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The Role of Principals in Curriculum Supervision and Academic Performance of Students in Teso North Sub County, Kenya

Limo Alice¹ and Omasete Gerald²

¹University of Eldoret, School of Education, PO Box 1125-30100, Eldoret.

²Mount Kenya university, School of Education.

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ABSTRACT

The primary responsibility of the principal in a school set up is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the overall mission of enhancing students' achievement. Instructional leadership provided by the principal has been identified as a contributing factor to higher student achievement. This study was guided by the following objective: to establish the principals' role in supervision of curriculum and its effect on academic performance. This study was anchored on Hackman and Walton's Functional Leadership Theory (1986) which addresses how specific leader behaviors contribute to organizational and leadership effectiveness. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The researchers sampled 20 (67 %) out of the total thirty schools in the region. Census sampling technique was used to select one extra county boys' school, one extra county girls' school, one county girls' boarding school, one sub county girls' day school and purposive sampling technique was used to pick sixteen other secondary schools from the categories of county mixed day/boarding and sub-county mixed day schools. The findings indicated that Most principals believed that the instructional practices of the principals impacted positively on academic performance of their schools. Most of them also facilitated acquisition of instructional materials, and helped in organizing the teaching timetable and school routine, which qualified them as instructional leaders.

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1.0 Introduction

The primary responsibility of the principal in a school set up is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the overall mission of enhancing students' achievement. Instructional leadership provided by the principal has been identified as a contributing factor to higher student achievement (Lezotte, 1994). Flath, (1989) defines instructional leadership as the type of leadership which is made up of direct or indirect behaviors that significantly affect teachers' instructions and as a result, students learning. This implies identifying directions and sharing goals and persuading teachers to work towards them. As a leader therefore, a principal needs to possess certain leadership skills in order to be able to carry out his instructional leadership duties satisfactorily. The instructional skills of the principal are a vital component in this study, since a school is a place of learning and the main purpose of schooling is academic achievement.

Many researchers Edmonds, (2009) stress the importance of the instructional leadership responsibilities of the principal which contribute to academic success. However, the consensus in the literature regarding this issue is that it is seldom practiced, (Flath, 1989). Stronge (1988) calculates that 62.2% of the elementary principal's time is focused on school management issues, whereas only 6.2% of their time is focused on program issues. Although McNally (1992) points out that practitioners and researchers agree that certain principals are effective, I personally seem to agree with

Fullan (1991) that such "effective instructional leaders are distinctly in the minority" (p. 151)

On the basis of two studies of successful school leadership in the UK, involving parents, pupils, teachers, governors, senior managers, and head teachers, Harris (2004) asserts that successful leadership in schools have resulted in higher levels of both student attainment and achievements, emphasizing the importance of distributed leadership. He also points out that findings from the studies have identified the limitation of a singular leadership approach in securing school improvements.

Cotton (2003) also asserts that two related lines of research have demonstrated the influence of school leaders on school improvement. The first line of inquiry is what is known as school effectiveness research which identified the characteristics of effective schools that influence the high-achieving schools. The second line of research is what is focused primarily on the principal's role as an instructional leader. In this context, the roles of principals in developing instructional programs have been found to have contributed in creating more high-achieving schools.

Principals are only trained as classroom instructors and while the undergraduate teaching in the university level for teachers cover subjects on education management, this may not be enough to equip teachers with the leadership skills and knowledge necessary to become effective principals. It is worth noting that the competitive environment in the Kenyan school system deters effective principals from sharing best practices, and the non-existence of principals' leadership

Tele:

E-mail address: limoalice@gmail.com

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journals keeps our schools from gaining from principals of effective schools. An article in The Daily Standard, November 7th 2010 “Kenya Schools Ill-Equipped in The Face of Disaster” stressed the need for school principals’ training to meet the needs of the emerging issues of the 21st century. The report pointed that the ministry of education would soon require refresher courses for school principals on school administration, a move meant to engage and improve leadership skills for current principals. The article challenges the ministry of education on the dire need for a comprehensive training program that includes both formal and informal training for both current and prospective school principals.

