

Examining the Influence of Principals' Democratic Leadership Style on Teachers' Professional Commitment in Public Secondary Schools in Kericho Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the influence of principal's leadership styles on teachers' professional commitment in Kericho Sub-county, Kenya. Specifically the study endeavored to establish the influence of Principals' Democratic Leadership style on Teachers' Professional Commitment in public secondary schools in Kericho Sub-county. This research was informed by the situational leadership theory and descriptive research design was adopted to guide the study. The sub-county has 31 public secondary schools. In the 31 schools there are a total of 31 principals, 155 Heads of Departments and 400 Teachers. All the 31 principals were selected to participate in the study because the sub county has recorded a decline in KCSE performance in the last two years. Five (5) HODS' in charge of academics from each school were purposively selected because of their special complementary roles in the leadership and management of schools. Simple random sampling was used to select five subject teachers in each school, one from each academic department to participate in the study; also 3 sub county quality assurance and standards officers' were selected. Therefore a total of 344 respondents comprising of 31 principals, 155 HOD's, 155 subject teachers and 3 SCQASOs constituted the total sample size. Data was collected using questionnaires which were administered to principals, HODs and subject teachers while interview schedules were used to guide discussions with the SCQASOs. Validity of the instrument was determined by the supervisors, lecturers in the department of Education Kisii University. For reliability, a test re-test of the findings was calculated and a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.856 was obtained. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with aid of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program while the results from interviews were analyzed qualitatively and thematically. Results revealed that democratic leadership style was the dominant style employed by principals in Kericho Sub-County together with the democratic practices employed point to a leadership that recognizes ideals of democracy in management. Other practices, principals delegate tasks and assignments to staff members ($M=1.94$, $SD = 0.923$); Principals ensure that members of staff feel involved and relevant in decision making process ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.075$); The study recommended that there is need to consider blending the leadership styles since each has some contribution to make indirectly to learner performance. The researcher paid keen attention to research ethical issues and got the informed consent of the respondents and guarded against plagiarism and ensured confidentiality.

Keywords: Principals, Autocratic, Leadership, Professional, Commitment, schools, Kenya.

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INTRODUCTION

Education practitioners all over the world have recognized leadership as virtually important for education institutions since it is the engine of survival for the institutions. The current search for excellence has ignited much interest in leaders from stakeholders of education. Schools as learning organizations deserve to be led well and effectively. Oyetunyi [1] asserts that leadership matters because effective leaders make a difference in peoples' lives; they empower followers and teach them how to make meaning by taking

appropriate actions that can facilitate change. It is within this premise that this study aspires to find out the particular leadership styles which are in support of teachers' professional commitment. Nsubuga [2] observes that the ability of the principal to relate with the teachers in order to enable them act and improve the organizational performance is critical for the smooth and effective operation of a school. Korkman [2] states that the principal is the most important and influential individual in the school.

Effective head teachers are able to transform a school into successful teaching and teachers communities [4]. Blasé and Blasé [5] stated that the praise by the principal provides teachers with an increased efficacy, self-esteem and creates greater motivation. Other studies have shown that teacher's satisfaction with school leadership determines their involvement and commitment to duty [6]. This phenomenon occurs because teachers who see principals as facilitators, supporters and reinforces for the jointly determined school mission than as guiders, directors and leaders of their own personal agenda are far more likely to feel personally accountable for student learning [7]. As teachers begin to feel better about them and what their collective mission is as a result of significant interaction with their principals they become more effective in the classroom. Teachers are trained and are expected to prepare the following professional records; schemes of work, lesson plans, records of work and student progress reports, setting and marking of exams, and carry out actual teaching in the classroom [8].

According to Shushila [9], the head teacher is the leader in the school, the pivot around which many aspects of the school revolve and the person in charge of every detail of the running of the school. The role of the principal in enhancing teacher commitment is a key component in promoting the ability of the teachers to function effectively by contributing significantly to the realization of the teaching and learning process in the school.

