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Principals' Leadership Approaches as Predictors of Career Progression among Middle-Level Managers in Secondary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Given that career progression offers opportunity for personal growth along with higher compensation, it is an essential part of a teacher's work life. In addition to having an impact on middle managers' job happiness and organizational commitment, secondary school principals' leadership style is crucial for career progression. This study looked at how middle managers' career progression was influenced strategic, directive, and supportive principal leadership in secondary schools within in Nairobi. Guided by Evans' Path-Goal Theory (1970), the study employed an Ex Post Facto design and collected data using questionnaires and structured interviews. Supportive leadership had a p-value of 0.172, indicating non-statistical significance in career progression; directive leadership also produced statistical significance with a p-value of 0.017; and strategic leadership with a p-value of 0.133 indicated lack of statistical significance, according to quantitative analysis using both descriptive and inferential statistics. According to the study, MOEST should have a policy encouraging principals of secondary schools to be more directive in helping middle managers advance their careers. Additional research on the impact of strategic and supportive leadership techniques on middle managers' career progression in secondary schools was recommended.

Keywords: Career Progression, Leadership Approaches, Middle Managers

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INTRODUCTION

The supportive function of secondary school principals is becoming more and more crucial for middle managers' career progression as well as for educational leadership. Given that career progression offers opportunity for personal growth along with higher compensation, it is an essential part of a teacher's work life. Recognizing that job progression offers secondary school instructors the chance to grow, Lee and Fei (2021) contended that it is a route to a position that every middle management aspires to. Middle managers at secondary schools aspired to a certain level of achievement prior to retirement when they were hired as teachers, which occasionally proved difficult to attain. Mutanga et al. (2021) acknowledged that professional progression can be difficult at times and pointed out that a variety of factors affect middle managers' path to fulfilling personal goals as secondary school teachers. These factors include the leadership styles of secondary school principals, who, according to Don and Raman (2019), have a responsibility to inspire employees to fulfill their personal professional goals. The leadership styles of secondary school principals are typically a major factor in determining middle managers' work satisfaction and career progression. Furthermore, Chi and Pan (2012) contended that secondary school principals' leadership styles affected their organizational commitment in addition to being a factor in middle management work satisfaction. The leadership style of secondary school administrators should ideally have a significant impact on career progression in addition to influencing the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of individual middle managers.

Deputy principals and heads of departments (HoDs) are examples of middle administrators in secondary schools who occasionally encounter disdainful influences on job progression from institutional leadership. According to Lee and Fei (2021), a situation like this could occur if secondary school principals don't create the right atmosphere to motivate middle managers to concentrate on their careers. In reality, middle managers' work satisfaction and organizational commitment are significantly influenced by the leadership styles of secondary school principals. As per Don and Raman (2019), encouraging secondary school principals serve as a social bridge between the goals of middle managers and the national HRM policy. The secondary school principal serves as a midway station by guiding, controlling, and providing leadership in a way that promotes middle managers' objectives for career progression. As per Banjarnahor et al. (2018), secondary school principals who practice both directive and supportive leadership would intentionally empower intermediate managers with less oversight for future progression. In light of the findings of Irungu et al. (2019), further research was necessary to determine the influence of secondary school principals on middle managers' career progression. Thus, this study examined how middle managers' career progression in Nairobi County, Kenya, was impacted by the leadership style of secondary school principals.

Statement of the Problem

Most of the time, job progression is not consistent; some middle managers advance more quickly than others, and there is clear stagnation throughout the nation, including in Nairobi County. According to Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Career Progression Guidelines (CPG), the secondary school system shall give middle managers similar opportunity for ongoing education whenever TSC posts job openings. This appears to be untrue, though, as evidenced by the research material that is now accessible, which suggests that the leadership styles of secondary school principals may have an impact on middle managers' ability to advance in their careers. It seems sense that middle managers and principals have a

directional connection when it comes to leadership in secondary schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine how middle managers' career progression at secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, is impacted by the leadership styles of supporting, directive, and strategic principals.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to determine how leadership styles affected middle managers' career progression in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. This study specifically examined the impact of strategic, directive, and supporting leadership techniques on middle managers' career progression in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Study Hypothesis

H_0: There is no statistically significant relationship between principals' strategic, directive, and supportive leadership approaches and career progression among middle-level managers in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

