

Influence of Head Teachers' Discipline Strategies on Learners' Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20677380>

Abstract

The research focused on influence of head teachers' discipline strategies on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following research question: To what extent do reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers to promote discipline influence learners' academic performance in public primary schools? The study was built on Path-Goal Leadership by Robert House. The study employed a mixed methods approach with convergent parallel design, combining a cross-sectional survey for quantitative data with a phenomenology design for qualitative data. The target population comprised of 10,500 learners, 15 head teachers, 363 teachers, and one sub-county director of education, across the 15 public primary schools. A combination of probability sampling approaches, such as stratified, simple random, and systematic sampling, and non-probability sampling strategies, such as purposive sampling, were used to choose the participants. The sample size included 385 learners, 53 teachers, 6 head teachers, and 1 sub-county director of education. Data collection instruments included questionnaire, interview guide, document analysis, check-list, and focus group discussions. Content and face validity were established for quantitative instruments with the help of experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.80 adopted as the acceptable threshold. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS software version 25, and the findings were presented in frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data was analysed thematically using content analysis and reported in narrative form, along with direct quotes. All ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research. The study established that reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers positively influenced learners' academic performance by promoting discipline, motivation, and active participation in learning. It was concluded that effective reinforcement practices contribute to improved academic outcomes. The study therefore recommends that head teachers consistently apply positive reinforcement strategies to foster discipline and enhance learners' academic achievement in public primary schools.

Key Words: Reinforcement strategies, Discipline promotion, Positive reinforcement, Behaviour management, Learner motivation, & Learning environment

Citation: Wanjiru, K.J., Nduku, E., & Wambiya, P. (2026). Influence of head teachers' discipline strategies on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in

Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. *Journal of Africana Articles*, 4(33), 1-23, 13 June 2026. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20677380>

Background to the Problem

Reinforcement strategies refer to deliberate actions used by head teachers to encourage desirable learner behaviour, while discipline denotes adherence to school rules that promote orderly conduct and effective learning. Academic performance refers to learners' achievement in curriculum-based assessments and examinations, reflecting the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. In this study, reinforcement strategies such as praise, rewards, counselling, parental engagement, and recognition are considered key tools used by head teachers to strengthen discipline and improve academic outcomes. Empirical evidence shows that positive reinforcement enhances learner motivation, reduces disruptive behaviour, and improves academic achievement (Simatwa, 2020; Karanja & Githinji, 2021). Therefore, reinforcement strategies are not only behavioural control measures but also critical determinants of learners' academic performance in primary schools.

In developed countries, reinforcement-based discipline systems are well established within structured education frameworks. For instance, the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model in the United States has reduced disciplinary referrals and improved academic outcomes (Center on PBIS, 2025). In Australia, self-regulated learning programmes have strengthened learners' behavioural control and academic performance (Boyer, 2024). Similarly, in Finland and other European countries, authoritative parenting combined with structured school counselling systems supports both discipline and academic success (Jekonia, 2023; European Commission, 2023). However, variations in parental involvement and inconsistent implementation of reinforcement practices continue to affect outcomes (Kim, 2022; Global Consortium for International Student Mental Health, 2025). This suggests that effectiveness depends largely on consistency and contextual implementation.

In African countries, reinforcement strategies are increasingly being adopted to improve learner discipline and academic performance, although challenges remain in implementation. In Uganda, positive discipline approaches such as counselling and reinforcement have significantly improved learner behaviour (Waiswa et al., 2024). In Tanzania, parental involvement through school committees has contributed to improved discipline, although communication gaps limit

effectiveness (Msacky et al., 2024). In Nigeria, counselling interventions have been shown to enhance both discipline and academic achievement (Fashina, 2020; Osuoha, 2024). Despite these positive outcomes, many African education systems face constraints such as inadequate resources, insufficient trained personnel, and weak implementation structures, which limit the effectiveness of reinforcement strategies.

In Kenya, head teachers' reinforcement and disciplinary strategies play a significant role in influencing learners' academic performance in public primary schools. Studies in Makueni, Kilifi, and Kajiado counties indicate that democratic, transformational, and participatory leadership styles enhance learner achievement (Mutua et al., 2023; Samson & Beth, 2024; Sitiol et al., 2025). Additionally, reinforcement strategies such as counselling, mentoring, and reward systems have been associated with improved discipline and reduced absenteeism in counties such as Kisumu and Kakamega (Onyango, 2020; Wekesa & Simiyu, 2022). However, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited counselling services, and low parental engagement continue to undermine effectiveness. This indicates that despite application, reinforcement strategies yield inconsistent outcomes across different Kenyan contexts.

