



HEAD TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE KENYA CERTIFICATE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MURANG'A COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Murang'a County of Kenya has been performing poorly in national examinations for four years running as indicated in the background of the study. The researcher, therefore, sought to undertake a study to establish whether head teachers instructional leadership role has any implications on academic achievement. The study was guided by the following specific objective: To establish how head teachers' instructional leadership role of setting a clear vision and goals influence academic achievement in Murang'a County. The study adopted survey design. Data was collected using questionnaires, document analysis and interview schedule. The public primary schools were selected for the study using stratified random sampling technique. A sample of 152 head teachers and 1,774 teachers and nine Curriculum Support Officers participated in the study. Validity was ascertained with the help of experts. Reliability was ascertained using test-retest method and it was found to be 0.75. Quantitative data was analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, while qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and grouped into themes and sub-themes. The most significant finding was that, the school vision and motto does not guide teaching and learning in Murang'a County. These findings can be a reference point for head teachers of schools in Murang'a County on their instructional roles that would lead to improved students' academic achievement.

KEY WORDS: Instructional Leadership, Academic Achievements, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and Kenya.

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that instructional leadership is a critical issue in the realization of educational goals, it is seldom practiced. Among the many tasks performed by head teachers, only one-tenth of their time is devoted towards providing instructional leadership. Head teachers continue to seek a balance in their role as managers, administrators and instructional leaders. Instructional leadership places more importance on academic achievements. Majority of head teachers may not be practicing their instructional role of monitoring classroom progress. They concentrate on managerial tasks and ignore instructional leadership which is critical in academic achievement, this leads to poor academic performance in KCPE. In Kenya, reading and writing abilities in primary schools have declined which could be a pointer to a gap in instructional leadership. According to UWEZO one out of ten pupils cannot perform simple calculations; two out of ten pupils cannot read in Standard Eight, Murang'a County could not be an exception. The years 2011-2015 have posted a downward trend in academic achievement in Murang'a County. The mean score ranges from 215-230 marks. Comparing this performance with those of neighbouring counties such as Nyeri and Kirinyaga which have been posting mean grades of over 250 marks, Murang'a County's performance is much lower. Literature reveals that there seems to be no study that has been conducted in Murang'a County to explain this poor performance. There may be many factors leading to poor performance in schools. However, in this study, the researcher sought to establish head teachers' instructional leadership role and its implications on academic achievements in Murang'a County.

1.1.1 Literature Review

Terms such as vision, mission and goals are central in the vocabulary of school leaders who wish to succeed (Hallinger and Heck, 2008). The first instructional role that all head teachers need to deal with is to establish vision and goals (Levin 2009). People are motivated by goals that they find personally compelling, as well as challenging, but achievable. A prominent synthesis of the school leadership effects research conducted by Hallinger and Heck (2009) identified vision and goals as the most significant avenue through which school leaders' impact learning. Robinson et al. (2010) in a meta-analysis of the school leadership effects reaffirmed this conclusion. Indeed, they placed vision and goals as the second most significant path through which principals contribute to improved learning in classrooms. Hallinger and Heck (2002) pointed out that vision and goals achieve their impact through two primary means. First they inspire people to contribute, even sacrifice, their effort towards the achievement of a collective goal. This motivational power of vision is highlighted in the theory of transformational leadership (Leithwood, 2004).

In schools with a history of success, the vision was strongly embedded in the school's culture and provided implicit guidance in maintaining the school's direction (Day et al., 2010). According to Steller (2011) an effective head teacher's central objective is academic achievement; the head teacher must create a school environment through policies and procedures that provide the appropriate support for teachers to focus on the goal. A vision is the final answer to the question of why? Why am I doing this? Why does it matter? A vision is the reason behind the immediate goals and motives that drive our daily behaviour (Damon, 2012).

Girvin (2014) has articulated that setting goals and objectives by a given school enhance students' achievement. Robinson and Lloyd (2002) in their study affirmed that establishing goals and expectations influence student's outcomes. Leithwood and Riel (2005) recognized that building a vision and setting directions is one of the core practices of successful instructional leader. According to Cross and Rice (2000) a head teacher who wants to be an instructional leader must have; a vision and commitment to high student achievement. Bandura (2007) in his study established that goal setting becomes a process that naturally creates discrepancies. Thus, goal setting creates discontent with our current circumstances or performance between the existing situation and a desired future state.