H_1: Principals' strategic, directive, and supportive leadership approaches significantly predict career progression among middle-level managers in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya**.**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Using an eclectic approach, the study adopted Evans' Path-Goal Theory (1970) to explain principals' leadership influence on middle managers' career progression (Shaibu & Ejeh 2017). As noted by Vandegrift and Matusitz (2011), Evans based his research on Victor Vroom's expectation theory, which contends that people are more inclined to perform when they are certain that their efforts will be acknowledged and rewarded. In this study, middle managers' performance in secondary schools was motivated by the prospect of job progression. Based on this theory, the study examined how middle managers' performance, motivation, and level of satisfaction affected secondary school principals' leadership styles. In concurrence Bhatti et al. (2015) noted that Path-Goal hypothesis describes middle managers' sense of purpose toward the group's objective and their focus on gaining the management experiences that are essential for career progression. The idea looks at how secondary school principals help middle managers achieve their objectives and how individual work performance plays a big part in middle managers' career progression. However, secondary school principals have a leadership duty to remove barriers that would prevent middle managers from achieving their career objectives, according to path-goal theory (Pool, 2011). In practice, leadership approaches determine the degree of policy adherence in secondary schools, which in turn influences career progression among middle managers. Additionally, Vandegrift and Matusitz (2011) argued that career progression becomes an illusion when secondary school leadership fails to remove obstacles on a path around professional development. In order to reduce career progression obstacles, secondary school leadership must give middle managers the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge through management responsibilities.

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Conceptual Framework

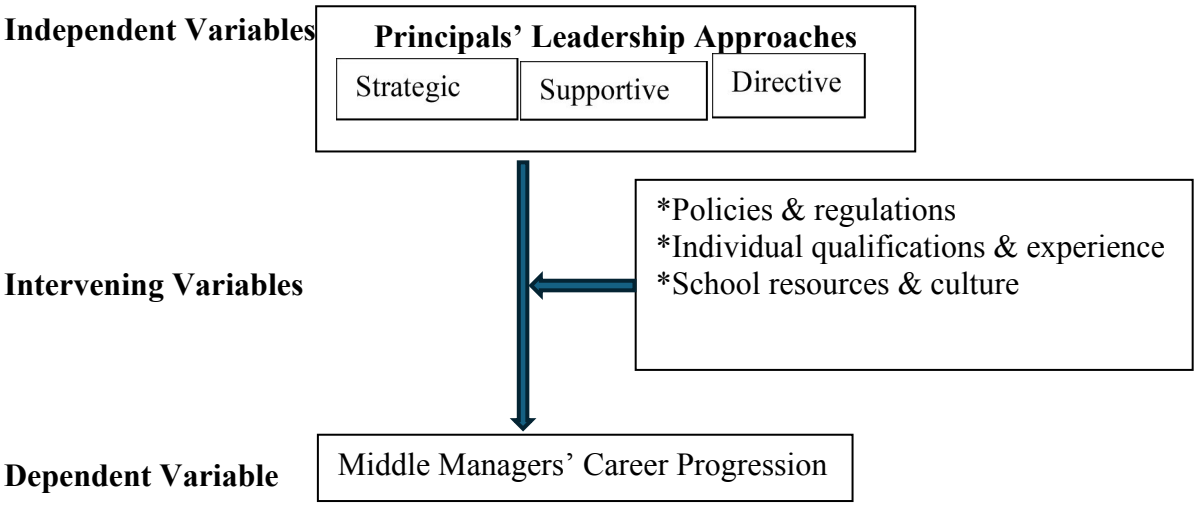

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework as illustrated in figure 1, posits that principals' leadership approaches, namely strategic, directive, and supportive leadership, influence the career progression of middle-level managers in public secondary schools. Strategic leadership facilitates career progression through vision creation, delegation, and professional development opportunities. Directive leadership influences career progression by providing clear expectations, supervision, and performance monitoring. Supportive leadership enhances career progression through mentorship, recognition, emotional support, and participatory decision-making. The outcome of these leadership approaches is reflected in the career progression of middle-level managers as measured by promotions, increased managerial responsibilities, leadership competence development, professional growth, and career satisfaction. However, the relationship may be moderated by intervening factors such as TSC promotion policies, Ministry of Education regulations, individual qualifications, organizational culture, school resources, and the availability of promotion opportunities

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an ex-post facto design and involved 728 middle managers from 104 public secondary school principals making a target population of 832. Three public secondary schools were selected using stratified random sampling, and two HODs were chosen at random from the sample size of 136. The technologies' combination made it possible to collect data holistically, which increased the breadth and depth of insights obtained and made it easier to triangulate conclusions (Nadarasa & Thuraisingam, 2014). The gathered data was processed and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Coding open-ended data, digitalization, cleaning to fix missing or misplaced codes, transforming the scale of measurement to make analysis easier, and aggregating impressions into thematic analysis were all steps in the processing of qualitative data. Quantitative analysis examined the relationship between leadership approaches and career development using statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics generated frequencies and percentages, while linear regression tested variable associations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The leadership styles of secondary school principals have a significant impact on middle managers' organizational commitment and career progression. Out of 126 sampled middle managers in participating secondary schools, 73.5% (75) completed questionnaires, resulting in a return rate of 72.8%, which includes 26 (76.5%) principals out of 34. The career progression rate of middle managers in secondary schools was the dependent variable, and it was determined as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Rate of Career Progression among Middle Managers