Academic performance has been cited as the core mandate of every learning institution in the world and largely depends on instructional leadership of the Principal. In Kenya, academic achievement is measured by performance in the two national examinations i.e. Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE). This study focuses more on KCSE Performance in Teso North sub-county.

In the KCSE results of 2012, the Sub-County registered only one A (plain) and seven A- (minus). Only 102 candidates scored quality grades of B (plain) and above that would give them direct entry into university.

The best school in the sub-county, newly upgraded to national status, had a staggering mean of only 7.403 and was the only one that appeared among the top 20 schools in the county where it was ranked 9th.

For a long period of time Teso North has lagged behind trailing very miserable grades that left the populace downhearted. It is in this light that this study attempted to investigate the effect of principals’ role in curriculum supervision on the schools’ academic performance.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Students performance in Kenya certificate of secondary examinations has persistently been poor in Teso North Sub County. To some extent, this has been blamed on the lack of focus on the academic programs and the seemingly misplaced priorities in the schools’ leadership. This may be due to the fact that school principals may not be trained to do their leadership roles in curriculum supervision. They are trained as classroom teachers and given roles of leadership direct from the classroom without having any formal training. How they adapt to their roles of curriculum supervisors affects academic performance is an issue which has not been given attention. The school principals employ trial and error method in leadership thus posting dismal performance. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the role of school principals as instructional leaders to find out its effect on academic performance.

2.1 Objective of the Study

This study was guided by the following objective: to establish the principals’ role in supervision of curriculum and its effect on academic performance.

2.2 Scope of the Study

This study covered all secondary schools in Teso North Sub-County. Teso North is located in the western part of Kenya, Busia County, with an area of 257.1 kilometers squared. The respondents were principals, teachers and students. The study sought to determine the relationship between the curriculum supervision of the school principals (the independent variable) and the academic performance (dependent variable).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study borrowed a lot from Hackman and Walton’s Functional Leadership Theory (1986) which addresses how specific leader behaviors contribute to organizational and leadership effectiveness. According to the theory, it’s the leader’s main job to see that the needs of a given group are taken care of so that members of the group can in turn, do their jobs. The main functions of a leader are expanded on more precisely to include environmental monitoring, organizing subordinate activities, teaching and coaching subordinates, motivating others, and intervening actively in the group’s work, with the goal of building relationships and setting clear roles and standards for all parties involved. The study adopted this theory because it focuses on the actual functions of the principals that characterize their leadership style which is its independent variable and the outcome on the performance of the subordinates which forms the dependent variable.

3.0 Research Design and Methodology

The research adopted a descriptive survey design, focusing on the relationship between the instructional leadership style and academic performance in secondary schools. The study was designed to draw information and conclusions on the current status of academic performance and leadership styles employed by the principals. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodology as it sought to get the information that reflected the content and meaning in the study. What was explored through the qualitative method was later explained using the quantitative methodology. The study was conducted within Teso North, Busia County. The study targeted all the thirty secondary schools in the sub-county. Purposive sampling, proportionate stratified sampling techniques and census were used. Simple random sampling was used to ensure a fair representation of each category of schools. The researcher sampled 20(67 %) out of the total thirty schools in the region to participate in the study.

Table 3.1. Category, Sampling and Sample Size.

Population name	Total population	Sample size	Sample percentage
Principals	30	20	67%
Teachers	200	80	40%
Students	1000	200	20%
TOTAL	1230	288	23%

The researcher used a number of instruments in order to establish the relationship between instructional leadership and academic performance. These were: questionnaires, interviews schedules and observation checklist. The interviews were generally unstructured and more informal. Observation method was appropriate since it enabled the researcher to see reality in person without relying on hearsay. In the observation, the researcher was able to observe the students’ notes and assignments which had been signed and remarked by the principal, teachers’ professional records also remarked, availability and adequacy of the instructional materials, availability and use of the curriculum co-ordination tools and the individual schools’ academic performance over the years.