In Ruiru Sub-county, public primary schools face increasing challenges due to rapid urbanisation, population growth, and overcrowded classrooms, which negatively affect discipline and academic performance. Existing studies have largely focused on instructional supervision and leadership qualifications rather than specific reinforcement strategies used by head teachers (Irungu, 2015). As a result, little empirical evidence exists on how counselling, parental involvement, role modelling, and reward systems influence learner discipline and academic outcomes in this context. Furthermore, socio-economic diversity and inconsistent parental engagement continue to complicate discipline management in schools. This creates a clear research gap on the effectiveness of head teachers' reinforcement strategies in shaping learner behaviour and academic performance, thereby necessitating the current study in Ruiru sub-county.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers; such as punishment management, parental involvement, guidance and counselling, role modelling, and positive reinforcement; are expected to promote desirable learner behaviour and enhance academic performance in public primary schools. Evidence from various studies indicates that consistent use of these disciplinary strategies contributes positively to learner outcomes. For instance, in

Mombasa County, parental participation was found to improve learner behaviour and academic achievement (Mwangi, 2021), while in Kakamega County, reinforcement strategies were associated with improved discipline and performance (Wekesa & Simiyu, 2022). Similarly, in Kiambu County, disciplinary interventions including counselling were reported to enhance both learner discipline and academic progress (Kariithi, 2024). These findings reinforce the view that effective reinforcement strategies are central to improving educational outcomes in primary schools.

Despite these benefits, the implementation of reinforcement strategies in many public primary schools remains inconsistent and ineffective. Challenges such as low parental involvement, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and insufficient counselling skills among head teachers continue to undermine the effectiveness of discipline management strategies (Mwangi, 2021; Wekesa & Simiyu, 2022). As a result, cases of indiscipline and declining academic performance persist, particularly in rapidly growing urban and peri-urban areas. In Ruiru Sub-county, for example, stakeholders continue to express concern over persistent learner indiscipline and uneven academic achievement despite the application of various disciplinary measures. Although studies have examined discipline strategies in counties such as Mombasa, Kakamega, Kisumu, and Kiambu, limited empirical research has specifically focused on Ruiru sub-county (Kariithi, 2024). This creates a contextual and empirical gap, necessitating an investigation into the extent to which reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers influence learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Ruiru sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya.

Research Question

To what extent do reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers to promote discipline influence learners' academic performance in public primary schools?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Path-Goal Leadership Theory developed by Robert House in 1971, which explains that effective leadership involves clarifying goals, removing obstacles, and enhancing follower motivation and satisfaction (House, 1971). Leaders are expected to adopt directive, supportive, participative, or achievement-oriented behaviours depending on situational demands (Kato et al., 2024). In the context of public primary schools, head teachers use reinforcement strategies such as rewards, counselling, parental involvement, and clear disciplinary

expectations to shape learner behaviour and improve academic performance. The theory is therefore relevant in explaining how leadership-driven reinforcement strategies influence discipline and academic outcomes among learners in Ruiru Sub-county.

The theory assumes that leaders improve performance by clearly defining expectations and providing necessary support to achieve set goals (Fabac et al., 2022). In schools, directive leadership aligns with setting discipline rules, supportive leadership with counselling and emotional guidance, participative leadership with parental involvement, and achievement-oriented leadership with rewards and high academic expectations. These dimensions directly reflect reinforcement strategies used by head teachers to promote discipline and improve academic performance. By applying these leadership behaviours, head teachers create structured learning environments that enhance learner motivation, reduce indiscipline, and improve overall academic outcomes in primary schools.

Empirical evidence supports the relevance of Path–Goal Theory in educational contexts. Studies show that directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership behaviours improve motivation and performance among teachers and learners (Pacia & Guevarra, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021). These findings suggest that adaptive leadership strategies positively influence school outcomes. In relation to this study, reinforcement strategies such as counselling, rewards, and parental engagement can be understood as leadership tools that shape learner discipline and academic performance. Therefore, the theory provides a strong explanatory basis for examining how head teachers influence learning outcomes in public primary schools.

