy goals, significant resource limitation, evolving professional standards, and changing demographic and educational dynamics. Research indicates that while leadership is acknowledged as vital for enhancing teaching and learning quality, systematic preparation, support, and accountability mechanisms remain underdeveloped. This context

offers a fertile ground to explore how authentic leadership principles could improve teacher performance by fostering trust, collaboration, and moral purpose within Gambian schools.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research methodology utilizing exclusively secondary data sources. For an exploratory study in an under-research context, this methodology is applicable, since it allows the possibility of synthesizing existing evidence, policies, and documented insights to establish a conceptual comprehension of the relationship that exist between authentic leadership and teacher performance within the educational system of The Gambia.

Data sources

The study depends on the following types of secondary data sources:

1. Government policy and official reports:

- Publications such as the School Management Manual (2011), annual education reports, and strategic plans of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) of The Gambia.
- The Gambia Committee for Promotion of Cooperatives (GCCPC) reports and other institutions of community and school governance.
- Official documents in which standards of teacher performance, frameworks for professional development, and initiatives of leadership training are outlined.

2. Academic and institutional literature:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles and books chapters on authentic leadership theory and its application in educational settings, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Academic theses, dissertations, and research reports addressing educational leadership, teacher motivation, and effectiveness of schools in The Gambia or similar contexts.
- Publications from international bodies such as UNESCO and World Bank that discuss educational challenges and leadership issues in the Gambia.

Data collection

The collection of data involves the systematic identification, retrieval, and organization of the secondary sources listed above. This is done through:

- Searches of academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR) using keywords: “authentic leadership,” “The Gambia,” “teacher performance,” “The Gambia,” “primary education,” and “school leadership.”
- Accessing digital repositories and websites of the Gambian Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE), UNESCO, and other relevant institutions.
- Selecting documents based on their relevance to the research aim, publication date (10-15 years), and authority of the sources.

Data analysis

Data from policy reports and academic literature were synthesized through thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), a systematic, six-phase qualitative method well-suited for identifying recurring patterns within secondary data. This synthesis identified thematic areas such as "authentic leadership

manifestations," "teacher performance indicators," and "leadership-performance nexus," to construct a logical case for the influence of authentic leadership on teacher effectiveness in Gambian primary schools. The analysis directly linked empirical data to the theoretical framework of Authentic Leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) and established models of teacher performance (Marzano, 2017).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of policy documents, academic literature, and institutional reports yielded four interrelated themes illuminating the relationship between authentic leadership and teacher performance in public primary schools in the Greater Banjul Area. Both the conceptual acknowledgement of the importance of leadership within Gambian educational policy and the operational realities hampering the implementation of authentic leadership were revealed by these themes.

Policy Recognition of Leadership Versus Operational Ambiguity

Consistently, Policy documents emphasized the essence of leadership quality as key to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The MoBSE School Management Manual (2011) differentiates between school management, which is defined as systematic approach facilitating teaching and learning, and school leadership, which is characterized by vision and personal influence. This policy-level awareness that leadership goes beyond administrative function to include transformational and moral aspects is highlighted by this conceptual differentiation.

However, evidence from documents shows a huge gap of implementation. According to UNESCO (2024) and Barrow (2023) the distinction between leadership and management blurs in practice, with both terms used interchangeably across educational policies. Leadership duties are shared among headteachers, School Management Committees (SMCs), and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), resulting in dispersed accountability structures. although collaborative governance systems are in place, the analysis found little evidence of cohesive, values-driven leadership frameworks guiding these entities.

This operational ambiguity is evident in two key areas. First, there is lack of role clarity: headteachers face overlapping directives from MoBSE regional offices, SMCs, and community stakeholders without clear authority hierarchies or decision-making protocols. Second, the mechanism for assessing leadership quality is mainly compliance-focused rather than development-oriented, prioritizing administrative outputs (such as report submission, attendance records) over relational or ethical aspects of leadership central to authentic leadership theory.

This highlights a significant gap between policy and practice. While leadership's importance is recognized by national frameworks conceptually, the absence of clearly stated values-based leadership models such as authentic leadership, leaves headteachers without operational guidance for the implantation of self-awareness, moral perspective, balanced processing, or relational transparency in their daily activities.

Systemic Constraints as Barriers to Authentic Leadership and Teacher Performance

On both effective leadership and teacher performance, three interrelated systemic issues have emerged as major obstacles: limited resources, insufficient professional support systems, and inadequate leadership training.

