

The Role of Leadership by School Principals in Enhancing Quality Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract: The provision of education in Kenya has been tremendous over the past years. Notwithstanding the fact that a major stride through the secondary education policy has been attained, the current indicators exhibit high levels of inefficiency. This is evidenced by high national poor performance in national examinations in many schools. The quality of education, including its relevance to the country's needs has also been questioned. The study intended to highlight the role of leadership among secondary schools principals in improving academic performance among students. Leadership is viewed as an ingredient in accounting for differences in the success of schools. The study utilized quantitative survey approach and involved 364 respondents in Trans Nzoia County. The study found a positive correlation between the role of principals and quality academic performance. It recommended that school principals should be pivotal in transforming their schools into successful institutions through enhancement of curriculum, development of instruction and learning environment and leadership styles. Principals are pivotal in transforming their institutions.

Keywords: Leadership, Quality academic performance, Transformation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Leadership is widely regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning and eventual academic performance of their students [1]. Indeed, the contribution of effective leadership is largest when it is needed most; there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around in the absence of intervention by talented leaders. While other factors within the school also contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst [2].

Though individuals are not capable of making completely rational decisions on complex matters, they are concerned with the selection and implementation of satisfactory alternatives rather than ideal ones [3]. However, administrators endure to talk about discovering the best choices to difficulties. Administrators look for solutions that are "good enough" and learning institutions afford members with an environment of goals, objectives, and purposes which limit and define the roles, thereby narrowing the number of alternatives [4].

Decision taking has always been an inevitable component of management in management theories and is also one of the major tasks of managers of any

organization [5], and decision-making is one of the most important functions of managers in any kind of organization [6]. Decision-making happens at all levels in an organization and decisions should be made in order to execute activities and to achieve goals. Inability to make a quality decision may affect every aspect of the organization [7]. In the context of schools, like in any other organization, the implementation of decision is normally done by the principal upon approval of the board of management. They have to understand the core of decision question. In order for the principal to make an intelligent, accurate and effective decision, she/he needs to have data and information to support the decision [4]. Hence, availability of information plays an important role in decision making process. It is assumed that only with adequate information can a decision be taken accurately and decision -making is a major responsibility of all administrators, but until decisions are adapted into action they are only good intentions. Therefore, schools like all formal organizations, is basically a decision-making structure and the principal is at the helm.

Despite the fact that major strides have been made to provide education in Kenya through the secondary education policy, the policy seems not to be successful going by the current indicators of exhibit

high levels of inefficiency. This is evidenced by high national poor performance in national examinations and high wastage as a result of dropout rates and low transition [8]. The quality of education, including its relevance to the country's needs has also been questioned. The overloaded curricula, lack of teaching materials, poor teaching approaches, poor or lack of adequate supervision and low morale of teachers greatly contribute to poor quality of education [9]. These all depend on the leadership of the principal to turn around situations within the school to improve the school academic performance.

Teachers' attitudes towards their work and students, their classroom management and their interaction with students have great impacts on the academic achievement and the retention in school of their students. Few classroom observations in Kenya indicate that there are cases where teachers' negative attitudes push students, especially girls, out of school. This atmosphere is not conducive to learning and makes some children hate school. An obvious result of all this are absenteeism, poor performance, and non-completion of the education cycle [10, 11]. The principal has to provide leadership to ensure that teachers' attitudes towards work does not affect the student in a negative manner.

The idea of evaluating whether the curriculum is attaining the desired outcomes has influenced teachers' instructional practices and decisions [12]. The evaluation of the curriculum using the tests scores with its associated sanctions and remarks tied on students test scores has impacted on the instructional practices and the decisions that principals and teachers make on curriculum implementation.

Statement Problem

Education is recognized by the Kenyan government as a catalyst that enhances human resource development which is necessary for facilitating high and sustained economic growth and development [13]. The education system in Kenya is dominated by examination-oriented teaching and passing of examinations is the benchmark for performance. Many studies have dwelt on low quality education being experienced in the country and its quality being questioned [14]. This indicates poor or lack of adequate supervision and low morale of teachers [9]. No study so far has been done on the role of leadership by school principals in enhancing quality academic performance in secondary schools in Kenya.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the role of leadership by school principals in enhancing quality academic performance among students in secondary schools in Kenya.

Objectives of the study

To achieve the purpose of the study three objectives were identified;

- To determine the role of the principal in enhancement of curriculum instruction in secondary schools
- To establish the role of the principal in the development of instructional and learning materials in secondary schools
- To ascertain the influence of the principal's leadership styles on academic performance in secondary schools

Theoretical Framework

An analytical quality of leadership is supporting a group to advance shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can bind a sense of purpose or vision [15]. The most indispensable theoretical explanations for the positioning of leaders' direction-setting practices are goal-based theories of human motivation articulated by Bandura [16]. According to this theory, people are motivated by goals which they treasure personally, convincing, as well as thought-provoking but achievable. Having such goals aids people to make sense of their work and empowers them to find a sense of distinctiveness for themselves within their work environment.