Rate of Career Progression	N	Percent
Lowest	30	40.0
Low	25	33.3
Moderate	14	18.7
High	6	8.0
Total	75	100

Source: ***Research Data***

Table 1 showed that middle managers in secondary schools in Nairobi County had low career progression, with 73.3% of respondents agreeing, 18.7% rating it as moderate, and just 8% believing it to be at a higher rate. These findings support the claim made by Bayar and Karaduman (2021) that low morale due to promotion would result in subpar performance. They also show low motivation among the majority of middle managers, which could lead to decreased commitment. In reality, the expectations of middle managers would affect people's behaviour and level of motivation for their careers. According to Kiptum (2018), the difficulty in keeping middle managers in secondary schools could be explained by higher expectations and the ensuing decreased level of career drive.

Principal Demographics

The study established relationship between middle managers' career progression and different demographic characteristics of the school principals as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Principal Demographics

Variables	Categories	N	Percentage
Gender	Male	14	53.8%
	Female	12	46.2%
	Total	**26**	**100%**
Academic Qualifications	Graduate	10	38.5%
	PGD in Education	3	11.5%
	Masters in Education	12	46.2%
	PhD	1	3.8
	Total	**26**	**100**
Years as a Teacher	Under 5	0	0.0

	6-10	0	0.0
	11-15	4	15.4
	16-20	14	53.8
	Over 20	8	30.8
	Total	**26**	**100.0**
Years as a Senior Master	Under 5	7	26.9
	6-10	15	57.7
	11-15	3	11.5
	16-20	1	3.8
	Over 20	0	0.0
	Total	26	100.0
Years as a D/principal	Under 5	9	34.6
	6-10	14	53.8
	Over 10 years	3	11.5
	Total	26	100
Years in current Position	Under 5	11	42.3
	6-10	14	53.8
	11-15	1	3.8
	Total	26	100

Source: ***Research Data***

Both genders are represented in institutional leadership in Nairobi County, as seen by Table 2, which shows that 53.8% (14) of the secondary school principals that took part were men and 46.2% (12) were women. Principals' gender orientation is not mentioned in the CPG from TSC, which outlines the professional and academic requirements for middle managers in secondary schools to advance in their careers. In terms of credentials, the majority of secondary school principals (46.2%) held a master's degree in education, followed by education graduates (38.5%, 10%), postgraduate diploma holders (11.5%, 3%), and PhD holders (3.8%). This shows that every secondary school principal in Nairobi County was qualified to direct and oversee middle managers' career progression s. The fact that every secondary school administrator in Nairobi has been a teacher for more than ten years, giving them what Leonard and Olubunmi (2022) called "human competencies," further supports this qualification. Additionally, it shows that 53.8% (14) of Nairobi's secondary school principals have worked for 16–20 years, and 30.8% (8) have worked for more than 20 years. As a result, they have developed a distinct set of experiences, viewpoints, beliefs, and emotional and social needs in human resource management.

The majority of principals in Nairobi County have the necessary expertise to promote middle managers' morale in terms of career aspirations because they came from a progressive structure that started from time of employment as teachers through ranks (TSC 2018) (Nadarasa & Thuraisingam 2014). According to Kinyua and Muchanje (2023), secondary school principals' ability to lead their teams effectively depends on their prior experiences as senior masters and deputy principals. As noted by Bayar and Karaduman (2021), experienced principals collaborate effectively with middle managers in decision-making. Experience

gained through such collaboration as senior masters and deputies enhances chances for career progression consideration from teamwork and school problem-solving activities. Secondary school principals' experience, as determined by this study, would allow middle managers to employ directive, supportive, and strategic leadership approaches to influence middle teachers' career progression. In particular, 53.8% (14) of those in the current position had been institutional heads for six to ten years, 42.3% (11) for less than five years, and only 3.8% for more than ten.

