

INFLUENCE OF HEAD TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP STYLE ON PUPILS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NJORO SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Based on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) results for the years 2012 - 2016, it was established that pupils' performance in Njoro Sub-county was below average for a number of years and much lower compared to other sub-counties in Nakuru County. The study sought to establish the influence of head teachers' leadership style on pupils' academic performance. The study was guided by descriptive survey which targeted a population of 887 participants including 76 head teachers and 810 teachers. Simple random sampling was used to select 63 head teachers and 252 teachers. Data was collected a teachers' questionnaire, head teachers' interview guide and document analysis. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated through the Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient test and was found to be 0.813. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple Linear Regression was used to determine the influence of the head teachers' leadership style on pupils' academic performance. The study established that, head teachers used a variety of leadership styles that influenced pupils' academic performance in public primary schools. The study concluded that Head teachers' leadership style had statistically significant influence on pupils' academic performance. The study recommended for in-servicing and capacity building of head teachers to enhance their leadership styles.

Key words: Academic performance, Leadership style, Public primary schools

Introduction

Head teachers play a critical role in determining teaching and learning environment in a school. According to a study by Wanjiru (2013) in Nyeri County, head teachers' professional support was as was one of the key determinants of the pupils academic performance. According to Njuguna (2011) the school-based factors that influence pupils' academic performance included use of Mother tongue and sub-standard Kiswahili and English during the teaching/learning process; ineffective monitoring of private studies and individual learners progress; inadequacies in assessment and feedback; lack of shared vision and focused mission; and inadequate and poorly maintained physical and material resources. This study seek to establish whether the Head teachers' leadership style in managing school resources may influence pupils academic performance.

According to Waller, Smith and Warnock (1989) a dimension of leadership style that is associated with the autocratic/democratic continuum is the task- versus relationship-oriented style of leadership with the task orientation being similar to the autocratic method and the relationship oriented style being similar to the democratic method. Transactional leadership is the extreme of autocratic leadership where leaders have a lot of power over their people (McCleskey, 2014). The Head teachers need to use the relationship-oriented style of leadership and develop respectful relationships between learners and teachers. These are essential for they support social and psychological engagement in learning, but also are part of the new curriculum itself, as described by Dunleavy and Milton (2009). Just as building of a house no one builder works alone, adults, including teachers, administrators, counselors, and

support staff, must join students on the building team (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). Engaging students is more of relationship oriented leadership since it makes them participative in their own learning process (Fletcher, 2005). However, while the concepts of school leadership and school learning environment seem to be intuitively linked, there have been few studies that have related these concepts together (Griffith, 1999). Yulk (2006) affirms that the essence of transformational leadership is to inspire commitment of the followers to share objectives, increase their social identification even to the extent of developing their skills and collective efficacy.

Sağnak (2010) in the study of the relationship between transformational school leadership and ethical climate in Nigeria states that recent paradigm shifts in conceptualizing leadership have also encouraged educational researchers to consider these relationships from the perspective of new leadership model. In analysis of the three leadership Nyamboga, Gwiyo, Njuguna, Waweru, Nyamweya, Gongera (2014) concluded that an effective headteacher pays more attention to planning work and special tasks, and permits teachers to participate in decision making processes in an effort to achieve school goals, as participatory leadership style provides the climate of sense of unity in pursuit of set goals. Mwatsuma (2012) indicated that effective leadership will provide schools with a vision, explicit philosophies laid on consultation and team work and lead to success in attainment of good results in national examinations.

Over the past decades, several comprehensive reviews have been conducted of the literature on school administrators and their roles in schooling. Examples are the Studies on the effects of leadership styles on performance of students in KCSE both by Okoth (2000) and Kimacia (2007) which found out that Head teachers rated as being democratic had high mean performance index than autocratic Head teachers. Though Huka (2003), Muli (2005) and Wangui (2007) all confirmed that leadership style influenced student KCSE performance, they noted that autocratic Head teachers had higher mean scores in KCSE than their democratic counterparts. In another study by Njuguna (1998), the conclusion was that there is no significant relationship between leadership styles and students' KCSE performance.

Nyamboga *et al.* (2014) in their study on the effects of leadership styles on the performance of public secondary schools in national examinations in Tana River County in Kenya concluded that there is a significant relationship between Head teachers' leadership style and students' performance at KCSE. The principals in Tana River County had an average of autocratic leadership styles which related very well with their students' poor performance. These findings agree with Millette (1988) who stated that the quality of leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school. This confirms that leadership styles are varied and they influence the outcome of students' academic achievements.