Limited Resource and Leadership Role Compression: persistent shortages of teaching materials, infrastructure inadequacies, and funding constraints force headteachers into a reactive, crisis-management roles. Rather engaging in moral stewardship or promoting relational transparency, key aspects of authentic leadership requiring time, space, and psychological safety, leaders are preoccupied with immediate operational survival tasks: acquiring essential supplies, managing overcrowded classrooms, and addressing facility malfunction. This crisis-oriented approach leaves little room for the reflective self-awareness and balanced processing that authentic leadership necessitates.

Insufficient Professional Support Infrastructure: The cluster monitoring system, intended to offer instructional support and quality assurance (MoBSE, 2019; GCCPC, 2024), is not functioning at its intended capacity. Mandated to visit schools twice a month, the cluster monitors observe teaching, review lesson plans, and provide

developmental feedback. However, documentary evidence shows that these visits are inconsistent and emphasize compliance checks than on coaching. Teachers face heavy workloads with limited access to ongoing professional development, which diminishes motivation and self-efficacy—crucial factors for teacher performance. This lack of support fosters an environment of teacher isolation, hindering the collaborative culture that authentic leadership aims to build.

Inadequate Leadership Preparation: Barrow (2023) notes that headteacher appointments often prioritize teaching experience or seniority over proven leadership ability or formal training. Pre-service leadership training is minimal, and in-service professional development rarely covers self-awareness, ethical decision-making, or relationship-building—the core competencies of authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This gap in preparation means most school leaders lack both conceptual understanding of authentic leadership principles and the practical tools for their application.

These systemic constraints create a vicious cycle. Resource scarcity forces transactional leadership behaviours; inadequate support systems leave teachers demotivated and isolated; and unprepared leaders are unable to break this cycle through authentic, transformational practices. Together, these barriers explain why inconsistencies performance persist despite policy intentions.

Authentic Leadership as a Potential Mitigating Framework

A Synthesis of global literature on authentic leadership alongside with Gambian contextual studies identified three ways in which authentic leadership principles could tackle systemic issues and improve the performance of teachers.

Relational Transparency and Trust-building

Studies in cross-cultural context revealed that leaders who practice relational transparency—by openly sharing information, acknowledging their limitations, and explaining their decision-making process—foster trust within organizations (Rego et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2024). In the Gambia where School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) share governance responsibilities with headteachers, relational transparency is even more crucial. Clear communication can turn potentially contentious stakeholder interactions into cooperative partnership, minimizing conflict and fostering stable environments that allow teachers to concentrate and perform effectively.

Evidence from documents indicates that a lack of trust currently hampers school efficiency. Reports frequently highlight conflicts between PTAs and SMCs over resource distribution and decision-making power, suggesting that secrecy and exclusion hinder collective efforts. Leaders who embody relational transparency can alleviate these issues by ensuring all stakeholders are aware of constraints, involve in setting priorities, and share responsibility for outcomes.

Internalized Moral Perspective and Ethical Resilience

In environments with limited resources ethical challenges become more pronounced: How should scarce materials be distributed? Which teachers should receive the few available professional development opportunities? How should community contributions be managed? Leaders who adhere to an internalized moral perspective—ethical principles that remain consistent despite situational pressures (Alavi, 2024)—can act as moral guides, ensuring fairness and equity even in times of scarcity.

The analysis revealed that teacher morale and professional identity suffer when resource distribution seems arbitrary or biased. Authentic leaders who consistently demonstrate integrity can combat demoralization by establishing transparent, principle-based decision protocols. Teacher resilience is built by this moral consistency allowing them to maintain performance despite systemic challenges.

Balanced Processing and Teacher Agency

Balanced processing, which involves seeking and impartially evaluating various viewpoints before making decisions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), is notably missing from decision-making processes documented in Gambian

schools. Decisions typically originate from MoBSE directives or SMC discussions, with little inputs from teachers, despite their frontline expertise.

Research connecting teacher input to performance outcomes (Boeskens et al., 2020; Martínez & Fernández, 2021) indicates that balanced processing could offer significant advantages. When teachers are involved in decisions regarding instructional methods, resource allocation, or professional development priorities, their sense of ownership, commitment, and effectiveness is enhanced, leading to improved performance. The synthesis of data suggests that establishing balanced processing mechanisms, such as regular staff meetings and teacher representation in SMCs, could transform school culture and one driven by compliance to one of collaboration, thereby enhancing both teacher agency and instructional quality.

Authentic leadership is not a remedy for resource shortages but rather a strategic approach to maximizing human and social capital within limited systems. By building trust, demonstrating ethical consistency, and amplifying teacher voices, authentic leadership fosters psychological and relational conditions that enable higher performance despite material constraints.

