Competencies Required by Heads of Department in Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Case of Siaya District

Manduku Joshua*, Ongek Margaret and Koske Mary
University of Kabianga Box 2030-20200, Kericho, Kenya.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out those competencies that Teachers' Service Commission (TSC) appointed Heads of Department in secondary schools should have for effective performance of their administrative duties and responsibilities. Major areas of responsibility for study were: Responsibility for Curriculum; Responsibility for Teachers; Responsibility for Learners; Responsibility for Resources; and Responsibility for Finance. Under these areas of responsibility, 46 specific tasks were identified and consequently studied. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. There were 37 Heads of Department, 112 teachers, 24 head-teachers and 2 Quality Assurance and Standards officers' in-charge of secondary schools selected from Siaya District. Data collection techniques included questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. For data analysis, mean scores and percentages were used to describe data. T-test and chi-square statistical techniques were used to draw inferences. The findings of the study revealed that heads of departments in secondary schools are lacking in certain competencies which are crucial for effective performance of their administrative functions and responsibilities. The most discrepant competencies were found to be in the area of Responsibility for Curriculum, and Teachers. On the basis of the findings, recommendations were made on how to equip heads of department with the necessary competencies in order for them to be effective in their work. These include the need to: offer extra job-focused formal training to heads of department; broaden, detail and make practicable education administration curriculum in teacher training institutions; provide elaborate job description manual; provide incentives to these administrators; and have quality assurance personnel make frequent and broad based supervision of the work of Heads of Department.

Introduction

Heads of Departments (HODs) in Kenyan secondary schools are crucial people in managing and implementing the curriculum. For instance, the Kamunge Report of 1988 acknowledged their potential roles in supervising the curriculum and hence, enhancing the work of the Department of Quality Assurance and Standards (QUASO). [1] Observed that HODs were capable of solving problems that frequently riddle schools while [2] recognized that head teachers and school inspectors relied on HODs as specialist subject teachers to interpret the curriculum. The responsibilities of HODs may be distilled into five major categories: responsibility for the curriculum, teachers, learners, resources and for finance [3]; [4]. However, an inspection of various reports from QUASO (formerly, the Inspectorate) and Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI) indicate that in many secondary schools, departments lack teaching documents such as syllabuses, schemes of work, lesson plans and departmental files. Moreover, most HODs did not carry out internal supervision and displayed poor knowledge of, and skills in areas crucial to effective departmental management such as, the Education Act, role of school Board of Governors, school finances and stores, filing and documentation, delegation, guidance and counselling procedures, and general departmental organisation [5].

For the efficient performance of designated functions, HODs must be equipped with the requisite leadership and management skills. It is assumed that pre-service training, a certain experience in teaching and passing an interview administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE) personnel are sufficient in preparing teachers for HOD positions. However, there is a paucity of empirical information on whether HODs in Kenya's secondary schools possess the requisite competencies for their jobs. The objectives of this study were: (1) To determine the current competencies possessed by HODs for the performance of their duties, (2) To determine the competencies that the HODs should have in order to be effective, and (3) To ascertain whether significant differences exist between the competencies that HODs have and those they should have to perform their tasks.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which was apt, as it enabled an in-depth study of the relevant variables existing in the schools and has a higher external validity [6]. The theoretical framework of the study was provided by the Needs Assessment Theory, which as enunciated by [7] is not only a problem-solving tool but also a means by which identified requirements might be prioritised. The theory is useful in identifying gaps between current practice and desired results, and then suggesting how these gaps might be reduced [8]. In order to identify the gaps, one ought to know what the current practice vis-a-vis that which is desired. Since the study aimed at identifying the gaps between the existing competencies

of the HODs and what they ought to have, the theory was germane.

