



Local Councils in the Gambia: Exploring the Influence of Leadership on Performance

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of leadership on local council performance in The Gambia, with three objectives focused on understanding leadership roles, evaluating their effects, and examining leadership challenges. The study adopted a survey research approach; data were collected from a sample of 384 individuals out of 408,284. Rigorous data analysis methods, including correlation analysis, multiple, and simple regression, were employed. The findings reveal a substantial and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.797$) between leadership roles and local council performance, supported by a low p-value (.000), emphasizing the significance of effective leadership in local governance. Multiple regression analysis further illustrates that higher values of certain predictor variables (CH and IM) are associated with improved performance. In comparison, higher values of IS are linked to decreased performance, underlining the diverse factors influencing local council performance. Additionally, a simple regression analysis highlights a significant negative relationship between leadership challenges (CoL) and local council performance, emphasizing the urgent need to address these challenges. In conclusion, this study underscores the vital role of effective leadership, the relevance of specific predictor variables, and the urgency of addressing leadership challenges to enhance local council performance and governance effectiveness in The Gambia.

Keywords: Leadership, Local government, Performance, Decentralization, Governance.

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Introduction

Governments historically centralised power but have increasingly shifted towards decentralisation in contemporary years, devolving authority to regional and local governments (Hueglin & Fenna, 2015). Leadership is a critical concept in organisational studies, defined as the process of influencing others to achieve specific goals (Sharma & Jain, 2013).



Effective leadership concerns creating a clear vision, enforcing organisational systems, and maintaining discipline (Braun & Mahmoud, 2014). In the context of local government councils in The Gambia, leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the future. The country is divided into eight administrative regions, each with its local council led by elected officials like Mayors and Chairpersons, while the Chief Executive Officer oversees daily operations (Fremeth & Holburn, 2020).

Despite policy reforms aimed at enhancing autonomy and performance of local councils, such as Decentralisation Act (2002), the Local Government Act (2004, 2006, and 2007), the Local Government Finance and Audit Act in 2004, the Decentralisation Policy in 2007, Local Government Service Commission Regulations (2010), and Local Government Staff Service Rules (2003), and the Decentralisation Policy (Ministry of Lands and Regional Government, 2015), local councils have not met expectations. This study aims to analyse the relationship between leadership and council performance. It assesses leadership based on various indicators, explores how these indicators affect council performance and investigates associated challenges. Notwithstanding past reforms, weak planning, unmet community anticipations, and sectoral inconsistencies persist due to inadequate leadership (Ministry of Lands and Regional Government, 2015). This leadership gap hampers the transfer of functions, competencies, and finances needed for complete decentralisation (Ministry of Lands and Regional Government, 2015).

Globally, scholars have extensively researched leadership's impact on local governance with varied insights (Ria, Hamzah, & Shinta, 2018; Shimengah, 2018; Lola & Samson, 2018; Uche, 2014; Denita & Marco, 2020; Onu, Akinlabi, & Egbuta, 2018), there is a dearth of such research in The Gambia. This study aims to bridge this gap by evaluating the roles of leadership in the performance of the local council, examining its effects on the performance of the local councils, and investigating the challenges of leadership associated with the performance of the local councils in The Gambia. The following hypotheses were formulated for the study: Hypothesis related to Objective (i): Null Hypothesis (H₀): The roles of leadership do not have a significant relationship with the performance of the local councils in The Gambia. Hypothesis related to



Objective (ii): Null Hypothesis (H₀): Leadership roles do not have a significant effect on the performance of the local councils in The Gambia. Hypothesis related to Objective (iii): Null Hypothesis (H₀): The challenges of leadership do not significantly hinder the performance of the local councils in the study area.

This study investigates the effect of leadership on the performance of local councils in The Gambia, focusing on the Ministry of Lands and Local Government Affairs (MoLLGA), Banjul City Council (BCC), and Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC). These councils operate under MoLLGA's guidance and hold critical roles in grassroots governance. The research targets senior and middle management staff with five to ten years of experience in these organizations, selected for their valuable understanding of leadership's influence on local council performance. The study spans from 2013 to 2023 due to data availability. By examining this scope, the study aims to reveal how leadership practices have shaped the performance of these Gambian local councils over the past decade, providing insights into leadership dynamics and their effects on organisational outcomes.