Despite its strengths, the Path–Goal Theory has limitations. It assumes that leaders can accurately identify follower needs, which may be difficult in overcrowded and resource-constrained schools such as those in Ruiru Sub-county (Northouse, 2021). It also gives limited attention to external factors such as poverty, peer influence, and home environments that affect learner behaviour and academic performance. Moreover, empirical findings on leadership effectiveness are sometimes inconsistent across contexts (Pacia & Guevarra, 2022). However, the theory remains useful when combined with other perspectives, as it helps explain how reinforcement strategies, when properly applied, can improve discipline and enhance academic performance in public primary schools.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

A quantitative study by Adam (2023) set out to investigate the impact of positive reinforcement on pupils' intellectual, behavioral, and social involvement in the classroom. especially the bilingual Somali pupils. This action research experiment was conducted at a Minnesota school US serving pupils in kindergarten through twelfth grade. With two locations (K–4 and 5–12), the school has about 308 enrolled pupils. Teachers and staff in grades K–12 participated in the study. A quantitative research study was the research design. Teachers participating in the study were given an electronic survey that included a questionnaire on their experiences with positive reinforcement and an informed consent form in order to gather data. There were ten (10) questions in the survey. There were ten (10) questions in the survey. A 5-point Likert scale was used to grade each question, with very important ranking at 5, important at 4, moderately important at 3, slightly important at 2, and unimportant at 1. Mark one of the responses to rate these five points. According to the survey's findings, students are more engaged in the classroom when they receive positive reinforcement.

Although it was constrained by its dependence on survey data alone, Adam's (2023) quantitative study demonstrated that positive reinforcement enhances Somali bilingual pupils' academic, behavioral, and social involvement. This resulted in a lack of knowledge on the underlying mechanisms and life experiences that underlie reinforcement's efficacy. By combining quantitative measurements with qualitative insights from focus groups, interviews, and observations, the current study filled this knowledge gap and provide useful suggestions for implementing positive reinforcement in a variety of educational contexts.

With an emphasis on positive discipline and reinforcement, the study by Ismail et al. (2023) investigated the tactics used by instructional administrators in Malaysia to foster a healthy school culture. Examining how school administrators use constructive reinforcement to uphold order and improve the general learning environment was the goal. The study, which was carried out in Malaysia, used a qualitative methodology to collect detailed information from principals of a few chosen schools through document analysis and interviews. The results showed that principals regularly used techniques for positive reinforcement, such as praise, encouragement, and constructive criticism, which enhanced student behavior and created a helpful learning environment. The study comes to the conclusion that discipline and academic success are fostered by leadership based on reinforcement techniques.

Ismail et al. (2023) offered insightful information about how Malaysian principals use positive discipline and other tactics to create a healthy school culture, but they did not particularly address reinforcement techniques or how they influence learners' academic performance. Without focusing on reinforcement as a primary variable, the findings mostly highlighted leadership techniques in general terms. This leads to study gaps because it is still unclear how much the school heads' use of reinforcement techniques influences student behavior and academic success. By evaluating reinforcement techniques, assessing how well they foster discipline, and directly connecting them to learners' academic achievement in a classroom setting, the current study closed this gap.

A mixed-methods approach was used in the study carried out by Mudahogora and Malinge (2025) in Rwanda's Musanze District to examine the effects of uneven disciplinary procedures and inadequate administrative assistance on students' learning results. Through questionnaires, interviews, and document checks, 270 participants—including head teachers, discipline directors, teachers, and students—were involved, guaranteeing both statistical and contextual richness. The results of a quantitative analysis conducted using SPSS showed that 20% of the variance was explained by inconsistent discipline, which had a substantial moderate negative connection with learning outcomes ($R = -0.450$, $R^2 = 0.200$, $p = 0.001$). Similarly, 14% of the variance in learning outcomes was explained by insufficient administrative support ($R = -0.380$, $R^2 = 0.140$, $p = 0.003$). These findings demonstrate how important it is to maintain discipline and have strong administrative support in order to promote better academic achievement.

Although this study emphasizes the negative consequences of inconsistent punishment and inadequate administrative support, it makes no attempt to investigate the function of school leaders' positive reinforcement strategies or establish a connection between them and academic performance. By concentrating on reinforcement techniques and investigating how they foster discipline and have a direct influence on learners' academic performance, the current study closed that gap.

Examining the use of rewards and punishments to enhance discipline in Yiadom Boakye Demonstration Junior High School (JHS) students in Berekum, Ghana, was the aim of the study by Boateng, Appiah-Kubi, and Denteh (2022). The study used a qualitative methodology. The research design employed was a case study. All eight (8) of the instructors at Yiadom Boakye Demonstration Junior High School (JHS) made up the study's population. The eight teachers and

the school chosen for the study were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. An interview served as the study's primary tool. The study found that both rewards and punishments cause students' behaviors to change, which in turn affects how well they perform academically in their classes. The study also came to the conclusion that reward systems are necessary in education to boost student learning by encouraging excitement; they pique students' interest in learning and alter their demeanor and posture in the classroom. According to the study, a decent punishment reduces poor behavior and won't make a student's academic situation worse if it has no bearing on their academic life. It is advised that Ghanaian educational institutions engage with the National Teaching Council and Ghana Education Service to host seminars and workshops on the application of incentives and penalties in the classroom.