This theory is adaptable to the study as leadership concept involves team work, goals and vision being articulated by the leadership of institutions. Performance or efficiency is attained through leadership that utilizes the human and material resources for the improvement of the institution. Such capabilities and motivations are affected by the direct involvement that organizational members have with those in leadership functions, as well as the organizational environment within which people work. Policy contexts change substantially over time but tend to be the same for many leaders at the same time. At the moment, accountability-oriented policy contexts are pervasive for educational leaders across the country and schools are key actors in the enactment of educational leadership. Currently, the focus is on standards and accountability systems that is driving schools decisions and policies in ways that are exceptional.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The precise responsibilities of school principals include curriculum and instruction, negotiations, physical facilities, finance, pupil improvement, evaluation and supervision, recruitment and selection of employees, and public relations [7]. Notwithstanding of the task, decision making is indispensable not only in each of these task areas, but also in the broader functional areas of administration [17]. The key resources of principals are people, money, authority and materials [5]. The coherent

process of deciding also is the instrument for resource allocation and in determining this; the principal is confronted with difficulties and problems that require both deliberate and reflective choice and implementation.

Some reforms endeavor to improve all schools in a district, county, state or country at the same time. Other reforms try to inspire the overall approach to teaching and learning within a school, but do so one school at a time. As diverse as these approaches to school reform are, nevertheless, they all depend for their success on the motivations and capacities of school leadership [18]. The probability of any reform improving student learning is faraway unless the principal and teachers agree with its purposes and appreciate what is required to make it work. So effective or successful are schools in academic performance, leadership is critical to school transformation.

Leaders in their prescribed administrative roles, they face greater challenges that better the effect on their achievement on learning. Though the evidence indicate small but momentous effects of leadership actions on student learning across the range of schools, the effects of successful leadership are substantially greater in schools that are in more challenging situations. Certainly, there are essentially no familiar occurrences of burdened schools being transformed without intervention by a formidable leader. Several other factors may cause such turnarounds, but leadership is the stimulus [19]. Evidence advocates that those leadership traditions included in setting directions explains for the largest proportion of a leader's influence on any outcome. This set of traditions is meant at helping one's colleagues grow shared perception concerning the organization and its activities and goals that can under tighten a sense of purpose or vision [4]. People are motivated by goals which they find personally convincing, as well as stimulating but attainable. Having such goals assists people to make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context.

Additional detailed sets of leadership practices that significantly and positively influence these direct experiences are: offering intellectual stimulation, providing personalized support and appropriate models of best practice and beliefs deemed ultimate to the organization [2]. Productive educational leaders foster their schools as effective organizations that boost and uphold the performance of administrators and teachers, as well as students. Identifiable practices characteristically related with this set of basics include reinforcing school cultures, adjusting institutional structures and building concerted processes. Such practices presume that the purpose behind the redesign of institutional cultures and structures is to facilitate the work of institutional members and that the flexibility of

structures should match the changing nature of the school's improvement plan [1].

Similarly, successful leaders have become skilled at not only "the fundamentals" but also prolific responses to the unique demands of the contexts in which they find themselves [20]. In this good judgment, all successful leadership is dependent on its roots. Certainly, inspiring individual leaders actually behave quite differently and productively depending on the situations they are confronting and the people with whom they are working. This appeals into question the common belief in characteristic leadership "styles" and the exploration for a specific model or style. Education need to be developing leaders with large ranges of practices and the capability to select from that repertoire as desired, not leaders trained in the delivery of one "ideal" set of practices.

Successful principals in urban schools often find it essential to involve in more direct and top-down forms of leadership than do successful principals in rural settings [3]. The curricular expertise of successful principals will typically rely on their departmental heads for such expertise. Comparably, small schools allow for fairly direct commitment of leaders in modeling appropriate forms of instruction and monitoring the practices of teachers, while in the same way successful leaders of large schools habitually influence their teachers in more indirect ways through planned professional development experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methods approach is one in which the researcher tends to use strategies of investigation that engages collecting data either to best grasp the research problem and also involves gathering numeric information so that the final database characterizes quantitative and evidence [21]. Quantitative research generates statistics through the use of large-scale survey research, using methods such as questionnaires. This study adopted the quantitative method approach within the survey design where quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire. This approach aimed at using the questionnaire for purposes of collecting data to generalize to the sample population. Sampling strategy employed was a simple random sampling and stratified random sampling design where the respondents were sampled from schools [22]. The study involved school principals, deputy principals and heads of departments and teachers. A total of 364 respondents were sampled to represent the study population. This study was conducted in secondary schools in Trans Nzoia county of Kenya. Data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study envisioned to analyze the role of leadership by school principals in enhancing quality

academic performance in secondary schools in Kenya. To achieve this purpose, three objectives were analyzed and the results are presented below.

Background information on Respondents

The study involved principals, deputy principals and heads of departments as shown on table 1 below.

Table-1: Respondents of the study

	Frequency	Percent
Principal	126	34.6
Deputy Principal	106	29.1
Heads of Department	132	36.3
Total	364	100.0

Source: research, 2018

From the table, it indicates that the sample was representative of the entire county and a school system structure. 34.6% were principals, 29.1% deputy principals and 36.3% heads of department.