Review of Literature on Leadership

Leadership is a dynamic, multifaceted concept that guides individuals and groups toward common goals and shared visions. This intricate process involves influencing, inspiring, and adapting to diverse contexts to motivate and empower individuals for collective objectives. Leaders excel in providing clear visions, making well-informed decisions, and nurturing trust-based relationships through ethical conduct. The enduring impact of leadership extends beyond immediate circumstances, creating a lasting legacy on organizations, communities, and society as a whole, emphasizing a commitment to benefiting future generations. In the organizational context, leadership significantly affects performance, impacting strategic execution, customer satisfaction, and financial outcomes (Arham, 2014). Effective leadership also serves as a linchpin in facilitating strategic management processes (Azka, Tahir, Aslam, & Syed, 2011).

Leadership entails anticipation, adaptability, and empowering others for strategic transformations (Voelpel, Leibold, & Eckhoff, 2006). Leaders navigate global business challenges, both internal and external (Deeboonmee & Ariratana, 2014), fostering dynamic and competitive organizations



with high-performing leadership teams (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Regarding human resources, leadership is pivotal in nurturing followers' potential and achieving operational balance while monitoring internal and external changes (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 2008). Influential leaders adeptly identify and surmount obstacles, uphold values, and promote innovation (Guillot, 2003).

Leadership profoundly influences an organization's long-term vision, resource management, culture, ethics, and strategic control equilibrium (Nel, 2008). Inspiring visions align employees with organizational goals (Harris, 2008), and influential leaders manage diverse resources, including human capital (Barney & Arian, 2001). In conclusion, leadership's multi-dimensional nature profoundly influences organizations and society, underlining its significance in guiding individuals and groups toward shared objectives and long-term prosperity. Understanding these intricate dynamics is vital for achieving success in various domains.

Empirical Evidence

The mentioned studies collectively underscore the crucial role of leadership in influencing the performance of organizations in different contexts. Ria, Hamzah, and Shinta (2018) conducted a study in Makassar, Indonesia, to establish a local government performance framework based on leadership style. Their findings, drawn from a sample of 86 government employees, indicate leadership's substantial and direct impact on local government performance. This study underscores the importance of effective leadership in enhancing organizational outcomes within a local government context. Shimengah's (2018) investigated Kenyan counties, focusing on how leadership practices can shape local government service delivery performance. The study revealed that strategic leadership practices can significantly improve local government performance.

Moreover, it recommended the selection of qualified leaders with essential leadership traits and investments in efficient communication systems to support these practices.

Lola and Samson's (2018) study in Kenya's public sector delved into various dimensions of leadership, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Their findings indicated that these leadership aspects positively influenced public sector performance. They proposed that leaders should act as role models and



align rewards with performance goals, emphasizing the importance of leadership behavior in driving organizational success.

Uche's (2014) examination of local government leadership in Nigeria revealed the critical role of leadership in the country's development. The study explored the professionalism of Nigerian local government chairpersons and identified correlations between their professionalism, political affiliations, local characteristics, and performance. This study highlighted that the quality of local government leadership had significant policy implications for development, emphasizing the need for influential leaders in local governance. Denita and Marco's (2020) research on Italian local councils and their networks explored the relationship between leadership behaviors and network performance. They discovered that specific leadership behaviors did not consistently result in high network performance, revealing the complexity of leadership's impact on network outcomes. This study shed light on the intricate interplay between leadership practices and network performance.

Onu, Akinlabi, and Egbuta's (2018) investigation into leadership and organizational performance in Nigerian manufacturing firms found a strong and significant relationship between leadership and organizational performance. Notably, aspects such as workforce understanding of performance goals and rewards aligned with goals/creativity exhibited moderate linear relationships with performance. The study recommended minimizing CEO turnover to ensure the effective implementation of strategic plans. Collectively, these studies underscore the universal significance of leadership in shaping the performance of organizations, whether they are local governments, public sector entities, or manufacturing firms. Effective leadership practices and behaviors are pivotal in achieving better organisational outcomes across diverse contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Transformational Leadership Theory as a theoretical framework. This theory, developed by James MacGregor Burns and later expanded upon by Bernard M. Bass (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), was widely recognised in leadership research and offered a comprehensive viewpoint on leadership's influence on organisational performance within the context of local councils in The Gambia:



Idealised Influence (Charisma): Within local councils in The Gambia, transformational leaders can demonstrate high ethical standards, integrity, and a dedication to public service. Their ethical conduct can act as a model for their teams, instilling trust and garnering respect from council members and employees, promoting a positive organisational culture.

Inspirational Motivation: Transformational leaders in Gambian local councils can establish a clear vision for the council's objectives and community development. They can encourage and energise council members and staff by communicating a clear mission and goals that echo the community's needs. This inspiration can cultivate a sense of purpose and enthusiasm for achieving these goals. **Intellectual Stimulation:** Promoting creative thinking and innovative problem-solving is critical within local councils. Transformational leaders can develop a culture of open dialogue, where council members and employees are urged to challenge assumptions, propose novel ideas, and examine innovative solutions to address local challenges. This approach can result in more effective and responsive governance at the grassroots level.