This Ghanaian study looks into the use of rewards and punishments to reinforce behavior, but it only looks at the classroom environment of one school. It doesn't look at how head teachers' reinforcement strategies affect the entire school or how they directly affect learners' academic performance. By examining reinforcement strategies used by school administrators in several different schools and quantitatively relating them to academic results, the current study seeks to close these gaps.

A study by Chuchu et al. (2022) examined the impact of goal-setting by the principal on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mbita Sub-County. Mbita Sub-County consistently performed poorly on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) between 2018 and 2020, ranking last among nearby sub-counties in Homa Bay County with a mean score of 4.886, while Rangwe, Rachuonyo South, and Rachuonyo East had higher averages. This led to the study. The results showed that by promoting independent learning and strengthening academic attention, principals' goal-setting greatly increased students' accomplishment. The findings were thought to be helpful for administrators and education policymakers in enhancing motivational techniques.

Although goal-setting was emphasized in the Chuchu et al. (2022) study as a successful motivating technique that improved students' academic performance, it ignored additional reinforcement techniques that principals may use to influence student behavior and performance. Techniques like praise, prizes, constructive criticism, and acknowledgment are equally crucial for maintaining academic performance and encouraging discipline. In order to close this gap, the

current study looks at how reinforcement techniques, which go beyond goal-setting, influence academic performance and learner discipline in public primary schools.

Kipkorir et al. (2024) looked into how school leadership affected student achievement in Kenya's Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo Marakwet, and Nandi counties. In order to capture both statistical and contextual viewpoints, the researchers used a mixed-methods methodology to collect data from administrators, instructors, and students through questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that student progress was significantly predicted by effective school leadership, with a particular focus on the role of principals in maintaining order and fostering a positive school climate. The study came to the conclusion that leadership is essential to raising learning outcomes and suggested that principals participate in focused capacity-building programs to improve their ability to uphold order, put supportive practices into place, and create environments that directly improve students' academic performance. This study did not really address reinforcement strategies as a type of leadership practice, although establishing leadership as a predictor of achievement. By examining how head teachers' use of reinforcement-based strategies influence discipline and, consequently, learners' academic performance, the current study aims to close this gap.

Research Design and Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods convergent parallel design, which allowed the simultaneous collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the depth and validity of findings on how head teachers' reinforcement strategies influence learners' academic performance (Creswell, 2021). The quantitative strand employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine relationships between reinforcement strategies and academic performance across schools, enabling generalizable findings within a single time frame (Rahi, 2020). The qualitative strand used a phenomenological design to capture lived experiences of learners, teachers, and administrators regarding discipline practices (Qutoshi, 2021). Integrating both approaches enhanced triangulation, improved credibility, and provided a comprehensive understanding of school-based disciplinary practices (Almeida, 2022; Feters & Molina-Azorin, 2020).

The study was conducted in Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County, selected due to its rapid urbanization, diverse socio-economic context, and varying academic performance trends in public primary schools. The target population comprised 10,500 learners, 363 teachers, 15 head teachers,

and one Sub-County Director of Education (Etikan & Bala, 2019). Stratified, simple random, systematic, and purposive sampling techniques were used to ensure representativeness and inclusion of key informants (Taherdoost, 2021). A total of 6 schools were selected, 385 learners sampled using Yamane's formula, and 53 teachers selected using Cochran's formula. All head teachers and the SCDE were purposively included due to their strategic roles in implementing and supervising reinforcement strategies in schools.

Data were collected using multiple instruments aligned to both research strands. Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaires administered to teachers and learners to assess reinforcement strategies and academic outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with head teachers and the SCDE, as well as focus group discussions with learners, to explore deeper perceptions of discipline practices (Bryman, 2023). Additional data were obtained through observation checklists and document analysis of attendance records, disciplinary cases, and academic reports (O'Leary, 2023). This multi-instrument approach enhanced data triangulation, reduced bias, and ensured consistency in capturing both observable and reported disciplinary practices within schools.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 25, generating descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics including correlation analysis to determine the influence of reinforcement strategies on academic performance (Creswell, 2021). Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development guided by research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The two datasets were then merged during interpretation to establish convergence, divergence, and complementarity of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study process (Smith & Williams, 2022; Brown & Johnson, 2021).

Findings and Discussions

Teachers were asked the extent to which reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers to promote discipline influence learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Ruiru sub-county on the Likert scale of 5 to 1 where 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Uncertain; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree. Table 5 presents the assessment's summarized findings in an organized manner.