Middle Managers Demographics

It is important to remember that middle managers' career progression is influenced by the larger legal and policy environment, and there are significant differences between nations. As a roadmap for professional progression, TSC in Kenya has a policy requirement for middle management promotions in secondary schools (Kiptum, 2018). In actuality, the career progression policy offers middle managers in secondary schools a methodical approach to progression. The goal of this study was to identify factors that influence middle managers' career progression in Nairobi County's public secondary schools. The profile of middle managers who took part in the study is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Middle Managers Demographic Information

Variables		**Low**		**Moderate**		**High**		**Total**
Variables	Categories	n	%	n	%	n	%	Total (n, %)
Gender	Male	29	38.7	11	14.7	4	5.3	44,58.7
	Female	24	32.0	5	6.7	2	2.7	31, 41.3
	Total	**53**	**70.7**	**16**	**21.3**	**6**	**8.0**	**75, 100.0**
Age	Under 25	0	0.0	1	1.3	1	1.3	2,2.7
	25-34	9	12.0	3	4.0	1	1.3	13,17.3
	35-45	17	22.7	3	4.0	1	1.3	21,28.0
	45-55	26	34.7	9	12.0	3	4.0	38,50.7
	Over 55	1	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,1.3
	Total	**53**	**70.7**	**16**	**21.3**	**6**	**8.0**	**75, 100.0**
Academic Qualifications	SI/ Diploma	1	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	1, 1.3
	Graduate	31	41.3	11	14.7	3	4.0	45,60.0
	Post-Graduate Dip. Ed	6	8.0	1	1.3	0	0.0	7, 9.3
	M. Ed	14	18.7	4	5.3	3	4.0	21,28.30
	PhD	1	1.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,1.3
	Total	**53**	**70.7**	**16**	**21.3**	**6**	**8.0**	**75, 100.0**
Years as a Teacher	Under 5	0	0.0	1	1.3	0	0.0	1,1.3
	6-10	6	8.0	1	1.3	3	4.0	10,13.3
	11-15	12	16.0	3	4.0	0	0.0	15,20.0
	16-20	10	13.3	4	5.3	0	0.0	14,18.0
	Over 20	25	33.3	7	9.3	3	4.0	35,46.7

	Total	**53**	**70.7**	**16**	**21.3**	**6**	**8.0**	**75, 100.0**
Years in this School	Under 5	18	24.0	6	8.0	5	6.7	25,33.3
	6-10	17	22.7	7	9.3	0	0.0	29,38.7
	11-15	6	8.0	1	1.3	0	0.0	7,9.3
	16-20	6	8.0	2	2.7	0	0.0	8,10.7
	Over 20	6	8.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6,8.0
	Total	**53**	**70.7**	**16**	**21.3**	**6**	**8.0**	**75,100.0**
Years in Current Position	Under 5	13	17.3	6	8.0	1	1.3	20,26.7
	6-10	29	38.7	6	8.0	2	2.7	37,49.3
	11-15	5	6.7	4	5.3	1	1.3	10,13.3
	16-20	4	5.3	0	0.0	1	1.3	5,6.7
	Over 20	2	2.7	0	0.0	1	1.3	3,4.0
	Total	**53**	**70.7**	**16**	**21.3**	**6**	**8.0**	**75, 100.0**

Source: ***Research Data***

Gender

According to Table 3, there are more male middle managers than female middle managers in Nairobi County's secondary schools. The chart indicates that there are 58.7% (44) male middle managers and 41.3% (31) female middle managers, despite the fact that most researchers have found that there are more female instructors in Nairobi (Irungu et al., 2019). There should be fewer male middle managers because there are more female instructors in Nairobi City secondary schools. The results of Muchanje et al.'s (2016) study on the factors impacting tutors' career progression in Kenya's public primary teachers' training colleges, which found no significant relationship between tutors' promotion and gender, support these findings. In contrast to Muchanje et al. (2016), Penelope (2018) found that female teachers had difficulty advocating for leadership roles in public secondary schools in Zambia's Chingola District. This finding may help to explain the situation in Nairobi County.

Age

According to Table 3's results, the majority of middle managers at secondary schools in Nairobi County are between the ages of 45 and 55, accounting for 50.7% (38) of the total, followed by those between the ages of 35 and 44 (28%). Middle managers between the ages of 25 and 34 make up 17.3% (13), those under 25 make up 2.7% (2), while those over 55 make up 1.3% (1). These findings support Bayar and Karaduman's (2021) assertions that age is positively associated with career progression. In practice, senior positions in secondary schools are often inaccessible to less experienced teachers as noted by Oyier et al. (2017) and is a key factor in career progression. In Kenya, teachers typically begin their careers at about 22 years, explaining why many middle managers are found in older age categories while promotion potential emerges from around age 25.

Qualifications and Experience

The majority of middle administrators in Nairobi County's secondary schools were graduate teachers with a bachelor's degree in education (60%), and a significant portion had master's degrees (28.3%). The majority of middle managers (46.7%) have worked as teachers for

more than 20 years, followed by those who have worked in secondary schools for 11–15 years (20%) and 16–20 years (18%). According to the aforementioned findings, 64 of the 75 middle managers who took part in the study had been teachers for more than 15 years, however just 4 believe the rate of professional progression has been high enough. Middle managers must wait at least three years following any promotion before moving on to the next stage of their careers, according to CPG.