Leadership effects on school goals are indirect as well as direct (Bovalino, 2008). A study undertaken by Sun (2005) demonstrated that, by developing a shared vision and building consensus on goals have a positive impact on school outcomes. Leithwood (2009) opined that a school with a vision has significant effect on student achievement. Felder (2010) in his study affirmed that head teachers' help teachers set goals and develop on-going assessment processes for examining the connections between their own learning, student learning, and school improvement goal. Leithwood *et al* (2012) indicated that head teachers play a central role in school leadership. School leader's ability to develop clear goals, and motivate all the stakeholders to work together toward a shared vision lead to improved performance (Louis, 2010). Setting goals help people make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context (Jantzi 2011).

Goal setting has yet to become personal, real and compelling for us in our daily lives in schools (Onyango, 2009). As a result we are missing one of the most powerful tools for helping students achieve their goals. Conzemius and O'Neill (2006) established that head teachers' without a clear vision and goals are missing opportunities to experience outcomes in their work. As Bandura (2007) suggested goal setting affects our level of motivation and our own self-evaluation. The discrepancy created by goal setting is experienced as a constructive discontent (Bovalino, 2008). However this is not always the case, according to Robinson *et al* (2009) goals are only motivating in an education setting if the stakeholders that is: teachers, students, or parents feel they have the capacity to meet the goals. People are committed to the goals if they understand and value them and the goals are specific and unambiguous (Reitzug, 2009).

Latham and Locke (2010) also alluded to the importance of distinguishing between assigned goals and personal goals. Personal goals, along with an individual's sense of self-efficacy, are what most directly determine a person's actions. Fullan (2010) explained that the moral purpose to be realized must combine deep commitment and the means of enacting it. Monitoring and supervision is also included in the head teacher's responsibilities, and evaluation help the instructional leader to change strategy if necessary (Yunas, 2013). Faisal (2013) acknowledged that, when a change takes place, the education system of any society should make amendments in order to achieve its goals.

Abdullah and Kassim (2010) noted that head teachers who are successful in effecting changes are able to make their own paradigm shift in the school system to achieve the set goals. Leaders ensure that they have at their disposal a variety of data helping them to show that student performance can be used for the forging of their vision and goals (Murphy, 2001). Research undertaken in different countries demonstrates that leadership plays a key role in school development and any sort of change that has been brought for the development of school (Chan and Kaur, 2013). The head teacher sets certain goals, like development of people that is, making them more responsible for the performance of various tasks. Gilbert (2000) found that leadership performance has two main aspects: the leadership behaviour displayed is the means, and the consequences of those behaviors are the end. When we assess the performances of head teachers, we search for instructional, behavioral leadership, managerial and relationship qualities. Assessment of head teachers often reveals a pronounced polarity: they are either successful or not in obtaining their key goals (Khan, 2009).

Looking towards the situation in education and its impact on the economic and social issues in any given country, it is suggested that instructional leadership can play a central role in changing the whole scenario (West, 2009). One key condition of this happening is that leaders have a vision to run their institutes effectively by helping teachers and guiding students (Hussein, 2011). Leithwood and Jantzi, (2006) defined effective school leadership as key ingredient in the facilitating of effective teaching. School head teachers' are the key actors charged to enhance school efficiency by bringing indispensable changes, which may result in the enhancement of student achievement as measured by the grades of the students. This is possible only when the leaders plan correctly and then implement their development programs to the desired level (Yunas and Iqbal, 2013).

1.1.2 Significance of the Study

The findings from this study are expected to serve as a reference point for head teachers in Murang'a County on instructional roles that would lead to improvement of pupils' performance in national examinations. In addition head teachers would get information which may be used to give guidelines on what is expected of them as instructional leaders with regard setting a clear vision for the school. The pupils may benefit from improved instructional leadership hence better learning conditions. The study would form a basis for further research and in addition widen the understanding of instructional leadership. It may be a source of information for future researchers in the same field.

2. Research Methodology

This chapter describes and justifies the research design and methodology that was used to carry out the study.

2.1.1 Research Design

Descriptive survey design was used in this study.

2.1.2 Target Population

The population for this study consisted of a total of 506 head teachers in Murang'a County and a total of 5,913 teachers all from public primary schools. 31 Curriculum Support Officers from the Ministry of Education participated in the study.

2.1.3 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Both probability and non-probability sampling methods was used to determine the sample. The sample size for this study was obtained by using the 30 % formula (Borg and Gall, 2004). Sample size comprised of 152 head teachers, 1,771 teachers and 10 Curriculum Support Officers.