Table 5

Teachers' Responses to Reinforcement strategies on Learners' Performance (n=46)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
Rewards given by head teachers encourage learner to improve academically.	16 (22.9%)	12 (17.1%)	8 (11.4%)	6 (8.6%)	4 (5.7%)	3.65	1.32
Consistent praise from head teachers motivates learners to work harder.	14 (20.0%)	13 (18.6%)	6 (8.6%)	8 (11.4%)	5 (7.1%)	3.5	1.38
Disciplinary reinforcement improves learners' focus on studies.	15 (21.4%)	10 (14.3%)	7 (10.0%)	9 (12.9%)	5 (7.1%)	3.46	1.41
Learners who are rewarded for good behavior achieve better academic results.	12 (17.1%)	14 (20.0%)	9 (12.9%)	8 (11.4%)	3 (4.3%)	3.52	1.24
Head teachers' reinforcement of positive discipline boosts learners' confidence.	16 (22.9%)	14 (20.0%)	5 (7.1%)	6 (8.6%)	5 (7.1%)	3.65	1.37
Academic performance increases when head teachers apply reinforcement.	14 (20.0%)	13 (18.6%)	7 (10.0%)	7 (10.0%)	5 (7.1%)	3.52	1.36
Rewards from heads encourage learners to complete assignments.	13 (18.6%)	18 (25.7%)	9 (12.9%)	3 (4.3%)	3 (4.3%)	3.76	1.14
Positive reinforcement reduces indiscipline, allow time for learning.	15 (21.4%)	14 (20.0%)	6 (8.6%)	5 (7.1%)	6 (8.6%)	3.59	1.39
Pupils are more attentive in class when good behavior is acknowledged.	17 (24.3%)	10 (14.3%)	8 (11.4%)	6 (8.6%)	5 (7.1%)	3.61	1.39
Reinforcement strategies by creating a conducive environment.	14 (20.0%)	12 (17.1%)	10 (14.3%)	5 (7.1%)	5 (7.1%)	3.54	1.33

Source: Researcher (2025)

According to the findings, 16 (22.9%) teachers strongly agreed with the first statement, which states that rewards from head teachers motivate learners to achieve better academically, and 12 (17.1%) agreed, for a total of 40% support. Eight (11.4%) were indifferent, six (8.6%) disagreed, and four (5.7%) strongly disagreed. There is moderate agreement with some disagreement, as indicated by the mean score of 3.67 and the standard deviation of 1.26. These findings imply that there was still a great deal of dispute even though many teachers acknowledged

the importance of rewards in promoting academic progress. This conflicting answer suggests that how consistently and equitably rewards are implemented in schools may determine their efficacy. This findings are supported by the Path-Goal Leadership Theory, which holds that rewards serve as motivating instruments that direct students toward desirable academic results. In line with the benefits of rewards that have been noted, Boateng, Appiah-Kubi, and Denteh (2022) verified that reward systems inspire students, altering behavior and improving academic achievement.

A total of (38.6%) of respondents agreed with the statement that regular praise from head teachers inspires learners to put in more effort. Of them, 14 (20%) strongly agreed and 13 (18.6%) agreed. Five (7.1%) strongly disagreed, eight (11.4%) disagreed, and six (8.6%) were still unsure. Moderate agreement but notable dispersion is shown by the results, which have a mean score of 3.61 and a standard deviation of 1.29. According to the statistics, some educators are still unsure or dubious about the effectiveness of regular praising as a motivating technique, even though many do. This variance implies that the effect of praise could vary based on the needs, character, or frequency of praise given to students. This findings are supported by the Social Learning Theory, which holds that when desired activities are reinforced by positive praise, learners mimic behavior. Additionally, Adam (2023) discovered that when learners got positive reinforcement, their level of engagement increased, demonstrating that regular praise maintains motivation and enhances classroom engagement.

Indeed, 15 (21.4%) strongly agreed and 10 (14.3%) agreed when asked if disciplinary reinforcement helps learners focus better on their schoolwork, showing 35.7% support. Five (7.1%) strongly disagreed, nine (12.9%) disagreed, and seven (10%) were unsure. The standard deviation was 1.32 and the mean was 3.57. According to these findings, over one-third of teachers thought that disciplinary reinforcement helped learners focus, yet a sizeable percentage had conflicting or indecisive opinions. The findings show that discipline, when used properly, can draw attention to research, but disagreements raise questions about the procedures or equity of these reinforcement techniques in real-world settings. This is supported by the Transactional Theory, which places a strong emphasis on corrective reinforcement and discipline in order to establish order and conformity. This is in line with the findings of Mudahogora and Malinge (2025), who found that inconsistent discipline negatively affected learning results. They also pointed out that regular disciplinary reinforcement improves academic focus.

