

# Assessment of the Effects of Public Primary School Head teachers' Leadership Skills on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination Results: A Survey of Kakamega County

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## Abstract

*This paper assessed the effect of public primary school head teachers' leadership skills on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination results of pupils in public primary schools in Kenya. The study adopted mixed methods with a case study design guided by Human Relations Theory in addressing the question of what is and what should be in preparing head teachers for leadership roles in public primary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who had served in their current stations for four years and above. Data was collected through questionnaires, document analysis and Focus Group Discussions. The findings indicate that head teachers are not trained before deployment, in-service programs are available but not useful from respondents' perception, head teachers face many challenges that include: harsh learning environment, minimal parental participation in school activities, inadequate resources, high rates of teacher-pupil absenteeism and high poverty levels. We concluded that head teachers are responsible for the learning outcomes of pupils, they acquire resources and provide conducive learning environment. We recommend training for aspiring head teachers before appointment, provision of adequate learning resources by the Government, motivation of parents and other stakeholders by head teachers and a professional body should handle disciplinary issues affecting teachers.*

**Key words:** Head teacher, Public primary school, Leadership skills, Examinations results

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## Introduction

Several studies worldwide acknowledge that improved learning outcomes in schools is not by chance but rather out of preparations of head teachers before appointments are made (Bush, 2010, Orr & Barber, 2007). In England and United States of America leadership preparation is recognised as an important element in school administration and management (Bush & Jackson, 2011). In countries like Netherlands, Australia and Norway, appointment to headship is not based on pre-service preparation but once appointed. Skills provided through such training are linked to improved school performance (Brundrett & Craford, 2012).

The need for training before appointment is necessary. This is because responsibilities of head teachers are becoming complex and a typical day may involve making many decisions, some trivial and others life threatening (Davies & Burnham, 2003). Training should therefore, be central in equipping them with relevant skills and attitudes to manage schools.

Bush (2010) pointed out that head teachers are central in laying and planning strategies for school improvement. They must have the ability to support staff members, plan and acquire learning resources and motivate parents and guardians to own the school through decision making. Once parents and guardians get involved in school activities, they will be willing to monitor academic progress of their children and instil discipline. Many countries in the developing world, including Kenya, are yet to embrace the importance of preparing aspiring teachers for headship roles in schools.

The Koech Commission (1999) pointed out that quality outcomes in education is a function of quality training of teachers, commitment, dedication and conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. Headteachers have responsibilities to influence

teaching staff to work as a team and achieve common goals. The Commission observed that:

*...there is enormous political influence in appointing head teacher and education officers and in most cases experience, academic and professional qualifications for the job do not count. Yet, heads of institutions are central to successful management of educational institutions and implementation of the total curriculum.*

The Commission also noted that such appointments are made from serving teachers, most of whom have no prior institutional training. Such lack of training impacts negatively on effective management of educational institutions and maintenance of quality and high standards of education and training (Koech Commissions, 1999).

To date, recommendations by the Koech Commission (1999) that heads of institutions be appointed based on proven institutional training, competence, appropriate training and relevant experience have not been adhered to. There is no institution in Kenya for training of aspiring heads in instructional management. Politicians still have considerable influence in appointments of heads of institutions making them untouchables. Such heads enjoy political protection and learners miss out on quality education as a result of chronic absenteeism, poor management and staff laxity (Mwangi, 2014). The introduction of free education in Kenya opened doors for many pupils from humble backgrounds to access education. This has led to increased enrolments (Khamisi, 2011) in public schools without increased facilities.

## **Statement of the problem**

The annual release of Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination results is marked by lots of celebrations by candidates and schools that perform well. While gloom and

disappointment for those who do not score expected 'good' grades becomes evident. Since 2011, cases of suicides have been reported by the media of pupils who do not pass with 'flying colours' and head teachers whose schools do not post 'good' grades. One pupil who committed suicide left a note for her mother expressing her disappointment of attaining 303 out of 500 marks. One head teacher was beaten to death by irate parents and others locked out of their offices by parents demanding explanations for 'miserable' performance by their children (Nzuma, 2011). In some schools learning was disrupted for many days as heads were ejected out by demonstrating parents demanding for their immediate transfers (Onyango, 2012, Waweru, 2014). This study investigated whether leadership skills by head teachers have impact on KCPE results.

## **Research approach**

**Objectives of the study:** The study aimed at establishing:

- i. How head teachers are prepared for leadership roles before deployment in public primary schools
- ii. Whether leadership skills of the head teacher influence KCPE examination results.

The study utilized mixed methods with a case study design and guided by Human Relations Theory (Koontz & Wehrich, 1998) to address the question of 'what is' and 'what should be', in preparing head teachers for leadership roles in public primary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who had served in their current stations for over four years. We believe that this period of time, if one served in one station would impact on pupils' performance in KCPE. Data was collected through the

questionnaire, document analysis and Focused Group Discussions and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Study Area:** The study was carried out in Kakamega North Sub-County from 2011 to 2014. The sub-county has a total of twelve (12) public primary schools and has recorded dismal performance in KCPE examinations, retaining the last position in ranking for three consecutive years, 2012, 2013 and 2014 (County Report ,2013 &Inyanji,2014).