4.0 The Relationship between the Principals’ Supervision of Curriculum and Academic Performance in Teso North Sub County.

The research question being answered here was: How does the role of the principal in curriculum supervision in the school affects academic performance?

4.1 The Principals' Role in Students' Homework.

In order to assess whether the principals checked on the students' work and its effect on academic performance, the respondents were asked to evaluate on how often they checked the students' homework. The responses for principals, teachers and students are as presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Principals and Students' Homework.

Responses	principals	Teachers	Students
V. frequently		11(14.47%)	150(75%)
Frequently	12 (60%)	61(80.26%)	45(22.5%)
Rarely	3 (15%)	4(5.26%)	5(2.5%)
Not at all	5 (25%)		
TOTAL	20 (100%)	76(100%)	200(100%)

From the results presented in Table 4.1, it can be noted that majority of the principals 12(60%) checked students' homework frequently. Three (15%) of them rarely checked students' homework while 5(25%) never checked homework at all. This indicated that most principals, (60%), in the sub-county practiced instructional leadership by individually checking on their students' work to confirm if the learners participated in the curriculum instructions. The other 40% indicated from their responses that they either rarely or did not at all check their students' work. Since this study took checking of the students' work as one of the indicators for instructional leadership, then it would be taken that the 40% principals who did not check the students' work fell short of this measure of instructional leadership.

The teachers' responses on how frequently principals checked students work presented in Table 4.1 also showed that 11(14.47%) indicated that principals checked students' work very frequently, 61(80.26%) did it frequently and 4(5.26%) rarely checked. This seemed to agree with those of the principals. The students' responses also tabulated in Table 4.1 majority (97.5%) of the students confirmed that principals in deed checked their work. King, (2010) emphasized that the principals' frequently checking their work put them on toes and thereby improved their academic performance.

When the teacher respondents were interviewed in relation to curriculum supervision, it was noted that most teachers said that the principals routinely checked students' work in order to keep them on their toes. One of the respondents said:

"Our principal checks the students' books fortnightly.

Although she teaches English, she checks the students' mathematics assignments also. The students are therefore kept conscious of their work because they know the principal can call for any of their books any time. And the consequences are dire. This has really helped improve academic discipline."

This was in line with what Wiles and Bondi (1997) pointed out that in improving instruction through supervision, the principal should become more clinical in reviewing the processes and procedure of the classroom so that the teacher and the supervisor develop a shared reality that can become the basis of professional dialogue.

4.2 The Principals and Teachers' Records.

In order to assess whether the principals checked teachers' professional records and its effect on academic performance, the respondents were asked to rate on how frequently the principals checked and remarked on the teachers' records. The findings are as presented in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2. Principals and Teachers' Professional Records (a).

Response	Frequency	Percent
Rarely or not at all	8	40
Frequently	12	60
Total	20	100

The results in Table 4.2 indicates that majority of the principals 11(55%) frequently or very frequently 1(5%) checked teachers' records. The rest of the principals (40%) either rarely or never at all checked teachers' professional records.

The teachers were also asked to state whether or not the principals checked their professional records. The findings were presented in Table 4.3

Table 4.3. Principals and Teachers' Professional Records (b).

Response	Freq.	Percent
False	4	5.26
True	72	94.74
Total	76	100

The findings presented in Table 4.3 indicate that majority 72(94.74%) of the teachers confirmed that principals indeed checked teachers' professional records. According to Akpa (2002) the principal performs a number of roles which could be administrative or academic. One of such roles is focus on scheme of work. As it relates to clarifying the curricula content and developing the scheme of work, from which teachers draw their lesson notes and diaries the principal ensures that the teachers constantly keep on up to date scheme of work. The principal performs these functions to sustain the internal efficiencies of the school in order to improve the educational system as a whole. These finding indicated that teachers agreed with the principals that indeed the principals frequently checked their professional records. This was particularly important as the principals would ensure that teachers prepared for their lessons professionally without compromising quality.