However, table 3 shows that almost half (49.5%) of middle managers have held their current post for six to ten years, 13.3% (10) for eleven to fifteen years, 6.7% (5) for sixteen to twenty years, and 4.0% (3) for more than twenty years. Even though experience may play a role in determining career progression, many middle managers appear to have held their current positions for longer than the CPG specifies. Even worse, 28% (18) have attended the same secondary school for more than ten years, and 38.7% (29) have done so for six to ten years. The results ran counter to Nadarasa and Thuraisingam's (2014) claim that the most crucial promotion factors should be administrative aptitude, teaching experience, and length of service.

Descriptive Analysis on Principals Leadership Approaches

The purpose of this study was to determine how much middle managers' career progression in Nairobi County, Kenya, would be impacted by the leadership styles of secondary school principals. The study specifically examined the impact of strategic, directive, and supporting leadership techniques on middle managers' career progression. Twelve perception statements were used to gauge the leadership dimension of school administrators. Middle managers were asked to rate their frequency on a five-point ordinal scale that was calibrated as "lowest," "low," "moderate," "high," and "highest." Furthermore, a clearer picture of the overall impact of secondary school principals' leadership styles on middle managers' career progression in Nairobi County can be obtained by analysing the composite means of the variables.

Supportive Leadership

In secondary schools, supportive leadership is principals collaborating with middle managers in an empowerment process to acquire the necessary abilities to eventually manage duties with little supervision. The opinions of middle managers on involvement through delegation and mentoring until tasks are completed as elements of supportive leadership as crucial factors in career growth were gathered, and the results are shown in Table 4**.**

Table 4: Middle Managers Perception on Supportive Leadership

Supportive Leadership Statements	VL	L	M	H	VH	Mean	Std. Dev
Principal maintains a positive teaching and learning environments for staff professional development	0 (0.0%)	4 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (21.3%)	55 (73.0%)	4.63	0.749
Principals embrace teamwork towards targets to be achieved	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (20.0%)	18 (24.0%)	42 (56.0%)	4.36	0.799

Principal is continuously mentoring middle managers toward career progression	11 (14.6%)	4 (5.3%)	8 (10.7%)	9 (12.0%)	43 (57.3%)	3.92	1.496
The principal encourages dialogue on available career progression vacancies	11 (14.6%)	1 (1.3%)	17 (22.7%)	21 (28.0%)	25 (33.3%)	3.65	1.341
Average	**7.3%**	**4.0%**	**13.2%**	**21.3%**	**54.9%**	**4.14**	**1.096**

Source: ***Research Data***

Table 4 indicates that over 90% of middle managers (Mean=4.63, SD=0.749) affirmed that principals fostered effective learning environments supporting professional growth. The average score of 4.63 suggests that middle managers' career progression in secondary schools in Nairobi County was significantly impacted by the development of a favorable learning environment. Approximately 80% of middle managers affirmed that principals fostered teamwork toward institutional goal attainment. This echoes Zhao (2018) argument that supportive leadership promotes sustained collaboration in task accomplishment. Also, nearly 70% of middle managers perceived principals as mentors facilitating professional progression . Consistently, Chi and Pan (2012) associated supportive leadership with career progression and job satisfaction. Additionally, as shown in Table 4.8 by around 60% (28% & 33.3%25) middle managers with a mean of 3.65 (SD=1.341), secondary school administrators promoted discussion regarding open career progression positions. According to Bayar and Karaduman (2021), middle managers would be able to develop a sense of self-worth and dedication to their respective organizations and tasks if they were rewarded with promotions. In secondary schools, motivated teachers who have been promoted should ideally be eager to assist pupils and deliver timely service (Kiptum, 2018). Overall, Table 4 shows that more than 75% (21.3% & 54.9) of middle managers believed secondary school principals' supportive leadership had an impact on career progression in Nairobi County. The overall mean of 4.14 supports Zheng et al.'s (2017) assertion that principals enhance commitment to educational objectives.

Directive Leadership

As indicated in Table 5, this study examined directed leadership among secondary school principals as a task-oriented strategy that equips middle managers for career progression .

