

The Preparedness of Secondary School Head Teachers as Leaders and Managers of Schools in Kenya

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Abstract

Management practices in Kenyan Secondary schools have come under scrutiny following the wave of student strikes that swept across the country in recent years. Over the past decade strikes in schools have been increasing phenomenally. Several reasons have been advanced by different stakeholders as the underlying root causes: overloaded curriculum; autocratic school administration; drug and substance abuse; poor living conditions in schools; excessive use of corporal punishment; lack of an effective school guidance and counseling services among others. The latest upsurge in violent strikes in public secondary schools in 2008 brought into sharp focus the role of head teachers in the management of schools in Kenya. The thrust of this study was to establish whether they are prepared to face challenges and problems that come with running these institutions. The fact that they are elevated to head schools without proper training in management practices is a cause for concern. This paper posits leadership and managerial ineptitude on the part of head teachers. The study specifically sought to identify the challenges and training needs of head teachers in secondary schools. It also explored the availability of head teacher training and its importance in managing schools. The data for this paper was collected through review of published and unpublished literature. The need to have management training for teachers' prior to promotion to the level of head teachers should be the focus.

Background of the study

According to an Afrol News report (23rd July 2008) more than 300 secondary schools went on strike in Kenya between the months of May and August 2008, resulting in the destruction of property worth millions of shillings. The report added that the students were protesting against poor living conditions and bad management.

This study proceeds from the observation (Eshiwani, 1993; Okumbe 1999; Mutai, 2003; inter alia) that in Kenya, there are no set criteria enumerating the skills a person should possess to qualify for appointment as a head teacher. This creates a managerial gap in public schools since without basic managerial training, the head teachers are less likely to be knowledgeable in elementary management practices and cannot readily grasp the provisions of the Education Act.

The Education Act (1968) defines a manager as any person or body of persons responsible for the management of a school. The regular upsurge of unrests in schools puts the capability of head teachers in this respect in serious doubt. Although the Act confers extensive powers on the Minister of Education over the management and regulation of education in Kenya, the day to day running of affairs in the school falls squarely on the shoulders of head teachers. Indeed, the Act presumes that head teachers are knowledgeable in educational management. The term management can be defined as the art of getting people together to accomplish desired goals through planning, organizing, sourcing, leading or directing, and controlling for the purpose of accomplishing a goal (Lewy, 1991). This paper intends to show that herein lays the main

problem in the management of public schools in Kenya and gives reference to secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education plays such roles as policymaking, resource mobilization, quality assurance, auditing how resources are used, field implementation, and capacity building. Head teachers who are also referred to as principals in Kenya are appointed under the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), and run the day-to-day administrative operations. The commission monitors the teachers and school heads through quality assurance officers who conduct regular inspections in schools and report to the ministry through the established reporting process and avenues. The TSC seems to have adopted a highly decentralized model where the field officers supervise head teachers in exercising their duties but adopts a 'hands off' approach when it comes to actual administrative style of individual heads. This means that such issues as discipline of staff and pupils are left entirely to the discretion of each head teacher.

In the Kenyan context, a number of researches have conducted research on head teachers' training needs and made various recommendations. For example, Okumbe (1999) recommended that for purposes of effectiveness of school teachers, school managers, and curriculum implementers, an effective in-service training should be provided to them. This recommendation was made with the understanding that the appointment of head teachers has generally been done on the basis of teachers' experience in the work place, at the expense of considering whether they have undergone training to prepare them for their new roles, before assuming office. Mutai (2003) underscored the need for effective school management and reported that promotion of teachers to a position of responsibility should be pegged on having undergone a pre-service training on his/her new roles. However, the appointment of head teachers in Kenya is based on years of service, rather than on having undergone training on their roles before taking up the post.

Ogembo (2005) observed that appointments of principals is done on the assumption that the pre-service professional training that they underwent to prepare them for teaching, coupled with the experience that they get as practicing teachers are enough to enable them discharge their roles effectively. It is assumed that when the newly appointed heads assume office they will learn on the job and that they will attend in-service training to equip them with emerging managerial challenges. However from the principals own experiences and in view of how they have been discharging their roles, it raises questions about their preparedness in this respect.