In order to assess whether there was a timely coverage of the syllabus and its effect on academic performance, the respondents were asked to remark on if they had set mechanisms to monitor on syllabus coverage in their schools. The findings are as recorded in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4. Syllabus Coverage and Performance.

Response	Freq.	Percent
Agree	2	10
Strongly agree	18	90
Total	20	100

From Table 4.4 it was observed that majority 18(90%) of the principals strongly agreed that timely syllabus coverage was critical in improving academic performance and the other 2(10%) also agreed that indeed timely syllabus coverage positively affected the academic performance. In the interview, the respondents argued that since the syllabus was the tool that the ministry of education used for determining what was to be taught, and the examination body used as a guide in setting exams, it was imperative that its coverage was associated with success in national exams. During the interview, the teachers indicated that the principals had placed very stringent measures on timely syllabus coverage. The teacher-respondents said that syllabus coverage was a priority and mandatory in their schools. One particular respondent said:

“Targets are set early in the year and the principal calls for briefs weekly to assess our speed. Each teacher is supposed to have completed the form four syllabuses by June in the year failure to which you would be pulling the others back.”

Timely completion of the syllabus calls for team work and all members of the team would be expected to pool together. This process starts with principals being effective instructional leaders, who must be knowledgeable about curriculum development, teacher and instructional effectiveness, clinical supervision, staff development and teacher evaluation. In order to achieve this therefore, the principal requires to embrace Fullan (1991: 48) that says; “The principal must be active and collaborative with teachers to shape the school as a work place in relation to shared goals and teachers’ collaboration.”

4.3 Schemes of Work and Academic Performance.

The researcher sought to investigate whether well prepared and followed schemes of work positively affected academic performance. The findings are as recorded in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Schemes and Performance.

Response	Teachers	Principals
Strongly agree	15(65.79%)	15(75%)
Agree	3(30.26%)	3(15%)
Disagree	2(1.32%)	2(10%)
Strongly disagree	2(2.63%)	
Total	76(100%)	20(100%)

Table 4.5 showed that 18(90%) of the principals agreed that well prepared and followed schemes of work positively affected academic performance. Only 2(10%) disagreed. On the side of teachers, 73(96.05%) of the teachers agreed that well prepared and followed schemes of work improved academic performance. Only 3(3.95) disagreed. From the responses of both principals and teachers it was learned that the educationists in Teso North Sub-county believed that for them to get quality results, the teachers needed to adequately prepare for the lessons through preparation of professional records such as schemes of work, lesson plans, lesson notes and records of work.

5.0 Conclusions

Most principals frequently checked their students’ work and teachers’ professional records. Most Principals also believed that both well prepared and followed schemes of work and timely syllabus coverage had direct positive impact on the academic performance. They all established mechanisms for syllabus coverage.

When the mean scores for all the twenty schools between 2009 and 2013 were averaged, the best school had a mean score of 6.463 while the lowest had 3.118. Most of the schools had a mean of between 3.118 and 4.9. Only two schools had a mean of more than 5.00. The mean score for the sub-county for the five years was calculated to be 4.259208. This was very low performance for a sub-county.

From the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that all principals in the sub-county were qualified to head secondary schools. Most of them were of mature age and had adequate experience as principals. Most principals also believed that the instructional practices of the principals impacted positively on academic performance of their schools. Most of them also facilitated acquisition of instructional materials, and helped in organizing the teaching timetable and school routine, which qualified them as instructional leaders. Most of the seminars teachers attended were however organized by non-educational organizations and were therefore not very relevant to the individual needs of the students in class thereby having minimal impact on academic performance in the sub-county. As the principals did all these, the academic performance in the sub county remained wanting. The researcher therefore concluded that there was no significant relationship between the instructional leadership of the principals and the academic performance in the sub county.

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