Table 5: Middle Managers Perception on Directive Leadership

Directive Leadership Statements	**VL**	**L**	**M**	**H**	**VH**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
The principal is assertively in ensuring targets are achieved	0 (0.0%)	11 (14.6%)	25 (33.3%	20 (26.7%)	19 (25.3%)	3.63	1.024
Principal make middle managers	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (20.0%)	30 (40.0%)	30 (40.0%)	4.2	0.753

aware of performance expectations							
Principals expect middle managers to fully complete given tasks	0 (0.0%)	11 (14.6%)	19 (25.3%)	32 (42.7%)	13 (17.3%)	3.63	0.941
The principal decisively sticks to rules and procedures toward completion of tasks	0 (0.0%)	11 (14.6%)	20 (26.7%)	15 (20.0%)	29 (38.7%)	3.83	1.107
Average	**0.0%**	**11.0%**	**26.3%**	**32.0%**	**30.2%**	**3.82**	**0.956**

Source: ***Research Data***

Table 5 shows that over 95% (33.3%, 26.7%, & 25.3%) of middle managers believed secondary school principals actively ensured goals were met (Mean 3.63, SD = 1.024). Alongside these findings, Bell et al. (2014) found directive leadership to be beneficial since it helps middle managers make decisions and take actions that could impact career progression. Once more, the findings show that in order to prepare middle managers for career progression, 100% of them agreed that principals informed them of specific performance requirements (Mean 4.2, SD=0.753).

Once more, the findings indicate that more than 80% of middle managers (25.3%, 42.7%, and 17.3%) concurred that principals who exercised directive leadership expected everyone to complete all assigned duties (Mean 3.63, SD = 0.941) in order to advance their careers. These findings supported the claim made by Rani et al. (2013) that secondary school principals who practice directed leadership eliminate barriers that could hinder middle managers' progression in their careers as a token of gratitude.

Additionally, the findings indicate that more than 80% of middle managers (26.7%, 20%, and 38.7%) concurred that secondary school principals in Nairobi County firmly adhered to policies and procedures to guarantee that assignments were finished (Mean 3.68, SD = 1.107). Table 5 shows that 62.2% (32.0% & 30.2) of secondary school principals highly value directive leadership as a factor in career progression.

A overall mean of 3.82 supported the claim made by Leonard and Olubunmi (2022) that secondary school administrators actively participate in establishing specific goals and assisting middle managers in realizing their career goals. This supported the claim made by Shaibu and Ejeh (2017) that principals of secondary schools that use directive-style leadership behave in an aggressive and controlling manner, which is crucial for developing middle managers' capacity for career progression.

Strategic Leadership

The interests of different stakeholders in the educational setting are balanced by strategic leadership, which is based on vision, mission, strategy, and strategic goals for career progression. The goal of this study was to determine how strategic leadership could help middle managers in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, gain a competitive edge

that would advance their careers. Middle managers' opinions of strategic leadership at secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Middle Managers Perception of Strategic Leadership

	VL	L	M	H	VH	Mean	Std. Dev
The principal guides on available positions for career progression	4 (5.3%)	6 (8.0%)	18 (24.0%)	21 (28.0%)	26 (34.7%)	3.79	1.166
The principal equally considers middle managers for promotion	5 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	31 (41.3%)	23 (30.7%)	16 (21.3%)	3.6	1.04
Principal balances interests of various stakeholders in career progression	0 (0.0%)	8 (10.7%	22 (29.3%)	22 (29.3%)	23 (30.7%)	3.8	1.09
Principal expects teaching-learning a collaborative venture with middle managers	4 (5.3%)	3 (4.0%)	20 (26.7%)	12 (16.0%)	36 (48.0%)	3.97	1.185
Average	**4.3%**	**5.5%**	**30.3%**	**25.8%**	**33.4%**	**3.79**	**1.121**

Source: ***Research Data***

Table 6 shows that over 90% of middle managers (24%, 285 & 34.7%) felt that strategic leadership principals provided counsel on open roles for professional progression (Mean 3.79, SD = 1.166). Once more, the findings demonstrated that more than 90% of middle managers (41.3%, 30.7%, and 21.3%) concurred that secondary school principals in Nairobi County who practice strategic leadership are equally qualified to be promoted (Mean 3.6, SD = 1.04) when positions become available. Principals using strategic leadership operated in accordance with Prasertcharoensuk and Tang's (2017) claim that middle managers individually ascribe rareness for consideration in career progression by providing direction and giving preference to those qualified for promotion. Many stakeholders are interested in career progression, and the results show that over 90% of middle managers (29.3%, 29.3%, and 30.7%) felt that Nairobi's strategic leadership principals balanced these within the institutional environment (Mean 3.8 SD = 1.01).

According to Kiptum (2018), principals who practice strategic leadership should promote teamwork when making decisions about career progression because intermediate managers have a variety of skills. Additionally, the findings show that slightly more than 90% of middle managers concur that principals who practice strategic leadership anticipate teaching-learning to be a cooperative endeavor with middle managers (Mean 3.97 SD 1.185). In agreement, Prasertcharoensuk and Tang (2017) claimed that by fostering an institutional culture that favors everyone regardless of stakeholder roles, strategic principles inspired and directed middle managers' career objectives. Overall, Table 6 reveals that 30.3% of middle managers somewhat, 25.8% highly, and 33.4% very highly agreed that secondary school principals value strategic leadership.

