

## SCHOOL LEADERS' STYLE AND PUPILS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC BASIC SCHOOLS IN GHANA

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### Abstract

This study investigated how the leadership style of public basic school leaders affected the pupils' academic performance in the Agona West Municipality of Ghana's Central Region. School leaders (SLs) play a critical role in school and pupils' academic performance. This quantitative study used a descriptive survey design. SLs were purposively sampled, while teachers were selected through simple random sampling techniques. The study's sample size was 511 respondents from a population of 1,582. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire. Reliability was determined using test-retest, evaluating the consistency of test findings across test administrations. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies & percentages). Cross-tabulations of the findings were also performed to highlight specifics of the findings in connection with the independent variable (school leaders' styles). The study found that SLs mostly used transformational and democratic leadership styles to enhance pupils' academic performance. Also, findings indicated that pupils' academic performance was significantly impacted by SLs' leadership styles. The study concludes that transformational and democratic school leadership styles are most crucial to effectively create a positive school climate to enhance teaching quality, engagement, and motivation to significantly influence pupils' learning outcomes. The study recommends that school leaders should be trained in academic leadership skills. Insights from this research will inform the Ghana Education Service, school leaders, teacher recruitment, inform leadership development and policy reforms to strengthen teaching quality and improve learning outcomes in public basic schools.

**Key terms:** Democratic leadership, leadership style, pupils' academic performance, school leaders, transformational leadership.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership is essential to the success of any organisation, including schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). According to Harris (2018), citing Leithwood and Riehl (2005), school leaders significantly shape school culture and climate, thereby influencing pupil learning and achievement. Thapa et al. (2013) further affirm that a positive school climate, fostered by effective leadership, enhances academic performance. Although research on school leadership dates back to the 1960s, there is still no universal definition or consensus on its precise role in education (Scheerens, 2016). Nonetheless, leadership remains widely recognised as essential to educational outcomes, with different leadership styles influencing task management, teacher motivation, and pupils' academic success (Yahya, 2015).

Leadership style refers to the approach and methods employed by leaders to influence, motivate, and direct their followers toward achieving organisational goals (Northouse, 2017). In educational contexts, leadership styles encompass various behavioural patterns, including transformational leadership (which inspires and motivates through shared vision), democratic leadership (which promotes participatory decision-making), autocratic leadership (which centralises control), and laissez-faire leadership (which delegates authority with minimal supervision) (Chemers, 2014; DuBrin, 2015).

Globally, education systems recognise that leadership style significantly influences pupils' academic performance (Fullan, 2014). Leadership training for both aspiring and practising school leaders strengthens this positive impact. Nyongesa (2014) highlights that effective school leaders create supportive learning environments, nurture pupils' strengths, and address weaknesses to enhance motivation and achievement. Improving academic performance thus remains a worldwide priority (Feldman, 2017).

Recent research in Ghana has increasingly focused on the relationship between school leadership and academic outcomes. Dare (2024) examined teacher leadership and relational authority in Ghana's basic education system, while Kyei-Nuamah (2023) investigated leadership styles and their contribution to educational outcomes in high schools. Ansaah (2024) compared instructional leadership practices between public and private basic schools, revealing significant variations in implementation. These contemporary studies underscore the evolving nature of educational leadership in Ghana and the need for context-specific approaches to leadership development.

In Ghana, however, many public basic school leaders assume leadership roles based on experience rather than training. Research shows that transformational and instructional leadership through supervision, mentoring, goal-setting, and participatory decision-making improves performance, while autocratic or administrative leadership weakens teacher commitment and learning outcomes (Ofori, 2018; Kyei-Nuamah, 2023; Ansaah, 2024). Leadership scholars such as Chemers (2014) and Yusuf (2016) identify styles, including autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and visionary, each shaping school outcomes differently. Gammage (2017) also classifies leadership as open, closed, flexible, or rigid. This study examines how these styles, as practised by public basic school leaders in Ghana's Agona West Municipality, influence teacher and pupil productivity and academic achievement. Hopkins (2015) links weak performance to poor leadership, while Rowntree (2015) stresses that academic success, often reflected in examination findings, depends largely on leadership quality. Nyongesa (2014) further notes that successful school leaders guide staff to enhance instruction and learning. In Ghana, the Ministry of Education [MoE] (2014) identifies leadership as crucial to educational quality, while the Ghana Education

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Service [GES] (2016) emphasises leadership competence. Yet, many school leaders lack formal leadership training (Osei, 2017). As leadership practices evolve, school performance varies; some school leaders achieve better results, while others struggle due to differing styles and management capacities.