2.1.4 Research Methods

The researcher used questionnaires to collect information from the head teachers and teachers', document analysis to collect data on performance and interview schedule to collect views from six CSO officers. The reason why the researcher used a questionnaire is that large samples can be made use of and thus the results can be made more dependable and reliable using this tool (Orodho, 2012). The interview schedule was administered to the Curriculum Support Officers (CSO's).

2.1.5 Validity of Research Instruments

Validity is the degree to which data accurately tests or gauges what it intends to measure (Gay *et al.*, 2009). To ascertain the validity of research instruments, the researcher gave copies of the proposal to supervisors in the School of Education Maasai Mara University who are specialists in this area.

2.1.6 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability is the degree to which a particular measuring procedure gives similar results over a number of repeated trials (Orodho, 2012). The test-retest reliability procedure to test consistent capacity of each of the three versions of the instruments for the study was done during piloting.

2.1.7 Pilot Study

Piloting of the data collection instruments was undertaken in primary schools which were not part of the sampled schools. The main purpose of the pilot was to test reliability and validity of the research instruments.

2.1.8 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained a letter from the Department of Curriculum Instruction and Education Management at Maasai Mara University, and applied for a research permit from the National Commission for Science Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI). Copies of the permit were presented to the relevant authorities that is, County Director of Education (CDE) Murang'a County and the Education Officers (DEO's) at the County, who issued a clearance letter to visit the schools under study.

2.1.9 Data Analysis Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the research instruments. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher read through them to ascertain and see if all items were responded to. A further task was to check on the accuracy of the answers and uniformity which constituted the main task of editing. To obtain results from the collected data, the researcher was guided by the research objectives. Quantitative data was coded and organized for processing.

The items were recorded on tally tables from which descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequency tables, and percentages were used to describe sample characteristics. The mean and standard deviation gave guidelines necessary to interpret an individual score. Inferential statistics used Pearson Correlation Coefficient to test relationships among the study variables. Open ended items of the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively. Data from interviews were transcribed and grouped into themes and sub-themes as they emerged from an ongoing data process.

3. Analysis of Results and Discussion of Findings

This chapter contains data analysis and discussions of the study on head teachers' instructional leadership role and its implications on academic achievements in K.C.P.E in Murang'a County, Kenya. This was done based on the following objective of the study:

- i) To establish how head teachers' instructional leadership role of setting a clear vision and goals for the school influence academic achievement in Murang'a County.

3.1: Head teachers Self- Rating on Setting a Clear Vision and Goals

To evaluate the head teachers' instructional leadership role of setting a clear vision for the school, weighted mean and standard deviation was computed from the responses.

On the leadership role of involving teachers and learners in designing a clear vision for the school, the mean was high ($M=3.52, SD=0.922$), meaning that most head teachers involve teachers and learners in designing a clear goal and vision for the school. On Sharing the school vision with all the stakeholders the mean was ($M=3.63, SD=0.869$). The standard deviation of 0.869 indicates slight variation of responses among the respondents. Sharing the school vision has impact on academic achievement since it brings stakeholders together to achieve performance it also ensures unity of purpose.

Most head teachers were in agreement that they gave teachers guidance on how to achieve the set goals for the school with a mean of ($M=3.47, SD=0.537$). The standard deviation of 0.537 indicates that most respondents had a similar opinion. Head teachers agreed that they guide teachers' on linking national goals of education with subject specific objects. This is evidenced by the high mean score ($M=4.15, SD=0.867$). However the standard deviation implies that the respondents' opinion varied widely. On Helping teachers set realistic goals with regards to pupils' abilities most head teachers agreed on this with slight variation in their responses as indicated by the standard deviation ($M=3.59, SD=0.563$).

Most head teachers were in agreement that they guide teachers to write suitable objectives for various subjects the mean was ($M=3.68, SD=0.600$). The standard deviation showed that responses slightly varied among the respondents. On coming up with new initiatives to achieve or alter current goals head teachers agreed with slight variation in their responses that most of them perform this instructional leadership role ($M=3.59, SD=0.673$). From these findings it was evident that head teachers perform their role of setting a clear vision for the school to attain academic achievements.

This concurs with the findings of Bennis (2009) who established that an instructional leader is the vision holder, the keeper of the dream, of the organization. Sergiovanni (2010) further indicated that head teachers are the ones who manage the vision by communicating it to others, to develop a shared covenant. They invite and encourage others to participate in determining and developing the vision. Head teachers have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place and the ability to translate that vision into reality.