The future of this country is being shaped in the classrooms of the schools. Successful implementation of the curriculum depends to a large extent on favorable leadership styles that boost teacher's job satisfaction, career commitment and intention to remain in the teaching profession [10]. Mazzeo [11] says that when classroom instructions are weak in underperforming schools, significant responsibility rests with the principal. Teachers who work under poor leaders tend to become contented and their expectations are low, lesson plans become stale and the old adages that "if you can't beat them join them" sink into collective mentalities.

In view of the important role that effective leadership plays in the success of an organization, the role of the school leaders is very crucial. Though many factors come into play in as far as effectiveness of teachers is concerned, the leadership of the principal is one of these factors.

Despain [12] says that there is need for effective leadership to assist in the proper guidance of those we place in classroom. Leaders who empower as opposed to those who delegate build trust rather than demand loyalty. Denton [13] states that the moral purpose of school is to make a positive difference in the lives of the students by providing them with skills and knowledge that they need to lead productive and fulfilling lives. To do so requires that the school principal and other leaders treat their teachers well because ultimately teachers have the greatest influence on students.

According to KESSP [14] secondary education in Kenya has been characterized by poor performance by some schools Kericho Sub-county included. This document states that one of the contributing factors is the head teacher's factor whereby some teachers have low pedagogical skills to deliver the curricular. This has contributed to internal inefficiencies where the leader fails to nurture employee motivation hence the desired results are not achieved.

In order to mitigate against low levels of transition from primary to secondary levels of education, Free Day Secondary Education FDSE was introduced in 2008. The provision of Free Secondary Education (FSE) funds is meant to go partly to tuition, vote head for the purchase of classroom teaching and learning materials to enhance students' academic achievement [15]. However, despite its importance in the process of the country's development, the expansion of quality education is far from being achieved in Kericho Sub-County. This is because the students' achievement has emerged as an issue of concern among parents, education officers and other stakeholders in education. The Table-1 below shows Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education performance in Kericho Sub-county for the last four years;

Table-1: K. C.S. E performance in Kericho Sub-county: 2010–2013

YEAR	ENTRY	M/S	GRADE	DEVIATION
2013	2311	6.0531	C	-0.0689
2012	1977	6.1120	C	-0.0807
2011	2055	6.2031	C	+0.1583
2010	1971	6.0448	C	+0.5243

Source: MOE, Kericho Sub-county (2014)

According to the MOE [16], Kericho Sub-county) it is abundantly clear that the observed falling standards in education in Kericho Sub-county seem to indicate that all is not well with the school leadership

provided by head teachers. If this is not checked, the poor performance will jeopardize Kenya's bid to attain vision 2030; and the financial resources invested in the

education sub-sector in the form of FSE funds will go to waste.

The most important human resource in any educational institution that enables it to achieve its core mission is the teacher. One area that needs empirical data is the influence that principal's leadership styles have on teacher's commitment to their professional work. This is because teachers commitment has been identified as one of the most critical factors for the future success of education and schools [17]. Teacher commitment is closely connected to teachers work performance and their ability to innovate and to integrate new ideas into their own practice. Absenteeism and staff turnover, however, has an important influence on students' academic achievement and their attitude towards school [18]. Therefore this study seeks to determine the influence that principals leadership styles have on teacher's commitment to their professional work in public secondary schools of Kericho Sub-county Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

In Kenya, the performance of students in Secondary school examination has emerged as an issue of concern amongst parents and other stakeholders. Despite the government's effort to mitigate against low levels of transition from Primary to Secondary levels by introducing FSE funds for the purchase of teaching and learning materials, the expansion of quality education is far from being achieved. In Kericho sub-county, the KCSE Sub-county mean score has virtually remained at Grade C, out of a possible mean of A. In the year 2012 and 2013, the Sub-county recorded a decline in KCSE performance [16], Kericho Sub-county). Principals are expected to develop services which would increase teacher commitment, interest, motivation and self-fulfillment and make teachers feel secure and confident about themselves as professionals so that they can effectively deliver in their work.