Pupils in public basic schools within Ghana's Agona West Municipality (AWM) continue to perform poorly academically, a situation partly linked to ineffective leadership among school leaders (GES, 2020). Effective leadership significantly influences teacher motivation, instructional quality, and pupil achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Robinson et al., 2008). Yet, little empirical evidence exists on the specific leadership styles adopted by school leaders in Agona West and their impact on performance (Osei, 2017; Ampah-Mensah, 2024). The municipality's Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) pass rate of 42.6 per cent in 2019, below the national average of 52.1 per cent (GES, 2020), highlights leadership and management concerns. Poor leadership often results in weak supervision, low teacher morale, and unsupportive learning environments (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Gyasi, 2016). This pass rate percentage is of much concern to the nation because it tells how Ghana is performing in terms of global education, and leadership may plausibly contribute to the issue. This is because everything revolves around leadership, both success and failure. Despite existing research on school leadership in Ghana, no study has specifically examined how different leadership styles among public basic school leaders in Agona West Municipality affect pupils' academic performance. This study aims to fill the gap by examining how the leadership styles of school leaders in AWM influence pupils' academic performance to inform leadership development and policy reform. Insights from this research will inform school leaders' teacher recruitment, in-service leadership training, and GES policy reforms to strengthen teaching quality and improve learning outcomes in Ghana's public basic schools.

The study was designed to address the following research questions: Which leadership styles are used by the public basic schools' leaders? What is the influence of the leadership styles of school leaders of public basic schools on pupils' academic performance? What measures are put in place to enhance the leadership styles of public basic schools' leaders?

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Path-Goal Theory (PGT) developed by House and colleagues (House & Mitchell, 1970; House, 1996) served as the theoretical foundation for this study. It contends that leaders can improve follower inspiration and performance by outlining goals, offering assistance, removing barriers, and rewarding accomplishment. The theory describes four leadership behaviours: directive, supporting, participative, and achievement-oriented. It also highlights that situational needs determine effectiveness (Côté, 2017).

To increase teacher commitment, motivation, and happiness in educational environments, school leaders must modify their style of leadership. PGT highlights the significance of contextual elements like staff traits, task structure, and authority levels, providing a helpful viewpoint for comprehending how leadership affects teacher performance and student outcomes in public basic schools in Agona West Municipality (Oyetunji, 2011).

From trait-based perspectives, which emphasise innate attributes, to contingency approaches, which highlight the interplay between leader traits, follower characteristics, and situational aspects, leadership theories have developed (Manning & Curtis, 2002; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2007). According to contingency theories, there is no one leadership style that works for everyone; instead, leaders must modify their

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strategy according to the situation. According to Fiedler's Contingency Theory, a leader's effectiveness is determined by how well their style and situation fit (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Leaders are classified as task-oriented or relationship-oriented. While relationship-oriented leaders flourish in unstructured situations by fostering trust and offering assistance, task-oriented leaders excel in controlled settings by planning tasks, establishing deadlines, and assigning duties. Similarly, Path-Goal Theory highlights four behaviours: directive, supportive, achievement-oriented, and participative that are chosen based on staff and context to improve motivation. These behaviours include removing barriers, providing guidance, and rewarding accomplishments (House, 2007; Northouse, 2009; Chance & Chance, 2002). Aligning leadership styles with situational needs, such as employing directive styles in structured classrooms or participative approaches with inexperienced staff, can boost student academic achievements, increase teacher effectiveness, and encourage motivation in Agona West's public basic schools.

Teachers' dedication and job satisfaction are key determinants of pupils' academic performance. Academic achievement is widely regarded as the primary measure of educational quality and significantly shapes pupils' future opportunities (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Although school leaders may not teach directly, their leadership profoundly influences school conditions, teacher motivation, and engagement. By effectively guiding, supporting, and managing staff, school leaders' impact both teacher performance and pupil outcomes, underscoring the critical role of leadership in promoting academic success.

Laissez-faire, or delegative, leadership is characterised by minimal leader involvement, granting staff considerable autonomy in decision-making (Muthike, 2014; Faulkner, 2017). Contingency theorists describe laissez-faire leaders as detached from daily operations, delegating complete authority to subordinates under the assumption that they are competent, self-motivated, and capable of independent work (Northouse, 2015; Freud, 2017; Chemers, 2014). While effective when staff are skilled and highly motivated, this style can lead to unstructured processes, conflicts, and reduced accountability if staff lack experience or discipline (Kitavi, 2014). In school settings, excessive laissez-faire leadership may create disorder and hinder educational objectives, as positive staff relationships do not automatically translate into improved pupil performance (Jay, 2014).