The role of the principal in enhancement of curriculum instruction

An analysis was performed on the role of principals in the enhancement of curriculum instruction in the school that influences academic performance. The PPMC results are shown on the table below.

Table-2: Results of the correlation between enhancement of curriculum instruction and academic performance

		Academic performance
Enhancement of Curriculum instruction	<i>Pearson's correlation</i>	0.576**
	<i>Sig.(2-tailed)</i>	0.000
	<i>N</i>	364

**correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

It was found that the influence of the principal is significant as regards academic performance ($r=0.576$, $p\leq 0.0005$, $\alpha=0.01$). The respondents hold the view that for performance to improve, the principal's role on curriculum instruction is important in any school. This holds the view held by Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb [2] who argue that productive leaders foster their schools as effective organizations that boost and uphold the performance of teachers and students. This is based on practices associated with a set of basics including reinforcing school cultures,

adjusting institutional structures and building concerted processes.

The role of the principal in the development of instructional and learning

Further analysis was performed on the role of principals on the development of instructional and learning environment in the school that influences academic performance. The PPMC analysis is shown on the table below.

Table-3: Results of the correlation between development of instructional and learning and academic performance

		Academic performance
Development of instructional and learning environment	<i>Pearson's correlation</i>	0.505**
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0.000
	<i>N</i>	364

**correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

It was found out that the principal's role in the development of instructional and learning environment is significant ($r=0.505$, $p\leq 0.0005$, $\alpha=0.01$). The school principal is in charge of creating a favorable school environment where teachers and students interact for purposes of learning to occur. This finding support that held by Leithwood and Jantzi [19] who posit that burdened schools can be transformed by a formidable

leader who acts as a stimulus. Principals who set goals, share with teachers and create activities that are geared towards transforming institutions succeed [19].

The influence of the principal's leadership styles on performance

On leadership styles and performance, a PPMC analysis is shown on the table below.

Table-4: Results of the correlation between principals, leadership styles and academic performance

		Academic performance
Leadership styles	<i>Pearson's correlation</i>	0.821**
	<i>Sig(2-tailed)</i>	.000
	<i>N</i>	364

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

The results indicated that the results is a highly significant positive correlation between the principals' leadership style and academic performance in schools ($r=0.0821$, $p \leq 0.0005$, $\alpha=0.01$). The results suggest that the principal's leadership styles are important to academic performance in secondary schools. This finding concurs with that held by Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, and Fullan [20]. The common belief in characteristic leadership "styles" and developing leaders with wide range of practices and the capability to select from that collection as desired, not leaders trained in the delivery of one "ideal" set of practices. Transformational leaders use a variety of styles to deliver successfully. Furthermore, successful principals

involve in more direct and top-down forms of leadership [3]. They rely on their departmental heads for such expertise and supervision of the curriculum instruction.

Determinants of academic performance in secondary schools

In order to establish the predictor variables of academic performance in secondary school education from the influence of the leadership of the principal, a multiple linear regression was used where

$E(AP) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{curriculum}) + \beta_2(\text{instruction and learning}) + \beta_3(\text{leadership style})$ where $E(AP)$ is the expected academic performance.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.919 ^a	.845	.837	1.07799

a. Predictors: (Constant), X_3 , X_2 , X_1

As shown from the table, the R value was .919. R is a measure of correlation between the observed and predicted value of the dependent variable. Thus .919 is the correlation coefficient between the levels of academic performance as reported by the respondents and the levels as would have been predicted by the predictor variables. The adjusted R-square value of .837 indicates that this model succeeds by predicting up to 83.7% of the variables in academic performance. Up to 83.7% of the variation seen in the area under study is accounted for by these factors.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding development of curriculum and instruction, the principal has a role to play in the school for the purpose of improving academic performance in secondary school education in Kenya. Principals are in charge of curriculum implementation and evaluation and for any success; she/he should provide leadership in terms of developing the activities relating to curriculum and instruction in the school. Secondly, school principals are catalysts in the development of instructional and learning environment in schools. They are the ones to transform the schools for teachers and students to perform well in their work and academic endeavor respectively. School principals through diverse leadership styles, can greatly improve and transform stuck schools to prominence. It takes the individual responsibility of the principal to involve others through delegation and development of teachers by training, participation in decision making among others. Schools have been turned around by individuals

from a state of inefficiency to efficiency through leadership approaches by principals.

This study therefore recommends that principals are the prime movers of the schools they act as the leaders. By providing leadership in the institution, the principals can develop encouraging environment for curriculum implementation by teachers and therefore improve academic performance among the students. Transforming schools heavily is indebted on the principal through mobilization and utilization of both human and material resources through varied leadership styles. This study hence recommends that, principals are the main architects of transformation in turning around schools they head.

CONCLUSION

The role of principals in transforming schools is well established in literature. Academic performance is linked to many factors within and without schools in Kenya. However, school principals have to take up responsibility to improving academic performance in their schools. Many schools are endowed with resources, but their output is inadequate both academically and extracurricular. Performances in both deeply rely on the principal of any school and leadership constitutes the transformational ingredient.

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