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 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 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.


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 (Jantz et al., 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. Conzenius 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 (Reitzig, 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 (Yanas, 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.
Piloting of the data collection instruments was undertaken in primary schools. The purpose of piloting was to test the reliability of the instruments. Reliability is the degree to which a particular measuring procedure gives similar results for the same individual under the same conditions (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The researcher defined reliability as the extent to which a sample of the results is truly representative of the population. The reliability of the instruments was determined using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) procedure. The KR-20 procedure is a statistical method for estimating the reliability of a test or questionnaire. The KR-20 procedure can be used to determine the reliability of a test or questionnaire, and it is commonly used in educational research. The KR-20 procedure is based on the assumption that the items of the test are independent and that the test has a normal distribution. The KR-20 procedure is a widely used method for determining the reliability of a test or questionnaire.

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