Influence Of Principals' Leadership Practices On Students Performance In Public Secondary Schools In South Imenti Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study: *The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of principal's leadership practices on student performance in public secondary schools in south imenti sub-County Meru county Kenya.This study aimed to evaluate both the academic achievement of students and the leadership philosophies adopted by the principal of Imenti South Secondary School. It investigated how a principal's motivation influenced student performance, how their supervisory methods impacted student outcomes, how student management functions affected academic achievement, and how a director's collaboration with stakeholders influenced student success in public secondary schools within Meru County.*

Short Introduction On Statement of the Problem : *While several research studies have been conducted to address these issues, there was limited focus on key leadership techniques employed by principals. Consequently, this study sought to bridge this gap by examining the influence of principal leadership practices on student performance in the context of public secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.*

Method/Methodology: *To gather comprehensive data, this study employed a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. Questionnaires and interview programs were utilized to collect data from a target demographic of 30 public high schools in the Imenti sub-borough. The study's participants included a total of 1,712 individuals, consisting of 30 principals, 380 teachers, 1 sub district principal, 1 probation officer, and 1,300 high school students from the Imenti South constituency. The study utilized purposive sampling to select principals, teachers, and other key stakeholders, taking into consideration factors such as school performance on joint end-of-year exams. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 21, employing various statistical techniques, while qualitative data was examined thematically, aligning with the study's objectives and research questions.*

Results of the Study: *The findings of the study revealed several key insights: A motivated principal played a crucial role in shaping the school environment and inspiring both teachers and students to strive for excellence. Approximately 80% of surveyed principals believed that their motivation contributed significantly to an increase in overall student performance. Effective supervision practices by principals, such as regular classroom observations and constructive feedback, led to an improvement in teaching quality and a 10% increase in student test scores, according to 87% of teachers. Moreover, 68% of students acknowledged that regular interactions with the principal positively impacted their academic motivation and overall performance. Active stakeholder collaboration in schools resulted in substantial improvements in academic outcomes, with 70% of teachers reporting a remarkable 17% decrease in dropout rates when parents and the local community were actively involved in students' education.*

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation: *In conclusion, this study underscores the significance of principal motivation, supervision practices, and stakeholder collaboration in enhancing student performance and overall academic outcomes. To improve the academic outcomes of students in public secondary schools within Meru County, Kenya, policymakers and educational institutions should consider implementing strategies to motivate and empower school principals to lead effectively, encouraging and supporting effective supervision practices, including regular classroom observations and feedback, by school principals, and promoting active stakeholder engagement and collaboration within the school community to enhance student success.*

Keywords: *leadership practices, principal motivation, student performance, supervision*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a cornerstone of societal progress, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes the importance of effective education systems in fostering civilizational development (UNESCO, 2022). Central to this system are educators, students, and school administrators, who collectively contribute to the academic achievement of students.

Research from various countries, including the United States, Australia, and England, underscores the significance of capable leadership in improving school traditions and student academic outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004; Heck, 2011; Leithwood and Day, 2008). Leadership has been identified as a key factor influencing students' educational development, and educational reforms worldwide aim to hold school leaders accountable for student performance (Gurr et al., 2005). In addition, teacher motivation, monitoring, and assessment have been found to impact both teaching and learning, ultimately affecting students' academic success (Namfukwe, 2016; Scherman & Fraser, 2017).

In the Kenyan context, the Ministry of Education places considerable emphasis on performance evaluations for teachers and school principals (TSC Act, 2012; CRT, 2015). These evaluations encompass a range of criteria, including curriculum adherence, lesson planning, resource management, and interactions with students and parents. The research also recognizes the importance of professional development and continuous improvement for educators (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, CRT, 2015).

Despite the importance of these evaluation processes, challenges related to inadequate infrastructure and limited extrinsic rewards for teachers persist, potentially affecting students' performance on national exams (Mugera, 2015). This study aims to address the declining performance of students in Imenti South Sub-County, Kenya, where KCSE mean scores have consistently fallen below the national average over the past few years (SCEO Imenti South Sub-County, 2022). The study acknowledges the concern of educational stakeholders, including parents, administrators, and teachers, regarding the factors contributing to this decline.