Autocratic, or authoritarian, leadership centralises decision-making, with the school leader maintaining complete control and offering minimal staff input (Chemers, 2014; Bii, 2015). Autocratic leaders are highly task-oriented, prioritising discipline, structure, and efficiency but often discouraging debate or collaboration (Kitavi, 2014). While this approach can be effective in crises requiring rapid decisions (DuBrin, 2015), it may demotivate staff, suppress creativity, and reduce engagement, negatively impacting pupil achievement (Schechner, 2017). Transformational leadership focuses on empowering teachers, promoting collaboration, and inspiring shared goals (DuBrin, 2015; Northouse, 2015). Transformational school leaders encourage creativity, professional growth, and instructional quality, positively influencing pupil motivation and academic achievement (Galassi, 2017; Hopkins, 2015; Drysdale, 2022).

Strategies such as mentoring, professional development, and shared goal-setting enhance teaching and learning (Harris & Jones, 2021). The effectiveness of school leaders in achieving high performance depends on how they engage with their social and organisational environments. This involves setting clear goals, developing staff capacity, and aligning structures with school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 2014; 2018). Visionary, efficacy-building, and context-responsive leadership, alongside strategies such as setting directions, developing people, and redesigning organisations, enhance motivation and productivity

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(Leithwood, 2016; Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Continuous support through performance monitoring, induction, and professional development strengthens teacher competence. Emotionally intelligent leadership that provides intellectual stimulation, individualising support, and recognition fosters collaboration and morale (McCull-Kennedy & Anderson, 2012; Cole, 2012). Ultimately, visionary leadership that supports holistic pupil development drives sustained school improvement.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This was quantitative research, underpinned by the positivist paradigm. The study employed a descriptive survey design to assess the current state of leadership styles and pupil academic performance in public basic schools. This design enabled the collection of data from school leaders, teachers, and pupils regarding their opinions, attitudes, and behaviours related to leadership and academic outcomes (Neuendorf, 2016), providing a basis for a detailed understanding of the relationship between school leaders' leadership styles and pupils' academic performance (Saunders et al., 2020). The study was conducted in the Agona West Municipality (AWM) with a population of 1,582 (nine school leaders, 120 teachers, 1300 pupils, and 153 PTA/SMC). Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table was employed to select a sample size of 511 respondents. The simple random sampling technique was used to select teachers, pupils, parent-teacher association and school management committee (PTA/SMC) members to ensure fairness. 92 teachers from all the schools were selected from 120 teachers; 297 pupils out of 1300 pupils, and 113 PTA/SMC members from 153 population in all nine schools were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Whereas a purposive sampling procedure was adopted to select nine (9) school leaders from the schools for the study. Purposive sampling was appropriate for school leaders due to their specific administrative roles and limited numbers in each school, ensuring all relevant leadership perspectives were captured.

The study employed structured questionnaires to examine the styles of school leaders and pupil academic performance in public basic schools. Three sets of questionnaires were used. The school leaders' questionnaire had two sections: demographics, leadership styles, and perceptions of factors affecting pupils' performance, rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5). Teachers' questionnaires covered demographics, leaders' styles, and factors influencing achievement, while pupils' versions addressed demographics, leadership impact, and attitudes toward performance factors.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Introductory and permission letters were obtained from the Ghana Education Service Directorate- Agona West Municipality and the school leaders, respectively. Respondents' informed consent was secured before gathering data. All respondents were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Anonymity was maintained by using coded identifiers instead of names, and confidentiality was ensured by storing all data securely with access restricted to the research team only.

Data was analysed using the Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) 24.0. Test-retest reliability was utilised to establish dependability, and the results were used to calculate the instrument's reliability coefficient using the Cronbach's Alpha technique. The overall reliability coefficient obtained after analysing the school leaders' styles data from the pre-test of the questionnaire was 0.765 (standardised item alpha), and the questionnaire on pupils' academic performance showed 0.731, which also falls within the accepted range of more than or equal to 0.70 (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), indicating a reliable instrument. Findings

were submitted to cross-tabulations in order to highlight specifics regarding the study's independent variable (leadership styles), which mostly involved the respondents' personal and professional profiles. In-depth content and conclusions were derived from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire schedule.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