The study was conducted in secondary schools and the District Education Office in Siaya District, which is a typical Kenyan district. This implied that findings from the study were likely to be generalized to the rest of the country. The target population were the entire Teacher's Service Commission appointed HODs and teachers in 84 secondary schools in Siaya District and the District Inspector of secondary schools. Both purposive and simple random sampling methods were used to select the sample. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method in which some members of the population are selected intentionally while others are left out [6] was used to select schools with TSC appointed HODs, head teachers, and district inspectors of secondary schools in the administration section. This method allowed the collection of information from the relevant cadres of the population. Simple random sampling was used to select three teachers from each department (each department comprises roughly three to four subjects) headed by a TSC appointee as HOD. This method ensured that any teacher in a department had an equal chance of participating in the study, hence increasing the external validity of the study. Given that researchers, such as [9] and [10] consider 30% of the total population as being an adequate sample size, this study selected teachers from 32 secondary schools in the district, which represented 38% of the total schools. From these schools, 37 TSC appointed heads of department, 24 head teachers, and 112 teachers were selected for the study. In addition, two District Inspectors were also selected.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. Questionnaires were preferred because they allow the collection of information from a large sample within limited time. The questionnaire was constructed to capture the five areas of responsibility of HODs: responsibility for the curriculum, teachers, learners, resources and for finance. Each question had two parts: one asking the respondent to rank the question on the actual practice; the other part to rank it on the desired practice. Interviews were conducted with 24 head teachers and 2 district inspectors while document analysis inspected reports such as those from Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI) and educational commissions.

The data collected by questionnaires was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages and means were used to describe the data. Data collected from interviews were transcribed and organised into themes, which were then indicated using percentages. Chi square (χ^2) tests of independence was used to establish whether significant relationships existed between performance of HODs and their background characteristics, such as gender, experience and academic discipline. T-tests were used to determine if the discrepancy between actual and desired practices were significantly different. All tests were two-tailed and significance level was set at P<.05

Results

The study found that HODs are likely to be males rather than females (78% were males compared to only 22% females), Bachelor of Education (B.ed) graduates (73% of them had B.ed degrees) and likely to have served as HODs for less than three years (70% had served between 0-3 years). Interviews with head teachers and District inspectors revealed that HODs had not undergone extra training upon assuming their offices.

Table 1 presents the current and desired practices, and gaps between the current and desired practices in the five areas of responsibility of HODs.

The questions investigating HOD competencies had scores, which ranged from 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often) to 5 (always). The results indicated that HODs in the study area are likely to perform the worst on their responsibilities to learners, which had the lowest mean and a relatively smaller standard deviation. They are likely to somewhat perform better on their responsibilities to teachers and resources, which had the highest means. However, given that the means in all the areas of responsibility ranged between two and three, it implied that HODs in the area of study lacked the required competencies, since they only "sometimes" or "rarely" performed duties, which they were supposed to do. The means of desired practices were all above four, in all the areas of responsibility, suggesting that HODs should excel in all their five responsibilities. However, the highest means for the desired practices were registered for responsibilities for resources, teachers and curriculum, implying that these areas might be particularly important. The results also indicated that current practices in all the areas of responsibility were below the desired practices and these differences were statistically significant. The worst discrepancies were recorded for responsibility for learners (-1.76) and curriculum (-1.35), which showed that HODs needed to improve in these areas.

It was also germane to provide a detailed analysis of the specific competencies or their lack- of among the HODS in the main areas of responsibility. This information is presented in Tables 2 to 5.

The results indicated that most HODs did not engage in research, never assisted in the organisation of parental visits to schools, did not carry out internal inspection of teaching, and had problems in translating subject goals into departmental objectives. Analysis of Table 3 showed that HODs were poor in in-servicing of other teachers, giving feedback to teachers on their performance, stimulating morale among other teachers and encouraging them to attend suitable courses.

With respect to their responsibility to learners (Table 4), HODs were found wanting in advising pupils on career choices, assessing students' work and providing remedial lessons to students. However, they were found to keep records of student performance and encouraging students to adopt active learning approaches.

Results in Table 5 indicated that HODs were poor in organizing for library services, informing parents about subject requirements and improvising absent resources.

It was also important to find out the extent competencies among HODs from the perspective of head teachers and District education inspectors (Figure 1).

The results indicated that heads perceived their HODs as being very poor in supervising instruction, setting and moderating examinations, administrative duties, departmental organisation and budgeting. Chi-square analysis revealed no significant relationships at p<.05 between respondent's background characteristics and performance.

Discussion

This study found that HODs in the study area were deficient in some requisite competencies in the five areas of responsibility. Most HODs never engaged in research, never assisted in the organisation of parental visits to schools, did not carry out internal inspection of teaching, never set and moderated examinations, never in-serviced other teachers, and

Table 1. Current and desired practices and gaps among HODs

Area of responsibility	Current practice Mean+SD	Desired practice Mean+SD	Gaps between current and desired Difference	t-value
1. Responsibility for curriculum	3.03+0.59	4.38+0.49	-1.35+0.56	12.78***
2. Responsibility for teachers	3.49+0.77	4.49+0.49	-1.00+0.63	9.66***
3. Responsibility for learners	2.55+0.67	4.31+0.59	-1.76+0.34	14.72***
4. Responsibility for resources	3.48+0.92	4.56+0.61	-1.08+0.77	11.21***
5. Responsibility for finance	3.21+1.41	4.29+1.15	-1.08+1.28	5.53*

SD- standard deviation; *, *** t-value significant at five and one per cent levels of probability, respectively.