Eshiwani (1993) and Okumbe (1999) agreed that training improves workers' effectiveness in discharging their functions. It is therefore important that training needs for school heads are addressed immediately one is appointed. This would render them effective in discharging their managerial duties such as implementing educational policies.

Statement of the problem

In Kenya, management related-problems for head teachers (principals) of secondary schools have been both turbulent and rapid. However, there have been few investigations into the changing nature of the role of head teachers, which focus on the management and leadership of

secondary schools. Over the past decade, many secondary schools have suffered from strikes most of which place head teachers in the spot light (Mathiu, 2008).

The 1990s were worse. In 1991, male students in a mixed high school invaded the girls' dormitory and raped more than 70 girls. At least 19 female students lost their lives at a tender age of 15. In another incident in 1999, a group of male students locked up 4 prefects in their cubicles at night and doused them in petrol killing them instantly. The worst calamity was in 2001 when 68 students were burnt to death and scores injured after their dormitory was set on fire by two boys who petrol bombed the school. In 2006 in a mixed boarding school, 15 girls were raped in the middle of the night (Mathiu, 2008).

Several reasons have been advanced by different stakeholders as the underlying root causes: overloaded curriculum; autocratic school administration; drug and substance abuse; poor living conditions in schools; excessive use of corporal punishment; lack of an effective school guidance and counseling service; pressure for excellent academic performance; abdication of parental responsibility; incompetent board of governors; culture of impunity in the society; adolescence identity crisis and mass media campaigns. Strikes that occurred in 2008 were attributed to the post election violence that affected the Kenya that year.

The appointment of head teachers by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) is done based on experience of the teacher i.e. the more the numbers of years one has taught the higher the chance of promotion to head teacher level (Okumbe 1999). However, the newly appointed heads usually assume their roles in the office without having undergone formal training to prepare them for their new roles. Lack of training could contribute to incompetence in their roles. As pointed out in the previous section, training is a prerequisite for the effective performance of duties. In order to deal with problems such as school unrests, training of head teachers on leadership and management upon appointment needs consideration.

In his study, Ogembo (2005) observes that for one to be a head teacher, he/she must be a qualified teacher, and must have been in an administrative post already such as a deputy head teacher. Although this ensures that appointees have some management experience, there are no mechanisms for tracking or monitoring how those appointed as heads performed in their earlier roles. In any case, this paper argues that what are needed are proper managerial skills for prospective heads. This study therefore aimed at examining the studies conducted on training needs of secondary school head teachers with regard to their state of readiness on taking up their role. It also attempts to identify support which would facilitate the induction of newly appointed secondary school head teachers.

Objectives of the study

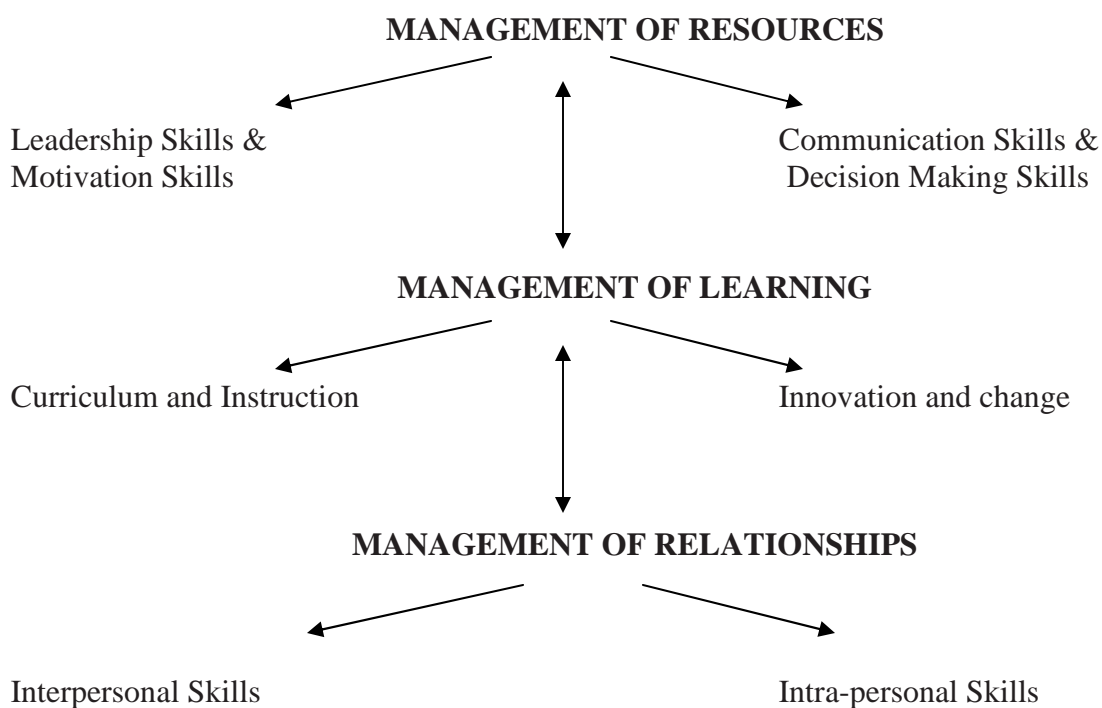
The study was designed to:

1. identify the challenges faced by heads teachers in running of schools,
2. examine the training needs of head teachers in secondary schools, and to
3. examine the leadership and management skills proposed in the literature to guide the head teachers in running schools.

Theoretical Model

Training of head teachers should emphasize school-wide staff development programs to improve the capacity of the whole school. Pushpanadham (2006) suggests that if the cost of training all staff is prohibitive, then a small group can be trained with the expectation that the head teachers would share their new knowledge and skills as master trainers with the rest of the teachers. He also emphasizes the importance of continuous staff development through the provision of regular in-service training with the aim of developing their professional capabilities. A sustained and comprehensive system of professional development through training can be created to train the teachers in pedagogical as well as managerial dimensions of the school. Pushpanadham (2006) proposes the following model for the professional training needs of educational leaders and managers.

Figure 1: A Model for Development of Educational Leaders



Research approach

This paper was conceived in an interpretative design following Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) who observed that the central endeavour in the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subject of human experience. Working in this paradigm, the author sought to explore the preparedness of head teachers in their role as leaders and managers of secondary schools using document analysis method of inquiry. A desk review of theses, books, bulletins, newspapers and

magazines as well as internet sources was conducted. The researcher found a substantial volume of literature relating to events widely different in scale across the world.

The data

The secondary data required for purposes of this study included those on the challenges encountered; the effects of leadership on students, helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in the set direction. It also focused on those studies that set specific leadership practices such as identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and creating high performance expectations.

Youngman (in The Wallace Foundation, 2004) observed that there have been few investigations into the changing nature of the role of head teachers focusing on their preparedness for management and leadership of secondary schools. When they considered themselves to be well prepared, they generally attributed this to experience alone not a combination of training and experience. The type of support, which the majority would prefer when taking up the post is mentoring by an experienced head teacher from a similar type of secondary school.

Leithwood and Jantzi, (2005) stated that perceived unique challenges related to the increasingly complex and diverse nature of the pupil population and behaviour in secondary schools calls for greater knowledge, understanding and awareness of relevant legislation. This includes understanding of the role, structure and function of service providers, demonstrating skills in people management including adolescents, and in curriculum planning and management.

Hammond (2007) revealed that all current school reform efforts aim to improve teaching and learning. However, there are huge differences in how it can be implemented. Some reforms, for example, attempt to improve all schools in a country. Other reforms attempt to influence the overall approach to teaching and learning within a school, but do so one school at a time. Still others, focus on innovative curricula (in science and mathematics, for example), typically addressing one part of a school's program and aim for widespread implementation, while innovative approaches to instruction, such as cooperative learning, hope to change teachers' practices one teacher at a time.

Hammond (2007) further affirmed that as different as these approaches to school reform are, they all depend on the motivations and capacities of local school leadership. It is also argued that successful school reforms have to have the support of school leaders. The author proposed the following:

- a) Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. While evidence about leadership effects on student learning can be confusing to interpret, much of the existing research actually underestimates its effects.
- b) Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most especially concerning leaders in formal administrative roles, the greater the challenge, the greater the impact of their actions on learning.