With an overall mean of 3.79, these findings supported the theory put forth by Mahdi and Almasfir (2014) that strategic leadership among secondary school principals offered a policy orientation that guided choices and actions as a foundation for the creation and execution of plans intended to improve middle managers' career progression.

Inferential Statistics on Principal Leadership Approaches and Career Progression

The association between career progression and leadership philosophies—supportive, directive, and strategic—was modelled in the study using linear regression.

$$Y=\beta_0+\beta_3X_1+\beta_3X_2+\beta_3X_3+\varepsilon \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (1)$$

Where e is the error term that accounts for unexplained variability, β1 X1, β1 X2, and β1 X3 are coefficients that quantify the impact of each leadership trait, and beta_0 is the intercept (baseline career development among middle managers). Table 7 displayed the model summary results.

Table 7: Model Summary (Leadership Approaches)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.292[a]	.085	.047	.93443
a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic, Supportive, Directive				
b. Dependent Variable: Rate your career progression				

Source: ***Research Data***

Table 7 shows a moderately favorable linear link between middle managers' career progression (dependent variable) and leadership techniques (independent variables), with a correlation coefficient (R) value of 0.292. The correlation suggests that stronger leadership practices moderately enhance middle managers' career progression prospects**.** Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R-squared) value was 0.085, meaning that the independent variables—supportive, directive, and strategic leadership—could account for about 8.5% of the variance in middle managers' career progression. Furthermore, the study produced the adjusted R-squared value of 0.047, which takes into account the number of predictors in the model and shows a little drop in comparison to the R-squared value, suggesting that the additional predictors have only slightly increased the model's explanatory power. Table 8 displays the ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test results.

Table 8: ANOVA (Leadership Approaches)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.793	3	1.931	2.211	.094[b]
	Residual	61.994	71	.873		
	Total	67.787	74			
a. Dependent Variable: Rate your career progression						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic, Supportive, Direct						

Source: ***Research Data***

The findings under the Regression section display the sum of squares, which illustrates how the regression model explains the variation in middle managers' career progression .

According to Table 8, the model explains 5.793 units of variation in middle managers' career progression . The degrees of freedom, which represent the three predictors in the model—supportive leadership, directive leadership, and strategic leadership—complement this realization. The impact of leadership styles on middle managers' career progression is further clarified by calculating the mean square, which yields an average measure of variability explained by each predictor.

With a value of 2.211, the F statistic highlighted the importance of the regression model and showed a significant improvement in prediction when compared to situations where there were no predictors. Moving on to the residual portion, the sum of squares represents the career progression variability that the regression model was unable to explain. The mean square provides an average measure of this unexplained variation in middle managers' career progression, with 74 degrees of freedom for the residuals.

Finally, the total section integrates both the explained and unexplained variability in middle managers' career progression. The significance of the predictors (supportive leadership, directive leadership, and strategic leadership) as career progression determinants is further supported by the small p-value (Sig.) of 0.094 (denoted as "b"), which shows that the observed career progression among middle managers is unlikely to be the result of random chance. Table 9 displays the coefficients of leadership techniques.

Table 9: Coefficients (Leadership Approaches)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.014	.581		3.465	.001
	Supportive	.085	.062	.345	1.379	.172
	Directive	-.181	.074	-.618	-2.436	.017
	Strategic	.085	.056	.266	1.520	.133
a. Dependent Variable: Rate of career progression						

Source: ***Research Data***

Table 9's findings shed light on how each predictor variable—supportive, directive, and strategic leadership—affects middle managers' ability to advance in their careers in secondary schools. In particular, supportive leadership produced an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.084, suggesting a negligible impact on career progression. This small effect was further supported by the standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.345, which, when expressed in standard deviation units, showed that supportive leadership had very little effect on career progression. Furthermore, the coefficient for supportive leadership in middle managers' career progression was not statistically significant, according to the t-value of 1.379 and the corresponding p-value of 0.172.