Table 2. Competencies of HODs in Responsibility for Curriculum

Implementation (%)			
Responsibility for curriculum	Never	Low	High
1.Assist teachers develop schemes of work	19	40	40
2.Demonstrate good knowledge of teaching methodology	16	34	50
3.Assist in setting exams	15	42	43
4. Ensure lessons are spread in school timetable	26	36	37
5.Carry out research	48	44	8
6.Assist in organising parental visits to school	52	35	13
7.Link with other departments in school	17	46	37
8.Translate goals of subject syllabuses into department objectives	23	43	34
9.Teach many classes	20	40	39
10.Make correct subject entries for external examinations	26	29	44
11.Offer guidance and counselling	21	46	33
12.Conduct regular departmental meetings	6	35	57
13.Carry out internal inspection of teaching	33	43	24
14.Display leadership qualities like punctuality	3	27	69
	7	23	26
	24	25	54
	15	26	27

n- 149 teachers (HODs and other teachers, excluding head teachers)

Table 3. Competencies of HODs in Responsibility for Teachers

Implementation (%)			
Responsibility for Teachers	Never	Low	High
1.Encourage teachers to attend suitable courses	29	39	32
2.Assign tasks	5	42	52
3.Give feedback to teachers on their performance	32	52	16
4.Stimulate morale of teachers	28	46	26
5.Check teachers' record of work	16	31	55
6.In-service other teachers	44	40	15
7.Show concern for teacher's welfare	29	43	28
8.Represent departmental teachers' view	6	32	62
9.Support teachers' professional development	25	46	29
10.Assign teaching loads to colleagues	9	19	71
11.Induct new teachers into the department	9	32	59

n- 149 teachers (HODs and other teachers, excluding head teachers)

Table 4. Competencies of HODs in Responsibility for Learners

Implementation (%)			
Responsibility for Learners	Never	Low	High
1. Advice pupils on career choice	23	39	38
2.Keep records of students' performance	8	25	66
3.Assess students' work	13	37	39
4.Ensure provision of remedial lessons to students	12	48	40
5.Encourage students to adopt active learning approaches	6	37	56

n- 149 teachers (HODs and other teachers, excluding head teachers)

Table 5. Competencies of HODs in Responsibility for Resources

Implementation (%)			
Responsibility for resources	Never	Low	High
1.Order for resources	9	33	58
2.Organize for library services	48	40	11
3.Prioritize required resources	15	46	39
4.Inform parents about subject requirements	22	54	24
5.Improvise resources	24	48	26
6.Allocate resources to teachers	23	39	38
7.Keep appropriate inventories for departmental resources	9	37	53

n- 149 teachers (HODs and other teachers, excluding head teachers)

did not provide feedback to teachers on their performance. They also had deficiencies in stimulating morale, encouraging teachers to attend suitable courses, advising pupils on career choices, assessing students' work and providing remedial lessons to students, improvising absent resources, preparing schemes and poor administrative skills. Given the centrality of the HODs, as 'linking pins' between their departments and the upper executives of the school, their deficiency in each of the five areas of responsibility as set out by [3] could substantially explain why many schools in the study area post poor results. [11] Has noted a general trend of decline in KCSE examination performance. [12] and [13] among others demonstrate that school inspection enhances better performance in examinations; thus, the dereliction of this duty by most HODs might imply that little supervision is undertaken in the schools because the school heads have many other functions. The failure of HODs to motivate pupils and other teachers, poor administrative and organisational skills, also suggest that most HODs lack leadership skills, which are a must-have for HODs [14]. These failures were found to be unaffected by a respondent's background characteristics, which implied all HODs were likely to lack competencies, regardless of their gender, experience or academic discipline.
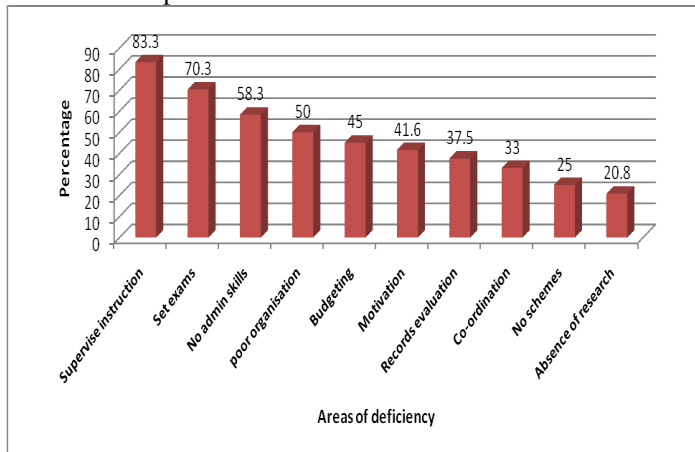