The fact that commitment is important for the realization of organizational and professional goals, especially in the teaching profession is an area of interest for investigation by this study. Hence it is important to identify committed teachers as well as to understand the extent to which principals leadership styles stimulates and sustain teachers commitment to their professional work in Kericho sub-county. This is why this study seeks to establish the influence of Principal leadership styles on teachers' commitment to their professional work in public secondary schools in Kericho Sub-county, Kenya. If the declining performance of learners in KCSE in this Sub-county is not checked, then the provision of FSE funds by the Government of Kenya may go to waste and the future of the learners is bleak.

The Democratic Style and Teachers' Professional Commitment

The focus of power is more within the group as a whole and there is greater interaction within the group. It decentralizes power and authority; decisions are made through consultations Okumbe [19]. Democratic leadership includes amongst others the following components: participation, relations orientation, consideration for subordinates, compromise, caring and sense of responsibility and attachment to followers. The democratic leader keeps his or her employees informed about everything that affects their work and shares decision making and solving problems. This leadership assumes that everyone has an equal stake in an outcome as well as shared level of expertise with regard to decisions [20].

In a study carried out in Uganda by Mumbwe [21], primary schools in Busia Sub-district of Uganda, the researcher concluded that the democratic style affected teachers 'Job satisfaction positively and motivated teachers to work harder towards the achievement of school objectives. The autocratic leadership style on the other hand was found to have a negative impact on the teacher's job satisfaction. Conversely the *laissez-faire* leadership style did not affect the teacher job satisfaction. In this study it was also concluded that teachers in Busia town were in favor of the democratic leadership style. Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members and the members are encouraged to participate in decision making process. By spending time getting people's buy in, the leader builds trust, respect and commitment. Because the democratic leader affords people a say in decision that affect their goals and how they do their work. It drives up flexibility, responsibility and keeps morality high [22].

According to Armstrong [23] and Awiti [24] the group members therefore have a greater say in decision making, determination of policy, implementation of systems and procedures. Leaders relying heavily on this style tend to believe that individuals and groups function best when allowed to feel that close supervision or very detailed instructions are not necessary. The key to this style is communication. Seeking the opinion of others and letting your opinion be known, workers feel that their opinion counts and because of that feeling, they are committed to achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. Collaborative environment created by this style often results in more thorough solutions to problems.

The democratic style, also known as participative or consultative leadership, decentralizes power and authority. Decisions are made through consultations [19]. To ensure effective and successful management, the principal must not only be innovative, resourceful and dynamic but also able to interact well

with people within and outside the school; namely the students, parents, members of the Board of management, Parents Association and many other members of the community all of whom need to be brought in some way or another into decision making process. In other words, for the purpose of achieving success as a leader the principal must create an environment for “participative democracy” in the running of the school [25]. Democratic leadership entails the knowledge of how effective teamwork can be achieved rather than how one can enforce commands. The democratic leader realizes that even though he/she is weaker than all the members of the staff taken together, the leader must cultivate solidarity of interests about the organization and its functions. Only through team spirit can a leader of organization succeed in his/her work [26].

The leadership of the principal is determined by the way they relate to their members of staff, for example the principal as a leader in the school is expected to give direction or make decisions which must be followed by all those who work under him/her. He/she leads and the members of staff follow. This official leadership is a shared one. The principals on one hand are expected to give proper guidance to the team/staff; while on the other hand, they must expect good quality work from their members of staff. If the principals as leaders in schools lack the initiative and originality to give the proper guidance, the organization cannot be expected to achieve its goals. Similarly, if some of the staff lacks sense of duty, the school was

certainly fails to achieve its aims. Innovative ideas on the part of the principal, compiled with devotion to duty by the members of staff, was given an organization the success needed [26].

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design, which according to Enanoria [27] describes as a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) individuals for the purposes of describing the attributes of the larger population of which the individual are members. The target population for this study was 586 persons broken down as follows: 31 Principals from 31 secondary schools, 155 Heads of Departments from 5 departments and 400 subject teachers in Kericho Sub-county.