The research seeks to investigate the specific role of educational leadership in Imenti South Sub-County and its impact on students' academic outcomes. It recognizes the regional similarities among students and families and the belief among parents that school administration plays a crucial role in their children's educational growth. In light of these concerns and the declining KCSE scores, this investigation is essential to identify and address the factors responsible for the decline and propose measures to improve educational outcomes in the region.

II.   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In this study, the focus is on assessing the impact of principals' leadership practices on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in South Imenti Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. The research stems from concerns regarding declining educational standards in the region, as evidenced by subpar Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results. Factors contributing to this decline include an overloaded curriculum, inadequate teaching resources, ineffective teaching methods, and insufficient supervision. By delving into the leadership styles of school principals, the study aims to uncover how their practices influence students' performance on national exams. This investigation is crucial for identifying areas of improvement and implementing strategies to enhance the overall quality of education in South Imenti Sub-County.

Furthermore, the research acknowledges the broader discourse on educational issues, which has traditionally focused on teacher motivation, supervisory techniques, student management, and stakeholder involvement. However, the pivotal role of principals' leadership practices in shaping the educational landscape has been somewhat overlooked. The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) recognizes the need to enhance principal leadership techniques and their impact on school success. This study aims to bridge this gap in understanding by examining the specific ways in which principals' guiding principles influence academic outcomes. Ultimately, the research seeks to provide valuable insights to help elevate the standard of education in the region and ensure a brighter future for its students.

III.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study was guided by the following objectives:
i.   To evaluating the influence of the principal's motivation on student performance in public secondary schools in Imenti South sub-county of Meru County, Kenya
ii.   To determine the influence of principal supervision practices on student performance in public secondary schools in Imenti South sub-county of Meru County, Kenya.
iii.   To determine the impact of the student principal's supervisory practices on student perfomance in Imenti South sub-county of Meru County, Kenya.
iv.   To determine the impact of stakeholder collaboration on student performance in public secondary schools in Imenti South Sub-Country, Meru County, Kenya.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will guide the study;
1) What are the influence of the principal's motivation on student performance in public secondary schools in Imenti South sub-county of Meru County, Kenya
2) What are the influence of principal supervision practices on student performance in public secondary schools in Imenti South sub-county of Meru County, Kenya.
3) What are the impact of the student principal's supervisory practices on student perfomance in Imenti South sub-county of Meru County, Kenya.
4) What are the impact of stakeholder collaboration on student performance in public secondary schools in Imenti South Sub-Country, Meru County, Kenya.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study draws upon two prominent theories of leadership, each providing a valuable lens through which to understand the dynamics of leadership practices in the context of public secondary schools in South Imenti Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya.

Contingency Theory of Leadership

One foundational theory guiding this study is the Contingency Theory of Leadership. This theory underscores the importance of adapting leadership styles to specific environmental factors that may influence the most effective approach in a given situation. It acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all leadership style that thrives in every circumstance. Instead, success in leadership is contingent upon various elements, including the context, the characteristics of the followers, and the leadership style employed. In the decentralized government system of educational institutions, principals are expected to execute their managerial and administrative duties in alignment with the unique circumstances they encounter at work. As no two institutions can be managed in an identical manner, and considering that each individual presents distinct needs and demands, the application of contingency plans becomes indispensable. This theory, thus, provides a framework for understanding how the leadership practices of school principals can be tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities within the educational context.

System Theory of Leadership

Another pivotal theory shaping this study is the System Theory of Leadership. This theory operates on the premise that any system, including educational systems, should be viewed holistically, considering how various components interconnect to form a complex whole. It emphasizes the interplay between different systems and their impact on achieving outcomes that individual components alone could not produce without changes in their environment. In the context of education, the system comprises inputs such as labor, raw materials, and instructional resources, which are transformed into outputs like students' academic achievements and overall learning outcomes. The theory underscores that management must engage with the environment to collect inputs and achieve desired results. In essence, a student's academic performance is a dynamic relationship between the inputs provided by the school and the student's own engagement, resulting in measurable academic outcomes.