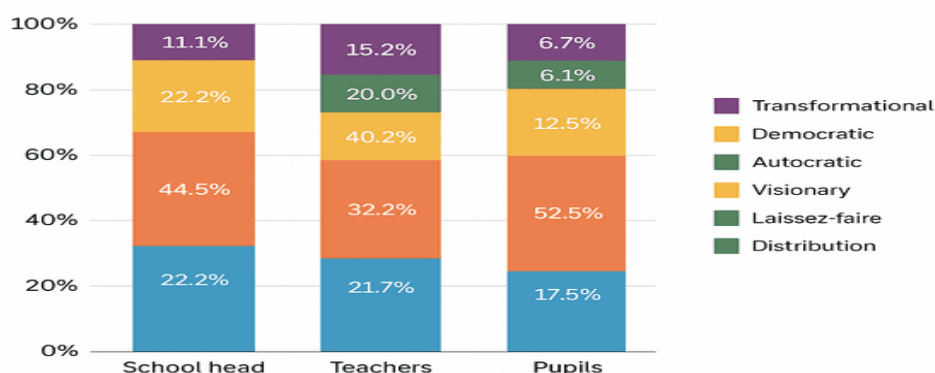
### Leadership Style of School Leaders

The main goal of this study was to investigate the leadership style that public basic school leaders in the Central Region's Agona West municipality (AWM) most frequently employ in order to raise their pupils' academic performance. The following leadership styles were stated by questionnaire respondents.

**Table 1: Leadership Styles of School Leaders**

Leadership style	School Leaders		Teachers		Pupils	
	N=9	100%	N=92	100%	N=297	100%
Transformational	2	22.2	20	21.7	52	17.5
Democratic	4	44.5	37	40.2	156	52.5
Autocratic	0	0.0	11	12.0	36	12.1
Visionary	2	22.2	8	8.7	18	6.1
Distribution	0	0.0	2	2.2	15	5.1
Laissez-faire	1	11.1	14	15.2	20	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>

The leadership style of school leaders greatly affects school culture and performance. Table 1, translated into a chart (Figure 1), shows that democratic and transformational leadership styles dominate among public basic school leaders, promoting collaboration, inclusivity, and academic success.



**Figure 1: Leadership Style Distribution Chart**

Figure 1 presents the leadership style distribution across all respondent groups. The chart illustrates that democratic leadership is the most prevalent style, with 44.5 per cent of school leaders, 40.2 per cent of teachers, and 52.5 per cent of pupils identifying this approach. Transformational leadership ranks second, reported by 22.2 per cent of school leaders, 21.7 per cent of teachers, and 17.5 per cent of pupils. Notably,

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autocratic leadership shows zero adoption among school leaders themselves but is perceived by 12 per cent of both teachers and pupils. The data reveals a clear trend toward participatory and collaborative leadership approaches, with democratic and transformational styles collectively accounting for over 60 per cent of reported practices across all stakeholder groups. Laissez-faire leadership appears least favoured, representing only 11.1 per cent among school leaders and similar small proportions among other respondents.

**Table 2: Using a Particular Leadership Style**

Leadership style	School leaders		Teachers		Pupils	
	<b>N=9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N=92</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N=297</b>	<b>100%</b>
Yes	2	22.2	44	47.8	118	39.7
No	7	77.8	48	52.2	179	60.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 highlights whether a specific leadership style is essential for improving pupils' academic performance. While respondents support the use of a particular style, mainly transformational leadership, a larger portion favour a blended approach.

## School Leaders' Leadership Style Practice

This section examined the leadership techniques employed by the school leaders of the AWM in the course of their responsibilities to raise the pupils' academic performance.

**Table 3: Promoting Everyone's Collaboration**

Leadership practice	School leaders		Teachers		Pupils	
	<b>N=9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N=92</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N=297</b>	<b>100%</b>
Never	0	0.0	0	0.0	25	8.4
Seldom	0	0.0	10	10.9	10	3.4
Often	3	33.3	25	27.2	62	20.9
Frequently	4	44.5	41	44.5	109	36.7
Always	2	22.2	16	17.4	91	30.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 highlights the importance of fostering cooperation among teachers, pupils, and school leaders to enhance academic performance. Among the school leaders, they often reported encouraging cooperation, while four did so frequently. Similarly, teachers confirmed frequent promotion of collaboration by their school leaders. From the pupils' perspective, the majority noted that cooperation was often encouraged, though said it was never promoted. Overall, respondents said cooperation was often urged, and the majority reported it was frequently encouraged.