Figure 1. Areas of deficiency among HODs according to head teachers and inspectors

The means of desired practices were all above four, in all the areas of responsibility, suggesting that HODs should excel in all their areas of responsibilities. However, the highest means for the desired practices were registered for responsibilities for resources, teachers and curriculum, implying that these areas might be particularly important. Since information about desired practices was gathered from the HODs and teachers themselves, the apparent disconnect between the actual and desired practice is curious, because the HODs appear to know what they ought to do although they do not implement them. This implied that the HODs might lack the competencies to implement what they are supposed do to. However, it also showed a weak supervisory system, which is supposed to hold HODs to account, as revealed in other studies, notably that of [15]. This study adopted a unique, needs assessment approach, which showed that the worst discrepancies between current and desired practices among HODs were recorded for responsibility for learners (-1.76) and curriculum (-1.35). These areas are probably the most important functions of HODs, and the fact that the greatest discrepancy was recorded in them might explain why schools in the study area perform poorly in KCSE examinations.

Conclusion and recommendations

The present study found that HODs do not perform their tasks frequently because they lacked necessary competencies to perform these tasks. Areas of responsibility that revealed the largest discrepancies were responsibility for learners and curriculum. Performance of HODs was unaffected by a respondent's background characteristics. The study recommends that regular training sessions, in form, of seminars, workshops and refresher courses, under the aegis of KESI, Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) and Ministry of Education, should be organised at district, county and national levels. Education administration curriculum offered in teacher training colleges and universities should be broadened to include more administrative duties, and elaborate manuals setting out the functions of HODs should be prepared and widely disseminated.

References

[1] Harris A. (2003). The changing context of leadership: Research, Theory and Practice. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

[2] Bullock, A. (1988).Meeting Teachers Management Needs. Berrycraft: Peter Francis Publishers.

[3] TSC, (2007). Policy on identification, selection, appointment, deployment and training of heads of post primary institutions. Nairobi. Government printers

[4] Dean P.G. (1982).Teaching and Learning Mathematics. London: Woburu Press.

[5] Ministry of Education.(1995). KESI Training Activities. Nairobi. Government printers.

[6] Kothari, R. (2004). Research Methodology, Methods and Techniques.New Delhi, New Age International Ltd Publishers.

[7] English F. W., Kaufman A.R. (1975). Needs Assessment: A Focus for Curricula Development. Washington: ASCD, NEA.

[8] Maranga J. S. (1977). "Guidelines for the Training of Educational Supervisors in Kenya". Unpublished Ed. D. Thesis. Teachers College, Columbia University, Columbia.

[9] Mugenda, M.O. and Mugenda, A.G. (2003). Research Methods:Quantitative and Qualitative approaches. Nairobi.NUP

[10] Cochran, W.G. (1975). Sampling Techniques 3rd ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

[11] Olembo J.O. (2002). "Major Functions of School Supervision in Kenya Schools". A paper presented in Education Forum, Kenyatta University.

[12] Digolo O.D. (2003). Response to the paper entitled: "Education Sector Review: How far have we come since independence and what still needs to be done to meet the education needs of all Kenyans". Paper presented in Education conference on 2nd August. Nairobi: Government Press.

[13] Davies, J.L. (2005). The Training of Academic Heads of Department. In Brew, A. Directions in staff development. (1st ed.) London, UK; The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

[14] Marland, M & Hill,S. (eds) (1981). Department Management. London: Heinnemann

[15] Watsulu, J. and Simatwa, E. (2011). Quality Education in Secondary Schools: challenges and opportunities for quality assurance and standards in Kenya: A Case study of Kakamega Central district. Educational Research, 2 (7):1281-1298