The direct and indirect effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects. Hallinger's model has been the most researched; it consists of three sets of leadership dimensions:

- a) Defining the School's Mission
- b) Managing the Instructional Program
- c) Promoting a Positive Learning Climate

These objectives are essential and needed in helping the organization set clear direction and influence its members accordingly.

Successful leaders utilise knowledge and skills demonstrated by colleagues to effect change. Leithwood and Jantzi (2004) found that principals typically count on key teachers for such leadership, along with their local administrative colleagues.

According to a research commissioned by the Wallace Foundation (2004) entitled, *How leadership influences student learning*, the authors argued that leadership is widely regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools promote the learning of their students. It is important therefore to learn which forms of leadership are most likely to foster student learning and how such successful forms of leadership manifest. Leithwood and Jantzi (2004) present a framework that assumes variation in workplace performance is a function of the capacities, motivations and commitments of the personnel in a given institution, the characteristics of the settings in which they work and the external environment. According to this framework, leaders play critical roles in identifying and supporting learning, structuring the social settings and mediating the external demands.

In the context of this paper, school leadership is the determining factor for success in the school setting. The head teacher has to consider various factors to ensure that he or she succeeds. This requires advanced managerial skills that can only be acquired through training.

Lessons can be drawn from Uganda where a Report on the Education and Sports Sector (2007) proposed wide-ranging reforms to steer development in the school system. The report presents a case for the repeal of the Uganda Education Act -1970 and covers issues ranging from establishment and management of schools, to contemporary developments in the system, procedures in the setting up of School Management Committees and Board of Governors, to the discipline of teachers and students in both private and public schools.

Several authors have proposed certain practices that are assumed to form the basis of successful leadership. They may not be a cure for leaders aiming to significantly improve student learning in their schools but they are necessary for progress. Hammond (2007) suggested that setting directions, developing people and redesigning the institution are the three sets of practices that constitute the basics of successful leadership practices. However, Hammond (2007) added that extrinsic financial incentives for achieving school performance targets, under certain conditions, can interfere in the teachers' commitments to the wellbeing of their students.

Effective School Leadership

For purposes of this study, special attention is devoted to the leadership of head teachers. Leithwood and Jantzi (2004) argued that school leaders need to: create and sustain a competitive school, empower others to make significant decisions, provide instructional guidance, and develop and implement strategic school improvement plans. Leithwood and Jantzi's argument highlights the place for the organizational context which is characterized by the geographical location, size of the school and the level of schooling (whether primary or secondary). All these determine what constitutes effective leadership. Successful leaders therefore need to have mastered what could be termed as the basics of school management and also be able to respond to the unique circumstances they may occasionally find themselves in. It is evident that individual leaders normally behave differently depending on the circumstances they are facing and who the colleagues are. Therefore we cannot talk of one successful leadership style.

Findings

Normally head teachers are expected to oversee the organization of departments and the allocation of resources within the units in the school, facilitate professional development and in-service training of teachers, as well as monitor how teaching and assessment of students is conducted and effectively manage the outcomes. Studies on the training needs of school managers in Kenya (Okumbe, 1999; Kipnusu, 2001; Ogembo, 2005) found that most take up management positions without formal training in leadership. Lack of confidence in their work especially in handling personnel in their schools are some of the common challenges experienced by head teachers. The above named researchers have pointed out that generally head teachers have shortcomings in the following areas: general administrative duties; planning and financial management, keeping of school records, personnel management and development; curriculum implementation and evaluation; and lastly, in areas pertaining to teamwork in the school. These challenges clearly indicate that on appointment, head teachers need formal training to ensure effective administration of secondary schools in Kenya.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study revealed that in practice, there are discrepancies between the actual and the desired leadership. The following recommendations were therefore made:

1. Teacher training institutions should introduce specialized and comprehensive training programmes on administrative skills, financial management and human resource management
2. The Teachers Service Commission in liaison with the Ministry of Education through the Kenya Institute of Staff Training should regularly organize refresher courses for head teachers of secondary schools to enable them discharge their functions effectively, this would ensure effective leadership and management at the school level.
3. Create monitoring and evaluation tools for head teachers with the aim of documenting good management practices.
4. Create school management positions in order to attract professional managers as heads.
5. Facilitate ways in which head teachers can create and sustain professional networks.

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