**Table 4: School Leaders Ask for Input on their Behaviour**

Leadership practice	School leaders	Teachers	Pupils
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	<b>N=9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N=92</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>N=297</b>	<b>100%</b>
Never	0	0.0	4	4.4	40	13.5
Seldom	0	0.0	8	8.7	25	8.4
Often	0	0.0	43	46.7	54	18.2
Frequently	4	44.4	21	22.8	100	33.7
Always	5	55.6	16	17.4	78	26.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>

Seeking feedback is a vital practice for school leaders aiming to enhance their effectiveness and improve academic performance. Table 4 shows that school leaders consistently seek feedback, a view supported by teachers and pupils. These respondents believe feedback helps leaders identify strengths and weaknesses, equipping them to support pupil achievement better. However, respondents, including four teachers and 40 pupils, stated that school leaders never seek feedback and oversight, which is seen as detrimental to academic improvement.

**Table 5: Do You Find Your Leader's Leadership Style Inspiring to Work?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Teachers (N = 92)</b>	<b>Percentage (100%)</b>
Yes	61	66.3
No	31	33.7
Total	92	100

The study examined whether school leaders' leadership styles motivated teachers. Table 5 shows that the majority of teachers agreed and performed better, while others disagreed.

## **Influence School Leaders' Leadership Styles on Pupils' Academic Performance**

The impact of school leaders' leadership style on pupils' academic performance. This study looked into how the leadership styles of public basic School leaders affected the academic achievement of pupils in the AWM.

**Table 6: Teachers' Participation in School Management- SPIP Planning**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (100%)</b>
Yes	80	87.0
No	10	10.9
I don't know	2	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>

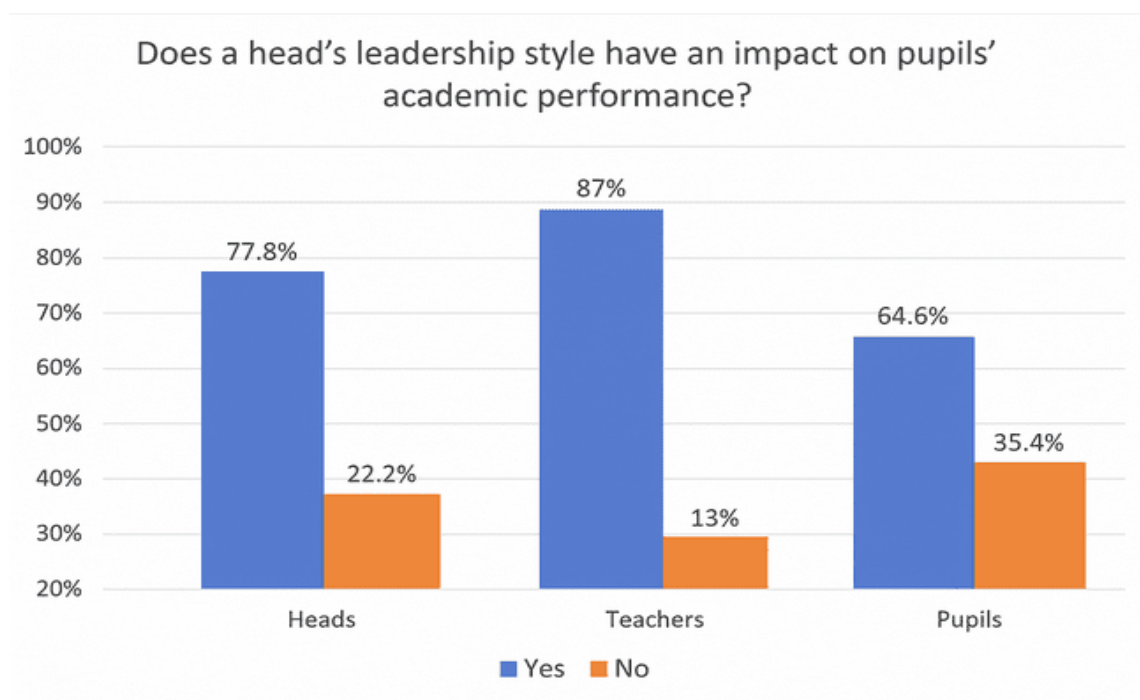
Table 6 presents strong evidence of a leadership culture rooted in inclusivity and collaboration. With the majority of respondents involved in school performance improvement plan (SPIP) preparation, it is clear that school leaders actively promote participatory governance. However, a few of the respondents who are uncertain about their involvement suggest gaps in communication or leadership that need addressing.