Due to convenience all the principals were selected for this study. Purposive sampling was also used to select the HODs in charge of academic areas only hence other HODs were not included. In support of this, Kombo and Tromp [28] noted that purposive sampling was appropriate when the researcher targets a group of people with reliable information for study and are special in some way. In this study therefore, 5 academic HODs were selected purposively from 31 schools making a total 155. They included the heads of departments namely: Mathematics, languages, humanities, sciences, and applied/technical departments. Table-2 gives a summary of the respondents.

Table-2: The Sample Size

Source of the Sample	No. of Principals	No. of HOD's	No. of Teachers	Grand Total
Mixed Day School	13	65	65	143
Mixed Day/Boarding School	7	35	35	77
Boys School	5	25	25	55
Girls School	6	30	30	66
SCQASOs	-	-	-	3
TOTAL	31	155	155	344

These HODs were very critical and key to the implementation of academic curriculum in schools which has a strong academic achievement of students in public secondary school Bloomberg and Volpe [29] suggest that a sample of 30% can be sufficient enough to represent the total population. Simple random sampling was therefore used to select one teacher from each department to participate in the study making a total of 155 subject teachers. In essence, therefore a total of 344 respondents comprising of 31 principals, 155 HOD's, 155 teachers and 3 SCQASOs constituted the sample size of the study.

The questionnaires and interview schedules were used and administered by the researcher. In considering the validity of the study, Orodho [30] opined that the content validity of the instrument can be determined by discussing the items in the instrument

with the supervisors, lecturers, therefore it was determined by supervisors in the department of Education Kisii University. For reliability, a test re-test of the findings was calculated and a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.856 was obtained, which, according to Kombo and Tromp [28] was considered reliable.

FINDINGS

Democratic Leadership Style

A total of nine items were suggested to measure democratic leadership style. Respondents were once again asked to indicate the extent to which various leadership roles or behaviour reflecting democratic leadership were engaged by the principal. Responses were once again elicited on a 5-point scale ranging from 1-strongly agree to 5-strongly disagree. This scale was

further re-coded into the variable 'democratic leadership style' measured using 1-the style is used (previous codes 1 and 2) and 2-the style is not used (previous codes 3, 4 and 5).

The contingency table presented (Table-3) reveals that majority of the principals were of the view that they use the democratic leadership style, 24

(88.2%). Only, 3(11.8%) answered to the contrary. Similarly, three quarters of the HODs, 102 (75.0%) indicated that their principals used the democratic leadership style. This was also the position held by the subject teacher whose majority, 92 (75.4%) observed that their principals use the democratic style of leadership.

Table-3: Respondents Opinion on use of Democratic Leadership Style

Teacher Category	Democratic Leadership Style		Total
	Used	not used	
Principal	24(88.2%)	3(11.8%)	27(100.0%)
HOD	102(75.0%)	34(25.0%)	136(100.0%)
Subject Teacher	92(75.4%)	30(24.6%)	122(100.0%)
Total	218(76.7%)	67(23.3%)	285(100.0%)

Source: Survey Data (2014)

These results suggest that the democratic style of leadership is the mode of leadership commonly used by principals in Kericho Sub-county. The findings was in line with the sentiments of Daft [31] who reiterated that democratic was commonly practiced. A few instances however exist where some principals do not prefer this mode of leadership.

CONCLUSION

Teachers in the Sub-County exhibit high levels of commitment towards their professional work which is manifested in their general administrative roles, professional documents, and student affairs. Commitment towards professional work could however be increased if school administrations motivate, build capacity, provide an environment conducive for working and acquire resource materials promptly. This can also happen if the Ministry and TSC address recurrent issues of remuneration, promotion and staff shortage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of the democratic leadership style as the dominant leadership style may not be achieving the desired result of improvement in examinations. There is need to consider blending the leadership styles since each has some contribution to make indirectly to learner performance.

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