Twelve (17.1%) strongly agreed and fourteen (20%) agreed with the assertion that learners who receive rewards for excellent behavior perform better academically, garnering 37.1% approval. Three (4.3%) strongly disagreed, eight (11.4%) disagreed, and nine (12.9%) were still unsure. The standard deviation was 1.22 and the mean was 3.63. This result indicates considerable uncertainty but also moderate support. A considerable proportion of teachers may believe that rewards for conduct do not necessarily translate into academic advances, partly because learners can be driven by intrinsic causes beyond outward rewards. The comparatively higher degree of agreement, however, suggests that many people continue to believe that behavioral reinforcement is directly related to better academic achievement. This finding is in aligns the Social Learning Theory, which postulates that when good behaviors are reinforced, learners repeat them. In a similar vein, Ismail et al. (2023) came to the conclusion that rewarding behavior and other forms of constructive reinforcement enhanced learners' academic performance and discipline, which is in accordance with the idea that rewards promote success.

Responses to the claim that learners' confidence in their ability to learn is increased when head teachers promote constructive punishment were overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, (42.9%) of respondents agreed, with 16 (22.9%) strongly agreeing and 14 (20%) agreeing. However, 6 (8.6%) disagreed, 5 (7.1%) strongly disagreed, and 5 (7.1%) were still unsure. The standard deviation was 1.33 and the mean score was 3.70. This was one of the table's strongest agreements, indicating that disciplinary reinforcement is often seen as a tactic to boost confidence. Opposing views, however, demonstrate that some educators are still unsure about whether disciplinary reinforcement consistently fosters confidence in a variety of school settings. The Path-Goal Leadership Theory, which contends that leaders who set clear objectives and offer encouraging feedback boost followers' confidence is in support of these findings. Effective school leadership techniques also enhanced students' academic performance by establishing a disciplined and self-assured environment, according to Kipkorir et al. (2024).

Thirteen (18.6%) agreed and fourteen (20%) strongly agreed with the assertion that academic performance rises when head teachers regularly implement reinforcement tactics, for a total of 38.6%. Five (7.1%) strongly disagreed, seven (10%) disagreed, and seven (10%) were unsure. Moderate agreement was once again indicated by the mean score of 3.63 with a standard deviation of 1.28. Variations in responses indicate that some teachers may believe that reinforcement alone cannot ensure higher performance, despite the data suggesting that

consistency in the application of reinforcement tactics is vital for academic growth. This illustrates the necessity of well-rounded approaches that incorporate reinforcement with additional teaching techniques in order to produce long-lasting academic gains. This is corroborated by the Transactional Theory, which emphasizes how structured rewards and penalties can improve performance. Chuchu et al. (2022) confirmed that reinforcement tactics improve learning outcomes by observing that head teachers' motivational goal-setting boosted pupils' academic progress.

One of the most strongly supported claims was that incentives and rewards motivate learners to turn in assignments on time. With 18 (25.7%) agreeing and 13 (18.6%) strongly agreeing, the approval rate was 44.3%. Three (4.3%) disagreed, three more (4.3%) strongly disagreed, and nine (12.9%) were unsure. A standard deviation of 1.14 and a mean score of 3.80 indicate above-average agreement and comparatively low variability. These findings highlight how instructors see incentives and rewards as effective drivers of accountability and on-time academic assignment performance. The high degree of agreement demonstrates how rewards can foster culture among learners. The findings are supported by the Social Learning Theory, which describes how learners imitate and internalize reinforced behavior. Additionally, Adam (2023) found that when students received positive reinforcement, they demonstrated increased engagement with learning tasks, confirming that rewards motivate learners to finish their academic work.

Out of the responses, 15 (21.4%) strongly agreed and 14 (20%) agreed with the statement that positive reinforcement minimizes indiscipline, leaving more time for learning, yielding 41.4% agreement. Five (7.1%) disagreed, six (8.6%) strongly disagreed, and six (8.6%) were unsure. The standard deviation was 1.35 and the mean was 3.63, indicating substantial agreement but discernible variation. These results imply that educators think positive reinforcement facilitates behavior control and improves classroom concentration. The divergent views, however, indicated that different learning environments and school contexts have varying perceptions of how well reinforcement works to reduce indiscipline. These findings are supported by the transactional theory since schools are kept in order through the use of reinforcement techniques. Boateng, Appiah-Kubi, and Denteh (2022) further supported the idea that positive reinforcement lowers indiscipline by showing that a mix of rewards and penalties successfully decreased misbehavior.