**Table 7: Does a Leader's Leadership Style have an Impact on Pupils' Academic Performance?**

<b>Leadership style</b>	<b>School leaders</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Pupils</b>
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	N=9	100%	N=92	100%	N=297	100%
Yes	7	77.8	80	87	192	64.6
No	2	22.2	12	13	105	35.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 7, teachers and school leaders agreed that leadership style impacts pupil performance. Additionally, pupils affirmed that the way school leaders lead affects academic performance. Overall, the majority of respondents believed that school leaders' effectiveness in their roles significantly influences pupil achievement. Below is a graphical representation of school leaders' leadership style impact on pupils' performance.



**Figure 2: Leadership Style that has an Impact on Pupils' Academic Performance**

Figure 2 demonstrates the overwhelming consensus across stakeholder groups regarding the impact of leadership style on academic performance. The visual representation shows that 77.8 per cent of school leaders, 87 per cent of teachers, and 64.6 per cent of pupils affirmed that leadership style significantly affects academic outcomes. This convergence of perspectives from different stakeholder groups strengthens the validity of the finding. The relatively lower percentage among pupils (64.6%) compared to adults may reflect their developing understanding of leadership dynamics, yet still represents a strong majority affirmation. The chart visually emphasises the critical relationship between how school leaders lead and the academic achievement pupils attain.

## Strategies to Enhance Leaders' Leadership Styles

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This research question aimed to investigate the steps taken to enhance the leadership style of the basic public-school leaders chosen for the study. Open-ended answers from section B of the questionnaire were employed to answer this research question. The results are displayed in Table 8 below.

**Table 8: Strategies to Enhance Leaders' Leadership Styles**

Statement	Frequency	Per cent (100%)
Adequate training in school management and administration and school-based in-service training be made a prerequisite for school leadership	492	96.3
The staff must be encouraged to participate in the decision-making process	480	93.9
The school leaders should do away with factions and treat all teachers equally and fairly	450	88.0
Extrinsic motivation should be provided to the teachers	420	82.2
School leaders should develop good interpersonal relationships with teachers	401	78.5
School leaders should delegate powers to appropriate persons by choosing carefully	380	74.4
The school leaders should adopt a democratic style of leadership to run the schools effectively and efficiently	360	70.5

Table 8 shows that among the 511 respondents, seven key strategies were identified for improving the leadership styles of basic school leaders. In-service training and inclusivity in decision-making were prioritised by respondents, respectively. Additionally, many supported developing a democratic leadership style, while others emphasised delegating authority with supervision. Since all strategies were endorsed by many of the respondents, they are broadly considered effective for enhancing leadership. Measures to improve leaders' leadership styles are represented in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Strategies/ Measures to Enhance School Leaders' Leadership Styles**

Figure 3 illustrates the seven key strategies identified for enhancing school leadership styles, ranked by respondent support. The chart shows that adequate training in school management (96.3%) and inclusive decision-making (93.9%) received the strongest endorsement, indicating these are viewed as foundational to effective leadership. Treating all teachers equally (88.0%) and providing extrinsic motivation (82.2 %) also garnered substantial support. Developing good interpersonal relationships (78.5%), careful delegation (74.4%), and adopting democratic leadership (70.5%) all exceeded 70 per cent support, suggesting a broad consensus on their importance. The descending pattern in the chart reveals that while all strategies are valued, capacity building through training and participatory governance is considered most critical for leadership improvement in the Agona West Municipality context.

## Discussion

Findings from the study revealed that democratic and transformational leadership styles are the dominant approaches practised by public basic school leaders, particularly within Ghana's Agona West Municipality. These leadership styles were found to promote collaboration, inclusivity, and enhanced academic performance among pupils. These findings underscore the critical role of leadership in shaping school culture and outcomes, aligning with global research emphasising that effective leadership directly influences teaching quality and learner achievement. Democratic leadership emerged as a particularly effective and widely practised style among school leaders. This approach fosters shared responsibility and participatory decision-making, allowing teachers, pupils, and community stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to school improvement. McCarley et al. (2016) argue that democratic leadership enhances decision-making, strengthens commitment to collective goals, and builds a sense of belonging within educational institutions. In this study, respondents noted that when teachers and pupils are given a voice in decision-making, their motivation and accountability increase, resulting in improved teaching and learning outcomes. These findings are consistent with the broader literature emphasising participatory and visionary leadership models as catalysts for inclusive and high-performing school environments.