On the other hand, middle managers' career progression was also significantly impacted by directive leadership, with a standardized coefficient of 0.618 and an unstandardized value of 0.181. The t-value of 2.436 and the corresponding p-value of 0.017 show statistical significance, indicating that middle managers' career progression is significantly impacted by directed leadership. The absence of statistical significance in strategic leadership was demonstrated by the t-value of 1.320 and the corresponding p-value of 0.133, highlighting the

minimum significant contribution of strategic leadership to differences in middle managers' career progression. Consequently, the linear regression model can be summed up as follows:

Career Progression among Middle Managers = 1.014 + .172 (Supportive leadership) + .017 (Directive leadership) + .133 (Strategic leadership) – 0.133

The study's null hypothesis, "Ho1. There is no statistically significant relationship between leadership approaches and career progression among middle managers Nairobi County, Kenya," was rejected as false based on the evidence presented. The reason for this rejection was that middle managers' career progression was found to be strongly correlated with directive leadership at a 95% confidence range. Therefore, the regression model shows evidence that leadership methods play a substantial role in predicting career progression among middle managers, with directive leadership emerging as the most significant variable in boosting career progression among middle managers

DISCUSSION

This study looked at how much middle-level managers' career progression at public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, is predicted by the leadership styles of their principals. The results showed that while respondents viewed supportive, directive, and strategic leadership favorably, only directive leadership was a significant predictor of career progression. These results offer crucial insights into how leadership behaviors influence career progression in highly regimented educational settings. Despite having significant professional credentials and a wealth of teaching experience, the study found that career progression among middle-level managers was typically poor. According to TSC, a significant percentage of middle managers had stayed in their current roles for longer than expected. This conclusion implies that systemic variables, such as institutional frameworks and a lack of promoting chances, may potentially hinder career progression in addition to individual skill or experience. The results corroborate the findings of Kiptum (2018), who noted that postponed promotions can lower workers' commitment and motivation, and Bayar and Karaduman (2021), who connected fewer options for progression with worse organizational morale.

Respondents gave supportive leadership high marks, especially when it came to collaborating, mentoring, and creating favorable work conditions. These results, which are in line with Zheng et al. (2017) and Zhao (2018), indicate that supportive principals improve professional development by encouraging teamwork and employee empowerment. However, career progression was not strongly predicted by supportive leadership. This result suggests that although supportive leadership may increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction, it has little effect on official promotion outcomes. Career progression in Kenya's public school system seems to rely less on interpersonal support and more on measurable achievement and adherence to predetermined promotion requirements. The only statistically significant predictor of career progression was found to be directive leadership. Middle managers' career progression was more likely to be facilitated by principals who emphasized accountability, implemented policies, monitored performance, and communicated clear expectations. The Path-Goal Theory, which holds that leaders improve subordinate results by defining goals and lowering performance obstacles, is substantially supported by this research.

Additionally, it supports the findings of Leonard and Olubunmi (2022), who discovered that directing leadership enhances employee progress by coordinating individual performance with corporate expectations. Directive leadership may give middle managers in public secondary schools the chance to exhibit the leadership skills, visibility, and performance qualities needed for progression. Despite receiving positive ratings, strategic leadership had little effect on professional progression. This result implies that rather than directly influencing decisions about promotions, strategic leadership may indirectly support professional development by fostering positive organizational environments. Mahdi and Almasfir (2014), who saw strategic leadership as a vehicle for long-term organizational effectiveness and employee development, are somewhat supported by the outcome. Overall, the results support Path-Goal Theory to some extent.

Although several leadership philosophies are important, directed leadership has the biggest impact on career progression since it directly matches employee conduct with organizational performance standards. Therefore, the study shows that principals who combine developmental assistance with clear performance goals, accountability systems, and opportunities for displaying leadership competency are most able to encourage career growth among middle-level managers.

CONCLUSION

The impact of principals' leadership styles on middle-level managers' career progression at public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, was examined in this study. The study looked at the predictive impacts of strategic, directive, and supporting leadership techniques under the guidance of Path-Goal Theory. The results showed that even though many respondents had significant professional credentials, a great deal of teaching experience, and a long tenure in leadership roles, career progression among middle-level managers is still very low. The survey also showed that strategic, directive, and supporting leadership styles were frequently used by principals. Only directing leadership, nevertheless, showed a statistically meaningful impact on career progression. In particular, middle managers' career progression was more likely to be facilitated by principals who evaluated performance, enforced policies, communicated objectives clearly, and offered organized guidance.

Conversely, supportive and strategic leadership did not significantly predict career progression, despite being positively seen and contributing to favourable work conditions. These results imply that career progression in Kenyan public secondary schools is impacted by leadership strategies that directly match employee performance with institutional and promotion requirements, in addition to leadership support. Thus, the study comes to the conclusion that middle-level managers' career progression is significantly influenced by directed leadership. As a result, administrators of secondary schools should provide mentorship, professional development, and leadership exposure opportunities in addition to strengthening performance-oriented leadership practices. Middle-level managers' chances for career progression and organizational effectiveness may both be improved by such an integrated leadership style.

Recommendations

Recommendations aimed at policy and research opportunities were made by this study. In this sense, MOEST needs a policy that will motivate principals of secondary schools to help middle managers advance their careers in a strategic and encouraging manner. The study

suggested investigating the impact of strategic and supportive leadership styles on middle managers' career progression in secondary schools.

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