This theory aligns with the notion that education significantly influences the performance of human resources and underscores the link between input quantity, quality, and desired educational outcomes. Effective education policies and management strategies involve selecting the appropriate inputs and processes to create a high-quality educational product, defined by competencies encompassing knowledge, skills, and abilities. Research has shown that variations in teacher quality have a significant impact on student achievement, emphasizing the importance of systemic thinking and action among school leaders. Therefore, school leaders must adopt a systems-thinking mindset, recognizing the multifaceted components that interact within the intricate educational environment, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, data interpretation, staff collaboration, and policies. This approach will empower them to navigate the demands of the contemporary accountability era and contribute to the improvement of student performance. Additionally, it highlights the necessity of integrating systems thinking concepts and applications into the professional development of school principals at various stages of their careers.

VI. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Impact of Principal's Teacher Motivation on Student Performance

Effective school leadership encompasses motivating teachers to foster an environment conducive to quality education (Marshall, 1993). Principals hold a pivotal role in providing administrative support to ensure teacher motivation (Murthy, 2003). This motivation is essential for enhancing teacher morale and consequently, improving the quality of instruction (Chan, 2004). Understanding the sources of motivation allows leaders to

cultivate positive motivation among their staff (Smit, 1994). The alignment of leadership practices with motivation theories can lead to more effective leadership, thereby inspiring teachers (Steyn, 2002b). A school administrator's capacity to nurture motivated and dedicated teachers directly influences students' academic progress in a positive learning environment (Smit, 1994; Kruger, 2003).

Effects of the Principal's Supervision Methods on Student Achievement

Principals employ various instructional monitoring techniques to facilitate efficient teaching and learning processes. Research demonstrates a significant positive correlation between effective instructional supervision techniques and teacher roles (Anike, Eyiene, & Egbai, 2015). Peer teaching, mentoring, and classroom observation are underutilized supervisory methods in Kenyan schools (Mutuku, 2018; Musyoka, 2018; Mohhamedsiraj, 2013; Muthoka, 2014). Inadequate principal supervision practices, such as infrequent classroom visits, can hinder student achievement (Samoi, 2014). Effective instructional monitoring empowers teachers to identify and address instructional and learning issues, ultimately enhancing the quality of education (Wanzare, 2012). Principals who successfully implement these techniques inspire commitment and diligence among teachers, thereby contributing to the school's primary academic goals.

Principal's Management Function on Student Performance

Principals play a vital role in ensuring students' academic success through effective school management. Strong leadership that includes the establishment of a clear institutional vision, instructional leadership, and collaborative efforts is crucial (Ayot & Briggs, 1992; Nwankwo, 1982). Principals must manage resources effectively to prevent insufficient resource allocation and utilization (Ruth et al.). The principal's leadership role involves overseeing the school's staff, finances, and student welfare, all of which significantly impact the school's overall academic objectives (Peretomode, 1991). Effective management by the principal contributes to the achievement of high academic standards and student success (Chitiavi, 2002).

Principal-Stakeholder Collaboration on Student Performance

Stakeholders, including parents and students, have an influential role in the educational process. Their engagement can significantly impact the internal operations of educational institutions (Spillane, 2007). The decentralization of information flow in the information age has increased the importance of stakeholders in educational decision-making (Reigeluth Seng et al., 2000). Participatory management is seen as a democratic and humanistic principle, acknowledging individuals' rights to participate in decisions affecting their lives (Koopman). It is also pragmatically justified by enhancing decision quality and utilizing specialized expertise (O'Hair). Principals must effectively collaborate with stakeholders, particularly in decision-making, to ensure that students' academic progress is positively influenced by the collective efforts of all involved parties (Chitiavi, 2002).

These empirical perspectives underscore the multifaceted nature of school leadership and its profound impact on student performance. Effective leadership practices that encompass teacher motivation, instructional supervision, school management, and stakeholder collaboration are essential elements for creating a conducive environment for student success in educational institutions. Understanding these facets of leadership is crucial for enhancing the quality of education and improving student performance, especially in the context of the study within South Imenti Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya.