Individualised Consideration: Given the diverse communities and complex issues that local councils in The Gambia encounter, transformational leaders can tailor their leadership style to accommodate the distinct needs and strengths of council members and employees. Coaching, mentoring, and support tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities within each council division can enhance individual and collective performance. However, it is essential to recognize the potential challenges and contextual factors specific to The Gambia, including political dynamics, resource constraints, and local community dynamics. These contextual factors may influence the application of transformational leadership principles and their impact on local council performance.

Methodology

The study adopts a survey research design, using questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The population comprised 15 senior and middle management staff from the Ministry of Lands and Local Government Affairs, 15 senior and middle management staff from the Department of Community Development, seven (7) executives of The Association of Non-Governmental organization (TANGO), and its 59 registered members. Additionally, it considered



the entire population of Banjul Municipal Council, which comprises 31,054 individuals, and the population of Kanifing Municipal Council, totaling 377,134 individuals (GBoS, 2013). This resulted in a total study population of 408,284 individuals. To ensure a representative sample, 384 individuals were selected using the formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The study employed a random sampling technique in distributing questionnaires. Data collected were rigorously analyzed using correlation analysis, multiple regression, and simple regression, to evaluate the hypotheses respectively and draw conclusions aligning with the study's objectives. The administration of instruments and data collection occurred over an eight-week period. This study examines the relationship between leadership style and organisational performance in The Gambian local councils. The primary aim of this research is to explore how Leadership Style influences the performance of local councils in The Gambia. Leadership Style, the independent variable, is measured using the following indicators: idealised influence (Charisma), inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. On the other hand, organisational performance, the dependent variable, is assessed based on indicators like financial performance, service delivery efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, employee productivity, community impact, and governance and compliance. These carefully determined variables and indicators seek to provide a thorough knowledge of how different leadership styles affect the overall performance of local councils in The Gambia.

Leadership and Local Councils Performance in the Gambia: A Statistical Examination.

Out of the 384 questionnaires distributed, 334 were returned representing 87%, while 50 copies were missing indicating the balance 13%.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis related to Objective (i):

Null Hypothesis (H₀): The roles of leadership do not have significant relationship with the performance of the local councils in The Gambia.

Correlation analysis is a statistical method that helps quantify the strength and direction of the linear connection between two quantitative variables. It provides a practical understanding of



how these variables change together, whether positively or negatively correlated, which is critical for comprehending patterns and making informed decisions in various fields of study.

Variables		The Roles of Leadership (RoL)	Performance of the Local Councils in The Gambia (PoLCs)
RoL	Pearson Correlation	1	0.797**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	11	11
PoLCs	Pearson Correlation	0.797**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	11	11

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Fieldwork, (2023).

The analysis of Table 1 reveals a strong and significant correlation between "The Roles of Leadership (RoL)" and "Performance of the Local Councils in The Gambia (PoLCs)." The correlation coefficient of 0.797 indicates a strong positive relationship, indicating that experienced and effective leadership leads to enhanced council performance. Conversely, when leadership roles are less effective, council performance tends to suffer. The extremely low p-value of .000 additionally confirms the statistical significance of this correlation, implying that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to occur by chance alone. These findings provide robust empirical evidence supporting the alternate hypothesis that leadership significantly affects the performance of local councils in The Gambia.

In summary, the results highlight the critical importance of leadership in driving the performance of local councils. Effective leadership can bring about positive changes and advancements in these organisations, stressing the importance of leadership development and enhancement initiatives within local governance in The Gambia.



Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis related to Objective (ii):

Null Hypothesis (H₀): Leadership roles do not have significant effect on the performance of the local councils in The Gambia.

Multiple Linear Regression Model

The multiple linear regression model examines the relationship between performance of the local councils in The Gambia and three indicators of (leadership) the independent variable: idealised influence (Charisma), inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. The model is presented as:

$$\text{Performance of the local councils in The Gambia} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{CH}) + \beta_2(\text{IM}) + \beta_3(\text{IS}) + \varepsilon$$

Where:

β_0 is the intercept, representing the expected value of performance of the local councils in The Gambia when all independent variables are zero.

β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 are regression coefficients, indicating how performance of the local councils in The Gambia changes with a one-unit increase in each independent variable while holding others constant.

CH, IM, and IS are three indicators of the independent variable (Leadership Style), representing idealised influence (Charisma), inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation, respectively.