There was also a moderate amount of agreement with the statement that learners pay greater attention in class when their head teachers recognize their good behavior. Ten (14.3%) agreed and seventeen (24.3%) strongly agreed, for a total of 38.6%. Six (8.6%) disagreed, five (7.1%) strongly disagreed, and eight (11.4%) were unsure. The responses showed overall support with somewhat greater variety, with a mean score of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 1.38. These findings imply that, while not all teachers believe it to be always successful, rewarding good behavior can increase attentiveness. The results show varying perspectives on how recognition and praise influence learners' attention in the classroom. Given that rewarding excellent behavior encourages attentiveness as a learned quality, the Social Learning Theory lends credence to this finding. The association between acknowledgment and better focus was confirmed by Ismail et al. (2023), who also noted that encouragement and praise improved attentiveness and classroom order. These findings are supported by the transactional theory since schools are kept in order through the use of reinforcement techniques. Boateng, Appiah-Kubi, and Denteh (2022) further supported the idea that positive reinforcement lowers indiscipline by showing that a mix of rewards and penalties successfully decreased misbehavior.

Finally, there were 14 (20%) strong agreements and 12 (17.1%) agreements, for a total of 37.1%, with the assertion that head teachers' reinforcement tactics foster a climate that is favorable for academic success. Five (7.1%) disagreed, five (7.1%) strongly disagreed, and ten (14.3%) were not sure. Moderate support is shown by the mean of 3.57 and the standard deviation of 1.30. These results suggest that although many teachers believe reinforcement can assist create a positive learning environment, others do not share this opinion. This conflicting view implies that in order to completely create an enabling academic atmosphere, reinforcement techniques might need to be combined with other leadership and teaching strategies. These findings are corroborated by the Path-Goal Leadership Theory, which highlights how leaders who use reinforcement techniques set clear expectations and create encouraging surroundings. Kipkorir et al. (2024) similarly came to the conclusion that maintaining pleasant environments that enhanced learner learning outcomes required effective leadership techniques, such as reinforcement.

With most items averaging mean values between 3.57 and 3.80, indicating moderate agreement, Table 5 shows that teachers tended to support reinforcement tactics. Incentives linked to completing assignments and increasing learner confidence were shown to have stronger support. Standard deviations between 1.14 and 1.38, however, demonstrate a range of viewpoints,

indicating that although many people thought reinforcement techniques were helpful, others doubted their efficacy. These results align with theories of leadership and motivation that stress modeling, rewards, and discipline, including Path-Goal Leadership Theory, Transactional Theory, and Social Learning Theory. According to empirical research (Adam, 2023; Ismail et al., 2023; Boateng et al., 2022; Mudahogora & Malinge, 2025; Kipkorir et al., 2024), the use of consistent and equitable reinforcement techniques improves academic performance and discipline.

Much of what the teachers described in Table 5 was confirmed by the researcher's use of the checklist, which showed that reinforcement tactics were in fact used in many schools. For instance, head teachers were observed giving learners verbal praise, certificates, and occasionally material goods in exchange for good behavior or discipline. As seen by mean scores above 3.5, this observation corroborated the comments that praise and awards motivated learners to put in more effort and finish assignments. The checklist also revealed that head teachers regularly praised exemplary behavior during class visits and assemblies, which supported the idea that learners pay closer attention when their behavior is acknowledged. The idea that reinforcement techniques produced a favorable learning environment was supported by these firsthand findings.

Merit lists, certificates of appreciation, punishment books, and attendance registers were among the documents analyzed that offered additional proof for the conclusions. Merit lists, for example, showed how academic reinforcement was institutionalized by consistently recognizing high-achieving learners. In keeping with the 3.59 mean score on positive reinforcement lowering misconduct, disciplinary case records also revealed a slow drop in repeat offenders, indicating that reinforcement techniques enhanced concentration and decreased indiscipline. The consistency of the results in Table 5 was somewhat called into question, though, by the researcher's observation of gaps in certain schools' documentation of awards or structured recognition systems. This implied that although reinforcement was valued and used, different schools applied it differently, which affected how it affected learners' performance overall.

Head teachers stressed in the interviews how important reinforcement techniques were in determining discipline and academic achievement. Many observed that prompt incentives, such as certificates, verbal applause, or recognition during assemblies, motivated learners to stay on track and finish assignments on schedule. Others remarked that a culture of accountability was established and indiscipline was decreased by the regular use of reinforcement. Some warned, nevertheless, that incentives needed to be managed because if they are used excessively, they may

cause learners to become less disciplined and self-motivated. Most people agreed that using reinforcement techniques improved learners' academic performance overall.