Despite the current government policy of 100% transition from primary to secondary education in Kenya, access to quality secondary schools is still a challenge to learners with below average mean score in KCSE. Most of the learners with below average KCSE performance fail to join secondary schools and therefore may not benefit from the government resources in that level of education. It is important to establish the factors that influence pupils' academic performance. This study therefore sought to establish the influence of

headteachers' leadership style on pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Njoro Sub-county.

The study was guided by the following null hypothesis.

HO₁: Head teachers' leadership style has no statistically significant influence on pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Njoro Sub-county

Research Methods

The study employed descriptive survey research design. This design was adopted because it describes the state of affairs or the situation as it is, without manipulating the variables. According to Avoke (2005) survey research in education involves collection of information from members of a group of students, teachers or other persons associated with educational issues. The study sampled 63 schools, 63 head teachers and 252 teachers using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table at 95% confidence level. Stratified random sampling was used to sample distribution of schools in Njoro Sub- County with the five divisions in the sub-County forming the strata.

Table 1

Sample distribution of schools in various divisions in Njoro Sub- County

Division	Sample size	Percentage
Njoro central	13	17.10
Kihingo	12	15.78
Mauche	9	11.84
Mau Narok	16	21.05
Lare	13	17.10
Total	63	82.89

Source: Njoro Sub-County Education Office 2016

The data was tabulated in form of frequencies tables, and percentages. Linear regression was used to determine how well the independent variables were able to predict the outcomes of the KCPE performance using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 24.

Results and Discussion

Measurement of Pupils' Academic Performance

Pupils' academic performance was measured using KCPE mean scores. The mean scores for each school for the years 2012 to 2016 were obtained from the office of Sub-County Director of Education, Njoro Sub-county. The mean scores for the 5 years were averaged and used as a measure of the pupils' academic performance as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Pupils KCPE Mean Scores for the Years 2012 to 2016

Year	N	Mean	SD
KCPE mean grade 2012	73	229.36	29.22
KCPE mean grade 2013	75	224.76	27.66
KCPE mean grade 2014	75	230.16	27.33
KCPE mean grade 2015	75	227.58	24.43
KCPE mean grade 2016	75	233.50	28.15
Overall mean for years 2012 – 2016	75	227.85	23.51

Source: field data 2016

The results in Table 2 reveal that the means scores for the 5 years ranged from 224.76 (SD = 27.66) to 233.50 (SD = 28.15). The results also reveal that the overall mean for the 5 years was 227.23.51 (SD = 23.51). The academic performance of the pupils in the Sub-county was indicated to be below average.

Results on Head teachers Leadership style

Teachers' opinions on head teacher's leadership style were collected using the teachers' questionnaire. The study focused on three leadership styles, namely; democratic, autocratic and Laissez-faire. A set of 9 close-ended items constructed using a four (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree) points Likert type scale was used to measure leadership style. The style that attracted the highest number of positive (agreed) responses was considered the one preferred by the head teacher. The preferred leadership styles were summarized using frequencies and percentages as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Leadership Styles used by Head teachers

Leadership style	Frequency	Percentage n = 186
Democratic	128	68.8
Autocratic	44	23.7
Laissez Faire	6	3.2
Democratic and autocratic	8	4.3

Source: Field Data 2016

The results in Table 3 show that slightly over two thirds (68.8%) of the teachers indicated that their school heads used the democratic leadership style. This leadership style was demonstrated by the head teacher being friendly and flexible and one who involved teachers in decision making, one who shared information and one who encourages staff to express their feelings. This was the style used by Head teachers who gave pupils an opportunity to participate in school decision making and also provided the schools with vision and embraced consultation and teamwork. Less than a quarter of the respondents (23.7%) felt that their Head teachers used autocratic leadership style. This was style used by Head teachers who did not involve staff in decision making and used threats and intimidation. Only a very small proportion of the respondents (3.2%) indicated that Head teachers used laissez faire style of leadership. These were Head teachers who were mostly absent and were not concerned about

school progress and members of staff used their initiatives to get direction with no clear guidance from the Head teachers. In those school there were no clear rules and regulations for staff and teachers. Only 4.3% of the teachers felt that their Head teachers used a blend of democratic and autocratic styles.

Influence of the Head teachers' Leadership Style Pupils' Academic Performance

The influence of the Head teachers' leadership style on pupils' academic performance was determined through simple linear regression and the results presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Influence of Head teacher's Leadership Style on pupils academic performance Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardize		Standardize	T	Sig.
	d Coefficients		d Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.416	.305		4.646	.000
Head teacher Leadership Style	.625	.089	.728	7.035	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