Community and Cultural Mediation of Leadership Effectiveness

A unique finding highlights the role of community governance and cultural context in influencing the potential impact of authentic leadership. Unlike educational systems where headteachers have more autonomy, the leadership in Gambian schools is deeply integrated into structures of community accountability (MoBSE, 2011).

SMCs and PTAs are central governance actors with authority over budget oversight, infrastructure projects, and even teacher appointment recommendations, not merely peripheral stakeholders. This structural reality necessitates that authentic leadership extends beyond internal staff relationships to include community engagement. An authentic leader in the Gambian context must practice relational transparency with community members, balance the processing of community expectations alongside teacher needs, and align school decisions with both educational standards and local values.

Cultural norms that prioritize collective decision-making, respect for elders, and community ownership of educational institutions add layers of complexity. The synthesis of data has indicated that the western theoretical roots of authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) necessitate adoption to fit the context. For instance, self-awareness should encompass an understanding of one's position within communal hierarchies, while balanced processing must reconcile traditional authority structures with ideals of democratic participation.

Both challenges and opportunities are presented by this cultural mediation. Challenges occur when the focus of authentic leadership on individual moral legacy clashes with collectivist norms. Conversely, opportunities arise when the principles of authentic leadership align with traditional values such as integrity, communal responsibility, and participatory governance, suggesting potential synergies between authentic leadership and indigenous leadership philosophies.

The effectiveness of authentic leadership in the Greater Banjul Area fundamentally depends on cultural and structural adaptation. Leaders need to extend the four dimensions of authentic leadership – self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency – beyond school staff to include community stakeholders. The findings highlight that authentic leadership is not a one-size-fits-all model but a flexible framework that requires adaptation to local governance realities and cultural values.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how authentic leadership affects teacher performance in public primary schools in the Greater Banjul Area of the Gambia. Through a synthesis of qualitative secondary data, it concludes that while the current policy framework acknowledges the significance of leadership, the practice of leadership is often limited by systemic challenges and absence of a deliberate, value-based leadership model. The existing operational environment emphasizes administrative management and crises handling over the development of authentic, relationship-focused leadership.

Nonetheless, the findings strongly indicate that – self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency – the core dimensions of authentic leadership provide a relevant and potentially transformative framework for the Gambian context. Authentic leadership is not proposed as a solution for resource shortages but as a crucial lever to build trust, enhance teacher resilience, improve collaborative governance, and create a more motivating and ethically grounded school environment. By doing so, it can alleviate some systemic constraints and directly enhance the conditions for sustained teacher performance. This study thus fills a contextual gap by theorizing the applicability of authentic leadership within the unique sociocultural and structural ecosystem of Gambian public primary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers based on the findings of the study:

A. For the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE)

1. **Revise Leadership Frameworks:** Incorporate authentic leadership principles into the national standards for school leaders. Move past managerial competency lists to include criteria for ethical stewardship, clear communication, and participatory decision-making. the principles of authentic leadership into the national standards for school headteachers.
2. **Transform Leadership Training:** Develop and require comprehensive pre-service and in-service training programs for both current and future headteachers, focusing on building authentic leadership skills such as self-reflection, moral reasoning, and community focused leadership.
3. **Strengthen Support Systems:** Re-evaluate and strengthen the system of cluster monitor to transition from a compliance-oriented role to one of coaching and mentorship, supporting both instructional leadership and psychological well-being of teachers.

B. For School Leaders (Headteachers, SMCs)

1. **Cultivate Relational Transparency:** Actively create open communication channels with teaching staff and community stakeholders. Regularly share challenges, decisions and school visions to build collective trust and ownership.
2. **Practice Balanced Processing:** Establish mechanisms to seek and genuinely consider teacher feedback on key issues before making decisions. This can be achieved through regular, structured staff meetings or representative committees.
3. **Model an Internalized Moral Perspective:** Consistently show integrity and fairness, especially in the transparent and equitable management of limited resources. Use ethical principles as the basis for resolving conflicts and setting school priorities.

C. For Future Research

1. **Conduct Primary Qualitative Studies:** Carry out in-depth case studies or phenomenological research involving interviews and focus groups with headteachers and teachers to collect firsthand accounts of leadership experiences and their impact on performance.
2. **Explore Cultural Nuances:** Examine how traditional Gambian values and community leadership models intersect with or can enhance the Western-derived concept of authentic leadership.
3. **Longitudinal Impact Research:** Design studies to evaluate the enduring effects of leadership development initiatives grounded in authentic leadership principles on quantifiable teacher performance metrics and student achievements.

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