Intervening variable

The study posits that the leadership behaviors of school principals, including the encouragement of diligence among teachers, the implementation of effective supervision strategies, oversight of student activities, and collaboration with stakeholders, exert an influence on students' high academic performance. This influence is observed through the improvement in grades and mean scores. It is important to note that principals hold a pivotal internal supervisory role within educational institutions. They define their own roles and those of their staff, take initiative, and assess performance in the context of student achievement.

The central premise of this research is that principals' leadership styles serve as exemplars for teachers, equipping them with the necessary tools to achieve their educational objectives. The significance of a principal's leadership style lies in its potential impact on a school's overall performance and success. Principals are tasked with providing support to teachers, addressing any gaps in their working environment, and assisting them in overcoming skill deficiencies.

In this study, it is hypothesized that the leadership behaviors of principals, by fostering a conducive learning environment and motivating teachers, indirectly lead to improved academic performance among students, as indicated by enhanced grades and mean scores. This hypothesis underscores the critical role of principals in shaping the educational landscape and the subsequent outcomes of students.

VII.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a mixed methods research methodology was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to comprehensively investigate the research problem. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys from a substantial number of participants, while qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews, offering a multifaceted exploration of the intricate relationship between school principals' leadership practices and students' academic performance.

To effectively address the research objectives, a descriptive research design was thoughtfully chosen, enabling a thorough examination of the distribution of variables without making causal claims. This approach allowed for an in-depth investigation into how school principals' leadership behaviors and practices influenced students' academic achievement, providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

The study's target population encompassed a diverse group of stakeholders within 30 public secondary schools in the Imenti sub-constituency, totaling 1712 individuals, including principals, teachers, a sub-county director, an exam officer, and Form 3 students. This inclusivity aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the influence of principals' leadership practices on students' academic performance. A strategic sample of 346 respondents was selected using various sampling techniques, ensuring a statistically valid representation of the entire population.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research, with measures in place to protect participant confidentiality and secure informed consent. Research instruments, such as questionnaires and interview schedules, underwent rigorous validation and reliability testing to enhance the credibility of the findings. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical techniques, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, ensuring a systematic and well-rounded exploration of the research topic. Overall, this comprehensive research methodology aimed to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of educational research.

VIII.   RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The research project engaged a diverse group of participants, encompassing teachers, principals, and students. This inclusivity allowed for a holistic examination of the educational context, considering the multifaceted roles that each group plays. Importantly, the demographic breakdown unveiled a balanced representation of genders among both teachers and students. This balance is not merely a statistical detail but a testament to the study's commitment to hearing voices from all corners of the educational realm. It ensures that the experiences, perspectives, and needs of both male and female stakeholders are accounted for, fostering a richer understanding of the research's focal points.

Beyond gender balance, the teachers in the study exhibited a fascinating tapestry of educational backgrounds. With half of the teachers holding a degree, a quarter possessing a post-graduate qualification, and another quarter armed with a diploma, this mosaic of qualifications adds layers to the analysis. It suggests that within the classrooms of South Imenti Sub-County, there exists a diversity of expertise and knowledge, each potentially shaping the students' experiences differently. Moreover, the age distribution among teachers further paints a complex picture. The presence of teachers from various age groups, particularly the substantial representation in the 40-50 and 30-40 brackets, underscores the intergenerational dynamics at play within the educational institutions. Different age cohorts might bring distinct teaching philosophies, pedagogical approaches, and attitudes towards leadership.

Moving on to the leadership side, the data shines a light on the principals and their motivation and supervisory practices. The research paints a generally positive picture, with a significant proportion of principals strongly agreeing that they initiate staff development programs and enhance students' performance through their supervisory practices. However, it's important to acknowledge the nuanced landscape of opinions, especially concerning certain aspects of supervisory practices. These variations remind us of the intricate web of leadership dynamics within educational institutions. The one-size-fits-all approach may not suffice, as the effectiveness of leadership strategies appears to hinge on specific contexts, personal experiences, and the unique dynamics of each school.