Further to this Hallinger and Heck (2008) noted that the school curriculum should be aligned with the school's mission for learning outcomes to be achieved. The Head teacher should work at providing whatever is needed to make the vision a reality. Therefore he should gather resources, both human and material, to bring the vision to reality

3.2. Teacher's Responses on Head Teachers Instructional Leadership Role of Setting a Clear Vision and Goals

Teachers evaluated the head teachers on the role of setting a clear vision and goals for the school. The responses indicated that teachers were not involved in designing a clear vision and goals for the school as portrayed by the mean ($M=2.39$, $SD=0.911$). However, responses highly varied as indicated by standard deviation of 0.911. On the instructional leadership role of Sharing the school vision with all the stakeholders the mean was ($M=2.35$, $SD=0.892$). Teachers indicated that head teachers do not share the school vision with stakeholders as implied by the mean and standard deviation showing variation in responses. This could be a pointer to the decline of performance in Murang'a County.

The mean indicated that head teachers do not assist teachers to work towards the school educational goal ($M=2.22$, $SD=0.668$). From the response it is evident that head teachers do not guide teachers to write suitable objectives for various subjects ($M=2.32$, $SD=0.873$). The mean implies that head teachers do not provide guidance on how to achieve the set goals for the school. Teachers indicated that Head teachers did not practice their instructional goal of motivating teachers and learners to achieve set targets/goals mean ($M=2.40$, $SD=0.921$). The standard deviation indicates a wide variation on responses in this item. The mean ($M=2.32$, $SD=0.873$) indicated that head teachers do not assist teachers to link national goals of education with subject specific objects in various subjects while the large standard deviation of 0.873 shows the wide variations of responses. On helping teachers set realistic goals with regards to pupils' abilities most teachers indicated that head teachers do not help them set realistic goals that are guided by the students' abilities as shown by the mean ($M=2.47$, $SD=0.905$). Consequently, the response in this question was widely dispersed as indicated by the standard deviation. On Coming up with new initiatives to achieve or alter current goals teachers indicated that head teachers do not perform this instructional leadership role ($M=2.23$, $SD=0.880$).

The standard deviation of 0.880 indicate varied opinion among the respondents. The responses from teachers imply that head teachers do not practice their instructional leadership role of setting a clear vision and goals this may be attributed to the fact that most head teacher are write the school vision as a formality hence, they do not internalize it. Unlike the findings from the head teachers that reported high level of agreement, teachers disagreed on head teachers' involvement stakeholders in designing a clear vision and goals for the school. This is a clear indication that the school vision mission and motto is just a formality but it does not give directions regarding teaching and learning, hence it has no positive implication on educational outcomes.

This contradicts findings by Hallinger (2000) who opined that head teachers' should work with staff to formulate clear measurable goals focused on academic achievement. In addition Southworth (2002) indicated that it is the head teachers' responsibility to ensure that school goals are widely known and supported throughout the school. Seven out of the nine Curriculum Support Officers who were interviewed corroborate with the teachers finding that; head teacher do not involve all the stakeholders in coming up with the school vision and motto.

4. Conclusions

This section provides a summary of the results of the findings as per the research question which was stated as follows; how does the head teacher's instructional leadership role of setting a clear vision, motto and goals influence academic achievements in Murang'a County. On head teachers instructional leadership role of setting a clear vision and goals the mean was 2.35. Teachers opined that, the school mission, vision and motto is just a formality but not interlinked with the school academic achievements.

Curriculum Support Officers concurred with the teachers finding by indicating that, all the stakeholder are not involved in coming up with the school motto, it therefore does not guide teaching and learning. In conclusion head teachers write the mission and vision of the school as a formality however they do not interlink it with academic practice in the school. Hence it is only a requirement by MOEST but it does not give directions to teachers, pupils and other stakeholder, therefore it does not influence academic achievements in Murang'a County.

5. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for policy makers, head teachers and researchers are documented below.

- At the school level, head teachers should work with teachers and identify weaknesses relating to school motto, vision and goal setting since goal setting is not enough. Hence Head teachers need to create an atmosphere where teachers can make reference to them as instructional resource.
- All stakeholders should be involved in coming up with the school vision, mission and motto. It should also be communicated to all people in the school since goals provide a sense of purpose and priority in an environment where a multitude of tasks can seem equally important and overwhelming.

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