$R=0.728$, $R^2 = 0.529$, $F (1,142) = 49.488$, $P< 0.05$

The results of the study indicated that the achieved R (Multiple linear regression coefficients) stood at 0.728 thus indicating that there was a high positive correlation between the head teacher's leadership style and academic performance. The study further found R^2 (Coefficient of determination) of 0.529 indicating that the variance of academic performance that can be attributed to head teacher's leadership style stood at 52.9% of the variance. This would indicate that 47.1% of the variance in the academic performance is as result of other factors that are not in this model. The predictive capacity of the model was examined using the F test in which the achieved results were $F (1,142) = 49.488$, $P< 0.05$ which implied that at 5% level of significance that the model was good fit for data. The regression coefficient of the study was thus examined. The results indicated that $\beta=0.625$, $t=7.035$, and $\text{sig}=0.000$ which implies that a unit increase in head teacher leadership style would lead to 0.625 increase in academic performance. The results were also found to be statistically significant at 5% level of significance since p value of 0.000 was below 0.05. The null hypothesis stating that "*Head teachers' leadership style has no statistically significant influence on pupils' academic performance in public primary schools in Njoro Sub-county*" was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis which stated that "*head teacher's leadership style has statistically significant influence on pupils' academic performance*" was upheld.

The results of this study were consistent with results of a study by Nyamboga et al (2014) which sought to establish effects of leadership styles on the performance of public secondary schools in national examinations in Tana River County, Kenya. Their study concluded that there is a significant relationship between Head teachers' leadership style and students' performance at Kenya Secondary of Education (KCSE). The findings also agree with Millette (1988) who indicated that the quality of leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school. Huka (2003), Muli (2005) and Wangui (2007) all confirmed that leadership style influenced student performance. They noted that autocratic Head teachers had higher mean scores in KCSE than their democratic counterparts. The results also agreed with a

study by Kimacia (2007) which concluded that Head teachers rated as being democratic had high mean performance index than autocratic Head teachers.

From the interviews conducted with the Head teachers, one head teacher said, "I lead through the democratic style because I want to get views and opinions of the teachers" another one said, "I lead through democratic style although there are situations which require no negotiations but call upon autocratic style especially policy matters". "Democratic is my style because I want my teachers to feel valued", another head teacher said.

One head teacher said, "It is sometimes difficult to state clearly which method one uses because most of the times I find myself giving the teachers freedom to choose what they intend to do especially on co-curricular activities. There are times that I find myself giving them instructions on what I actually want to be done with no room for negotiation and in most cases I find myself discussing and agreeing on the way to do things". This views were supported by another head teacher, "For there to be peace in the work station and for everyone to feel valued I generally use democratic style and a bit of autocratic when it comes to policy implementation issues".

On the issue of Head teachers leadership style the quality assurance and standard officer said, "I regularly visit these schools and I would wish to say that I do interact with Head teachers and teachers when I am in their schools and the style used is mostly democratic. A few Head teachers use autocratic and very few use laissez faire in rare occasions. He said that if heads were to use laissez faire style all through teachers would have too much freedom such that the head teacher will not have control over quality and might not know whatever is happening in the school". He went ahead and said, "The school is as good as the head teacher so he should be a role model to the rest of the staff through a leadership style which accommodates the views and opinions of his staff".

Each of the three leadership styles; autocratic, democratic and laissez- faire have their strengths and weaknesses as applied in schools management. In autocratic leadership, the overall effect on the work climate is likely to be negative and may not be effective in the long-term school management. The style does not allow flexibility and freedom for the staff make decision and have no room for creativity and innovation. Democratic style on the other hand gives power to the staff. The leader's role is to maintain control while allowing plenty of room for exchange and adaptation. It relies heavily on input from education team. Democratic leadership style boosts the morale of teachers by seeking feedback from colleagues ensures everyone takes ownership for decision making and success (Oyetunyi 2006). However, this style have its potential weaknesses by slowing down progress due to an increase in meetings and debates to have consensus.

Laissez faire style is more of transactional leadership where the employer needs the work done and employees do the work in exchange for money. In education there is more at stake for employees who quite often understand their job to be more than just a simple exchange of services for money but rather see their higher purpose. Money is therefore not a motivating factor. This style is easy and straight forward, the leader allows the employees to do as they like but it is less effective in the long term (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership is truly an amalgamation of the three. It takes from each of the three, its best qualities and then uses those, along with deep sense of shared purpose, to motivate subordinates. While the other forms of leadership focus on one single aspect or another, transformational leadership takes broad view of the issues surrounding leadership and then uses those driving force for meeting the overall goals of the organization. In school management, transformational style helps to tap the potentials of the workers and offer them the potential to perform at their best (Gyasi et al, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that head teachers' leadership style had statistically significant influence on pupils' academic performance. Therefore, good and quality leadership is necessary for any institution to achieve its goals and objectives and in particular good academic performance for the pupils. The study recommended an in-service training and capacity building for head teachers in public primary schools to enhance their leadership styles for effective management of schools in the attainment of their goals and objectives.

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