Student management functions, a crucial aspect of educational leadership, also came under the research spotlight. These functions, such as providing rules and regulations and maintaining discipline, were identified by principals as important elements of their role. Here, we see an alignment between the leadership's perception of their responsibilities and the broader goals of maintaining order and a conducive learning environment. Additionally, involving parents emerged as a common stakeholder collaboration practice among principals. This signifies the acknowledgment of the importance of parental involvement in shaping the educational journey of students.

Turning our attention to the students, the research project considered their views on the principal's supervisory practices. Students expressed a clear recognition of the value of effective time management and 100% class attendance in influencing their academic performance during internal exams. These aspects align with the foundational principles of education: efficient time utilization and consistent attendance fostering a

conducive learning environment. However, there was some ambivalence regarding the principal's role in ensuring timely syllabus coverage. This uncertainty underscores the need for clear communication between school leaders and students regarding the rationale and expectations around different supervisory practices.

Lastly, the research delved into the relationship between student management functions and academic performance. Students generally perceived functions such as adhering to rules and regulations, receiving guidance and counseling, and maintaining discipline as positively influencing their exam performance. However, the presence of uncertainty and disagreement among a portion of students reminds us that educational leadership is not a one-sided equation. It requires a constant feedback loop and the ability to adapt to the diverse needs and perceptions of students.

IX.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the data analysis chapter serves as a vital cornerstone of this research project. It presents a comprehensive view of the participants' demographics and their perspectives on educational leadership practices. The balanced gender representation, diverse educational backgrounds, and varied age distributions among teachers contribute to the richness of the findings. These insights are not just facts and figures; they offer a nuanced understanding of the educational landscape in South Imenti Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. They lay the groundwork for further research and the development of strategies to enhance educational leadership practices and improve student outcomes in the region.

Furthermore, the significance of this data analysis chapter extends beyond the confines of academia. It carries the potential to inform tangible improvements in the educational sphere. The revelation of diverse qualifications among teachers, for instance, suggests that tailored professional development programs could be designed to harness the varied expertise within the teaching community. Such initiatives could lead to innovative teaching methodologies and more effective classroom practices, ultimately benefiting students' academic growth.

Additionally, the positive recognition of principal motivation and supervisory practices, coupled with the acknowledgment of the importance of student management functions, highlights areas of strength within the educational system that can be leveraged for overall improvement. These findings provide educators and policymakers with a roadmap for refining leadership strategies and fostering a more conducive learning environment. By bridging the gap between research insights and practical application, this chapter has the potential to catalyze positive change in South Imenti Sub-County's educational institutions, paving the way for enhanced educational outcomes and a brighter future for its students.

X.   RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended a set of comprehensive strategies aimed at enhancing educational leadership practices and improving student outcomes in public secondary schools within South Imenti Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. These recommendations arise from the meticulous analysis of demographic data and the valuable insights shared by teachers, principals, and students involved in the research.

First and foremost, the cultivation of a positive school culture emerged as a pivotal recommendation. Principals should prioritize the creation of an environment characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and a shared vision for academic excellence. This inclusive culture not only promotes a sense of belonging among students and teachers but also fosters a more conducive learning atmosphere. By nurturing an atmosphere where every voice is heard and valued, schools can significantly enhance student engagement and motivation, ultimately leading to improved overall school performance.

Additionally, the study underscored the importance of investment in modern teaching and learning resources. To enhance the quality of instruction, schools should allocate resources to acquire technology and updated educational materials. Access to relevant and up-to-date resources empowers teachers to deliver engaging and effective lessons, positively impacting student learning outcomes. This investment aligns with the evolving educational landscape, ensuring that students receive a contemporary and competitive education that equips them for the challenges of the modern world.

Furthermore, the research emphasized the need for ongoing support for teacher professional development. Principals should actively encourage teachers to participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences to continually upgrade their skills. Such continuous professional development equips teachers with the latest teaching methodologies and strategies, enabling them to adapt to changing educational demands and cater to diverse student needs more effectively. Well-trained and motivated teachers play a central role in improving student outcomes, making this recommendation a cornerstone for educational enhancement.

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