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The strong success of democratic leadership in AWM (87% stakeholder involvement in SPIP) may be attributed to Ghana's cultural emphasis on communal decision-making and consensus. This differs from Western environments, where democratic leadership confronts implementation issues due to individualistic attitudes (Bush & Glover, 2014). However, the 13 per cent non-participation percentage requires further examination. Does this indicate hierarchical educational systems that persist despite democratic goals, or practical limits in time-limited planning sessions?

In addition to democratic leadership, transformational leadership was also identified as a central style adopted by school leaders in the municipality. Transformational leaders were found to inspire shared visions, promote creativity, and motivate teachers and pupils intrinsically. According to Eyal and Roth (2020), transformational leadership enhances school culture by fostering innovation, collaboration, and mutual respect, conditions essential for sustained academic excellence. This study's findings confirm that transformational leadership contributes to improved instructional quality and student performance by empowering teachers to align personal and institutional goals, thereby cultivating collective commitment to excellence. A significant insight that emerged from the study is the importance of leadership adaptability. Khalifa et al. (2019) contend that effective school leaders must adapt their leadership approaches to suit the unique needs and contexts of their schools and communities. This study supports that assertion, concluding that combining multiple leadership styles allows school leaders to address complex and diverse educational challenges more effectively. Contextual flexibility ensures that both teachers and pupils receive appropriate support and motivation tailored to their specific needs, leading to enhanced productivity and learning outcomes.

These findings further highlight that leadership styles play a critical role in shaping academic performance. Leithwood et al. (2020) affirm that democratic and transformational leadership significantly enhance pupil outcomes by fostering supportive and engaging learning environments. The majority of respondents in this study agreed that leadership styles have a positive impact on academic achievement, reinforcing the value of participatory and visionary leadership. Conversely, laissez-faire and autocratic leadership styles were found to be less effective. Hoy and Smith (2023) note that laissez-faire leadership often results in weak accountability, while autocratic leadership, although sometimes beneficial during emergencies, can stifle collaboration and innovation. Similarly, Bush and Glover (2021) observe that these leadership forms are generally inconsistent with the principles of inclusivity and teacher empowerment that underpin successful school systems. The rejection of laissez-faire leadership contrasts starkly with findings from high-autonomy education systems such as Finland (Sahlberg, 2015), where teacher-led governance thrives. AWM's inclination for active leadership could be attributed to: (1) teachers' need for administrative support due to large class numbers and limited resources, (2) examination-driven accountability necessitating collaborative efforts, or (3) early-career teacher demographics necessitating greater direction. Interestingly, autocratic leadership preserved minority support, particularly for 'emergencies,' implying context-dependent tolerance, which Hoy and Smith (2023) ignore in their blanket criticism.

Respondents overwhelmingly supported transformational leadership as the most effective style for improving academic performance, but emphasised that a blended, context-driven approach is ideal. This aligns with Khalifa et al. (2019), who argue that no single leadership style can address the diverse and evolving challenges faced by school leaders. Effective leadership, therefore, requires integrating complementary approaches that promote collaboration, inclusiveness, and shared responsibility. Leithwood et al. (2020) similarly describe transformational leadership as a multidimensional model that

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fosters open-mindedness, shared decision-making, and tolerance for diversity, all essential attributes for building cohesive and high-achieving school communities.

The study's data from the AWM further underscore the importance of cooperation in achieving academic success. Most respondents indicated that cooperation was actively encouraged by school leaders. This finding is supported by Hattie (2009), who emphasises that cooperative learning enhances pupil outcomes by developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. Likewise, Johnson and Johnson (2017) note that collaborative learning strengthens teamwork and communication competencies vital for success in examinations such as the BECE. However, some pupils reported limited support and inconsistent collaboration, suggesting areas for improvement. Sergiovanni (2015) attributes such gaps to weak communication and leadership inertia, urging school leaders to model cooperation, engage stakeholders, and institute systems that reward teamwork. An additional issue identified was the limited feedback-seeking behaviour among school leaders. Several teachers and pupils reported that leaders rarely sought feedback, an oversight with potential negative implications for school improvement. This paradox—leaders profess to encourage cooperation while students observe inconsistency—indicates a gap between stated and implemented leadership strategies. This supports Van der Rijt et al.'s (2022) observation that leaders frequently overestimate their collaborative behaviours. In the context of AWM, this could refer to: (1) time constraints that preclude persistent interaction, (2) token consultation without actual power-sharing, or (3) uneven treatment between grades/subjects. The evidence indicating a lack of feedback-seeking supports this implementation gap. DeWitt (2022) reinforces this view, noting that when school leaders engage with teachers' perspectives, they foster mutual respect, transparency, and a culture of reflection. Establishing regular feedback mechanisms, therefore, is essential for sustaining effective leadership and continuous academic improvement.