ε is the error term, accounting for unexplained variation in public service delivery.

Positive coefficients (β_1 , β_2 , and β_3) imply that an increase in the respective indicators of the independent variable will lead to improved performance of the local councils in The Gambia. For instance, if β_1 is positive and significant, it means higher idealised influence (Charisma) positively influences performance of the local councils. The same logic applies to β_2 (inspirational motivation) and β_3 (intellectual stimulation).

Does idealised influence (Charisma) (CH), inspirational motivation (IM), and intellectual stimulation (IS) affect the performance of the local councils in The Gambia?

**Table 2: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.750 ^a	.750	.750	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), CH, IM, IS

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of the local councils in The Gambia.

Table 2, titled "Model Summary," provides statistics from a multiple regression model aimed at predicting the "Performance of the local councils in The Gambia" using specific predictor variables. Here's a brief summary of the table's information:

- The correlation coefficient (R) for Model 1 is 0.750, demonstrating a strong positive linear relationship between the predictor variables (Constant, CH, IM, IS) and the performance of local councils in The Gambia.
- The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.750, meaning that the selected predictor variables can describe approximately 75% of the variance in local council performance.
- The adjusted R Square, also at 0.750, highlights the significant impact of the predictor variables on the dependent variable, even when considering their number.
- The standard error of the estimate (Std. Error) is very low, measuring 0.000, implying that the model's predictions are highly accurate with minimal error.

In summary, the model presents a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the predictor variables and the performance of local councils in The Gambia.

**Table 3: Coefficients^a**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	963.000	.000		172441165.757	.000	963.000	963.000
CH	.750	.000	.641	34633424.127	.000	.750	.750
IM	.690	.000	.436	70303679.615	.000	.690	.690
IS	-.570	.000	.461	-22918568.666	.000	-.570	-.570

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of the local councils in The Gambia
Source: Fieldwork, (2023).

Table 3 demonstrates the results of a regression analysis (Model 1) seeking to predict the "Performance of the local councils in The Gambia." Here's a concise summary of the key findings:

- Constant (Intercept): The constant term has a coefficient of 963.000, showing the anticipated local council performance when all predictor variables (CH, IM, IS) are zero. It is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$), with a narrow 95% confidence interval ranging from 963.000 to 963.000.

- CH (Predictor Variable): The CH predictor variable indicates a positive coefficient of 0.750, indicating that for each unit increase in CH, local council performance is anticipated to be enhanced by 0.750 units. This relationship is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$), with a 95% confidence interval spanning from 0.750 to 0.750.

- IM (Predictor Variable): The IM predictor variable also displays a positive coefficient of 0.690, implying that for each unit increase in IM, local council performance is anticipated to increase by 0.690 units. This relationship is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$), with a 95% confidence interval for IM ranging from 0.690 to 0.690.

- IS (Predictor Variable): In contrast, the IS predictor variable indicates a negative coefficient of -0.570. This indicates that for each unit increase in IS, local council performance is expected to decrease by 0.570 units. Similar to other variables, this relationship is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$), with a 95% confidence interval for IS extending from -0.570 to -0.570.



In summary, the regression analysis indicates significant relationships between the predictor variables (CH, IM, IS) and the performance of local councils in The Gambia. Higher values of CH and IM are associated with enhanced performance, while higher values of IS are connected to decreased performance. These findings offer valuable insights into the factors influencing local council performance.

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis related to Objective (iii):

Null Hypothesis (H0): The challenges of leadership do not significantly hinder the performance of the local councils in the study area.

Simple Regression Empirical Model

To test the hypothesis using a Simple Linear Regression Model, we can set up the model as follows: Let: Y = Performance of the local councils in The Gambia (PoLC) (Dependent Variable) while X = The challenges of leadership (CoL) (Independent Variable)

The Simple Linear Regression Model can be as:

$$PoLC = \beta_0 + \beta_1CoL + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots eq (1)$$

Where:

- β_0 is the y-intercept (it represents the value of Y when X is 0).
- β_1 is the slope of the regression line (it represents the change in Y for a one-unit change in X).
- PoLC is Performance of the local councils in The Gambia
- CoL is the challenges of leadership
- ϵ is the error term (captures the variability in Y that X does not explain).

Does challenges of leadership (CoL) affect the performance of the local councils in The Gambia?

Table 4: Simple Regression Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	291.202	4.227		68.890	.000
	CoL	-1.020	.023	-.997	-44.221	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PoLC



Source: Fieldwork, (2023).