One head teacher made the following observation:

Learners gain confidence and pay closer attention in class when we acknowledge their hard work and positive behavior. I've witnessed shy learners become more engaged when they receive praise, which inspires them to work harder in class. For instance, after receiving public recognition for consistency, a learner who had previously struggled with involvement started to perform exceptionally well. However, because learners pick up on uneven reinforcement rapidly, it must be used regularly and fairly. Some students may lose trust and become disheartened if they feel excluded despite putting in a lot of effort. For recognition to be effective, it needs to be regular, balanced, and inclusive in order to make all learners feel appreciated (RSCPPHT2, Personal Communication, August 4, 2025).

According to the SCDE, the sub-county's schools needed to use reinforcement techniques to foster academic success and discipline. They clarified that learning outcomes improved and classrooms became more orderly when head teachers often gave learners praise or rewards. The SCDE further emphasized that reinforcement encompassed more than just tangible incentives; it also included acknowledgments and support that bolstered learners' self-esteem. They believed that one of the most important leadership strategies for maintaining a strong school culture was positive reinforcement. He emphasized the necessity of educating head teachers on how to employ reinforcement in a methodical manner and steer clear of punitive methods that can lower learner morale and performance.

According to the SCDE:

I have found that learners in schools with positive reinforcement from head teachers do better academically and exhibit greater discipline. During assembly, a simple word of support or acknowledgment frequently has a lasting effect that inspires learners to keep up their hard work. I've seen schools where regular reinforcement improved learner achievement and decreased instances of misbehavior. However, the benefits of reinforcement are diminished and others may feel forgotten when it is uneven or only targeted at a small number of learners. It's critical that head teachers see reinforcement as an essential component of their leadership responsibilities rather than an elective. To

preserve its beneficial effects, we must teach school administrators to refrain from implementing it irregularly (RSCDE, Personal Communication, September 1, 2025).

Learners stated in focus group discussions that incentives including recognition, appreciation, and little tokens encouraged them to work more in class and behave better. A number of individuals reported feeling more motivated to attend courses consistently and turn in assignments on time when their head teachers publicly recognized their achievements. Others mentioned how receiving positive feedback helped them feel less anxious and afraid, which improved their focus in class. Nonetheless, some learners acknowledged that if they were not offered prizes, an over-reliance on them might lower their drive. The majority of learners underlined that they valued verbal praise and acknowledgment more than only financial rewards. One student clarified:

We feel proud and inspired to perform even better when the head teacher commends us for finishing our assignments. We are made to feel important by small gestures like clapping for us in front of our peers or calling our names at assembly. This motivates us to put in more effort, show up to class on time, and act appropriately. Being acknowledged boosts the confidence of even the timidiest or suffering people. But when only a select few students receive recognition, others may become disheartened, particularly if they have also worked hard. When we give it our all, we all want to be appreciated. More than tangible benefits, verbal encouragement gives us a sense of respect and support (RSCPPS, Personal Communication, September 29, 2025).

The qualitative findings typically show that head teachers' use of reinforcement techniques has a major influence on learners' conduct, academic achievement, and classroom participation. In addition to encouraging learners to finish assignments and pay attention, positive reinforcement, such as praise and rewards, also boosts self-esteem and discipline, which fosters a positive learning environment. According to theories like Path-Goal Leadership, Transactional, and Social Learning, reinforcement improves motivation, sets an example for behavior, and guarantees compliance, all of which promote academic progress. These findings are constantly supported by empirical research by Adam (2023), Ismail et al. (2023), and Boateng et al. (2022), which demonstrates that structured reinforcement techniques and recognition enhance learning outcomes. However, the regularity of these tactics and the dedication of head teachers to their implementation determine how effective they are.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reinforcement strategies employed by head teachers play a significant role in shaping learner discipline and academic performance in public primary schools. Strategies such as rewards, praise, counselling, parental involvement, and clear disciplinary expectations were found to positively influence learners' behaviour by enhancing motivation, encouraging positive conduct, and reducing cases of indiscipline. When consistently applied, these strategies create a structured and supportive learning environment that enables pupils to focus on academic tasks, thereby improving overall performance. However, their effectiveness is influenced by factors such as school resources, teacher commitment, and home environment, which may either strengthen or weaken the impact of reinforcement on learners' outcomes.

Recommendations

It is recommended that head teachers strengthen the consistent use of positive reinforcement strategies, particularly rewards, constructive feedback, and counselling services, to enhance discipline and academic performance. Schools should also promote stronger collaboration between teachers and parents to ensure reinforcement strategies are reinforced both at school and at home. The Ministry of Education should provide regular training for school leaders on effective behaviour management and reinforcement techniques to improve implementation. Additionally, adequate support and resources should be allocated to public primary schools to ensure sustainable application of reinforcement strategies, ultimately leading to improved discipline and better academic achievement among learners.

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