Findings from research question two show that democratic leadership is widely practised in Bobikuma Circuit 'A' public basic schools, particularly in developing the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP). This aligns with the study's objective of examining how leadership styles influence stakeholder participation, decision-making, and school improvement. The finding indicated strong evidence of a leadership culture rooted in inclusivity and collaboration. With 87 per cent of respondents involved in SPIP preparation, it is clear that school leaders actively promote participatory governance. Involving teachers and stakeholders in decisions fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. This approach, reflecting democratic leadership principles, enhances collective input, strengthens shared responsibility, and results in a more motivated and cohesive school workforce. The democratic leadership style observed in these schools aligns with broader educational goals that emphasise stakeholder engagement to enhance performance outcomes. The SPIP serves as a vital tool for planning strategies that improve teaching and learning. Active involvement of major stakeholders ensures the plan is comprehensive and addresses each school's unique needs. This inclusivity supports practical problem-solving and strengthens overall school operations. The study highlights the impact of leadership style on organisational culture; democratic leadership promotes cooperation, transparency, and mutual respect. These values foster strong workplace relationships, professional growth, and innovation.

The study aimed to determine whether pupils' academic performance is influenced by the leadership style of school leaders. Democratic, transformational, and visionary leadership styles were seen as more beneficial than authoritarian approaches, supporting findings. However, 119 (6.0 %) of respondents, including school leaders, teachers, and pupils, believed that leadership alone does not determine academic

success. They emphasised the role of pupil self-discipline, motivation, and behaviour in influencing outcomes. Effective leadership must be complemented by active pupil engagement. These views align with Huka (2003), Muli (2005), Wangui (2007), who noted that even democratic leaders may not succeed without a structured academic focus and pupil accountability.

The third research question aimed to investigate the steps taken to enhance the leadership style of the basic public-school leaders chosen for the study. Since all strategies were endorsed by over 70 per cent of respondents, they are broadly considered effective for enhancing leadership. These findings underscore the importance of capacity-building programmes, particularly in-service training and administrative education. These results align with Bush (2020), who highlights professional development as essential for effective leadership, and Leithwood et al. (2021), who stress the need for specialised training to meet evolving educational challenges. The emphasis on inclusivity in decision-making reflects a growing recognition of participatory leadership in education. Mulford (2022) notes that involving teachers and staff fosters accountability and ownership, thereby boosting academic performance. This approach is especially relevant in modern education, where collaboration is key. Though delegation and democratic leadership ranked slightly lower, they remain vital. Spillane and Diamond (2023) argue that distributed leadership, through supervised delegation, effectively utilises staff expertise and reduces school leaders' overload, enhancing school efficiency. While Khalifa et al. (2019) promote adaptive leadership, AWM findings show a stronger preference for steady transformative approaches over situational flexibility. Only 70 per cent of those polled supported style-altering based on context. This disparity could be attributed to: (1) teachers' demand for predictable leadership in resource-constrained contexts, (2) insufficient leadership training in adaptive models, or (3) cultural preferences for stable, authoritative figures. Unlike Spillane and Diamond's (2023) distributed leadership model, AWM reveals centralised decision-making even inside democratic contexts, implying consultation democracy rather than dispersed democracy.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** The study examined how leadership styles of public basic school leaders affect pupils' academic performance in the Agona West Municipality (AWM). Findings revealed that transformational and democratic leadership styles were most effective in promoting participation, collaboration, and motivation, creating a positive school climate. Autocratic leadership was used occasionally, while laissez-faire was least practised. Leadership style was found to significantly influence pupil performance by enhancing teaching quality, engagement, and motivation. However, factors such as pupil discipline, teacher commitment, and school conditions also affected outcomes, underscoring the need for complementary strategies. Continuous professional development in school management, participatory decision-making, fair and inclusive practices, teacher motivation, and fostering positive relationships were identified as key strategies to improve leadership effectiveness and academic performance.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends that school leaders adopt transformational and democratic leadership styles to enhance motivation, collaboration, and academic outcomes. Participatory leadership involving teachers, parents, pupils, and SMCs is essential for shared responsibility. GES and the Ministry of Education must provide leadership development and mentorship, prioritise teacher engagement and professional development, while Colleges of Education and the district directorate enhance leadership training, ethical standards, and accountability.

## Limitations of the Study

The investigation was limited to the AWM of the Central Region due to resource limitations; further studies should be conducted using the entire country.

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