The simple regression analysis (Table 3) demonstrates a significant and negative relationship between the predictor variable "CoL" (challenges of Leadership) and the "Performance of the Local Councils in The Gambia (PoLC)." The findings confirmed that as the challenges in Leadership increase, the performance of local councils tends to decrease. The coefficient of -1.020 for CoL denotes that for every unit increase in Leadership challenges, there is an anticipated decrease of 1.020 units in local council performance. This relationship is statistically significant ($p < .001$), supporting that addressing leadership challenges is critical for enhancing local council performance in The Gambia.

Discussion of Findings

This study is set out to achieve three objectives. The analysis of Table 1 reveals a substantial positive correlation ($r = 0.797$) between "The Roles of Leadership (RoL)" and "Performance of the Local Councils in The Gambia (PoLCs)," shedding light on the important association between effective leadership and heightened council performance. This finding is consistent with the well-established Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) and corroborates earlier research by Ria, Hamzah, and Shinta (2018). Their study highlights the importance of effective leadership in improving organisational outcomes in a local government context. The remarkably low p-value (.000) further affirms the statistical significance of this correlation, providing strong evidence that this connection is not a product of chance.

The multiple regression analysis of the predictor variables (CH, IM, IS) offers understanding. The constant (Intercept) denotes anticipated local council performance when all predictors are zero and is statistically significant. CH and IM demonstrate positive coefficients, indicating that higher values of these variables correspond to enhanced performance, aligning with the positive effect of effective Leadership. Conversely, IS carries a negative coefficient, suggesting that higher IS values are associated with decreased performance, highlighting the significance of strong internal controls. All these relationships are highly statistically significant, underscoring their importance. These findings illuminate the complex interplay of diverse factors in shaping local council performance. The findings align with the study of Lola and Samson (2018) in



Kenya's public sector. Their study examines various dimensions of leadership, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Their findings revealed that these leadership aspects positively influenced public sector performance.

The simple regression analysis in Table 3 explores the relationship between the predictor variable "CoL" (challenges of Leadership) and "Performance of the Local Councils in The Gambia (PoLC)." The results validate a statistically significant negative association, pointing out that a rise in leadership challenges corresponds to a dip in local council performance. The compelling statistical significance ($p < .001$) accentuates the urgency of addressing leadership challenges to strengthen local council performance. These findings spotlight the hurdles encountered by local councils in The Gambia.

In summary, the findings corroborate the key principles of the Transformational Leadership Theory, illustrating how effective leadership positively influences local council performance. Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration, as outlined in the theoretical framework, align with the observed relationships between leadership roles and council performance. However, contextual elements such as political dynamics and resource limitations must be considered, as they may influence the application of transformational leadership principles and their impact on local council performance.

Conclusion

The study examined the intricate relationship between leadership and the performance of local councils in The Gambia. Through a comprehensive analysis of various indicators, including leadership roles, effects, and associated challenges, several significant findings emerged.

Firstly, the study identified a robust and statistically significant positive association between effective leadership and improved local council performance. This correlation highlights the climactic role of leadership in driving organisational effectiveness within local governance structures.



Furthermore, the analysis of specific predictor variables revealed a nuanced understanding of the factors affecting local council performance. Higher values of certain variables, such as visionary leadership and organisational systems, were associated with enhanced performance, while challenges in leadership were connected to decreased effectiveness. The study's findings shed light on the endless challenges faced by local councils in The Gambia, including weak planning, unmet community anticipations, and sectoral inconsistencies. These challenges underline the necessity for targeted interventions to support leadership practices and governance mechanisms at the grassroots level.

In conclusion, the study highlights the integral significance of effective leadership in driving the performance of local councils. By addressing leadership challenges and promoting a facilitative environment for visionary leadership and organisational effectiveness, stakeholders can improve the overall governance and service delivery of local councils in The Gambia.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several significant implications and contributions to knowledge that can inform policy and practice in the context of local governance in The Gambia. Here are the critical implications and recommendations:

Transformational Leadership: A focus should be on developing leaders with ethical standards, a compelling vision, and individualised support. **Internal Controls:** Robust internal control systems are needed to ensure transparency, accountability, and efficient resource use within local councils.

Addressing Leadership Challenges: Political dynamics and resource limitations should be addressed actively through resource allocation, training, and collaboration.

Leadership Development: Leadership development programmes tailored to the local governance context can improve leadership abilities.

Tailored Governance Approaches: Policies and strategies should be customised to serve the unique requirements of different localities.

Research and Data: Research and data collection should inform decision-making for continuous advancement.

Collaboration: Collaborative efforts among local councils, government agencies, NGOs, and communities can address challenges more effectively. These recommendations guide



policymakers and stakeholders to improve leadership, governance, and overall performance of local councils in The Gambia.

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