### KCPE KAKAMEGA SUB-COUNTY RANKINGS – 2012-2013

POSITION		SUB-COUNTY	2012	2013	DEVIATION
2012	2013				
1	1	Mumias	282.08	284.64	+2.60
2	2	Kakamega South	267.98	275.56	+7.58
3	3	Likuyani	275.60	273.12	-2.48
4	7	Khwisero	261.98	261.38	-0.60
5	9	Butere	259.70	256.18	-3.52
6	8	Navakholo	258.18	256.18	-1.66
7	6	Matungu	257.33	262.11	+4.58
8	11	Matete	257.73	250.02	-7.71
9	4	Kakamega Central	269.42	269.95	+0.53
10	10	Lugari	255.03	252.28	-2.75
11	5	Kakamega East	256.79	262.77	+5.98
12	12	Kakamega North	245.30	248.74	+3.44

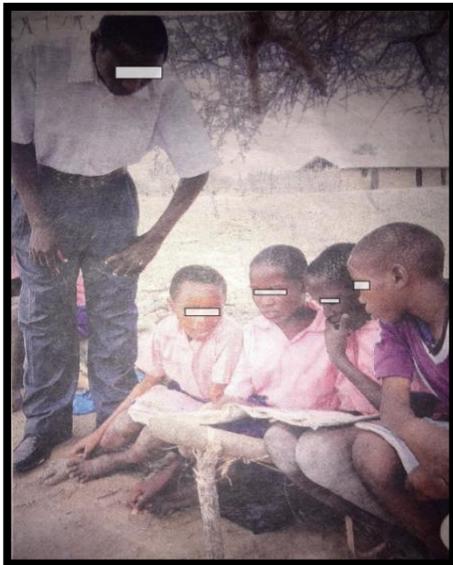
**Source: Kakamega County Report, 2014**

## Findings and Discussions

**Training of head teachers:** Asked whether they underwent any training before appointment, 68.97% of the respondents reported that they did not, while 31.03% said that they had prior training before deployment. However, they were unable to name institutions where they were trained. This was an indication that they were not truthful in their response on this item. During their period of service, 48% indicated they had attended in-service training offered by KEMI, KEPSHA, KNUT and Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards. However, not all head teachers reported that the training was useful. A number indicated that the in-service trainings were too expensive and therefore, out of reach for poor schools. The trainings were also irregular, and most of the facilitators appeared incompetent to handle the courses from the head- teachers' perspective. From these responses, it was clear that training before appointment was not available and in-service training, although available, appeared too expensive for a number of schools, and head teachers.

**Facilities:** Majority of the head teachers (96%) said that all facilities in school ranging from classrooms, desks, toilets, library, offices, and exercise and text books were inadequate. These facilities were in pathetic conditions (pictures, 1, 2, 3, 4) and overstretched due to high pupil population. In a number of schools, lower classes learn in the open. It was common practise to ask pupils to go home early rather than being rained on in classrooms. Few schools had libraries, which were also used as stores for farm implements, or offices for members of staff, defeating the purpose of having such facilities. The general state of facilities provided difficult environment for teaching and

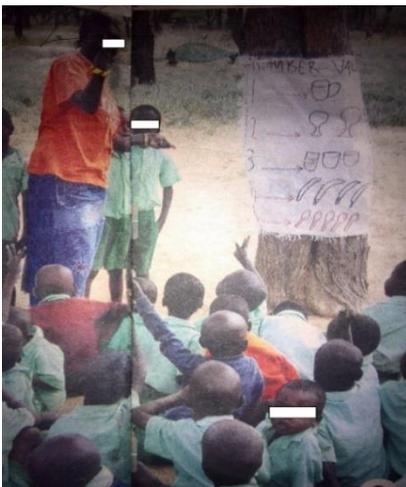
learning. The head teacher should be able to provide leadership by mobilizing all stakeholders to provide conducive learning environment for pupils.



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Source: *Standard paper, 2013: State of facilities in a public school*

**Teaching and staffing:** The findings indicated that the average teacher pupil ratio has increased due to free primary education policy. Asked how they sorted out the issue of teacher shortage, majority of the head teachers confirmed that school committees employed untrained teachers. For such teachers, wages paid were low and irregular. On average the pay was Ksh: 1000 per month. These teachers commitment to duty was equally low as they were not motivated.

Low self esteem among regular staff was quoted as one of the major factors that affect KCPE results. A high number of staff (62.11%) including head teachers had acquired bachelor's degree certificates in education, and expected to be redeployed to secondary schools. The option was not a government policy; but surprisingly it was a source of frustration for teachers in this study as captured by one of the head teachers saying:

*...they (teachers) sacrificed their meagre resources and enrolled for degree courses thinking that once they acquired degree certificates, they would be redeployed to secondary schools. Their dreams were shattered upon realisation that they would remain in primary schools. It has 'killed' their spirit and regret that they invested their money in further education (respondent, 2013).*

A demoralised staff cannot be relied upon to play a significant role in contributing to quality learning outcomes.

**Teachers and pupils absenteeism:** The study showed that teachers and pupils' absenteeism stood at 13% and 17% respectively and affected syllabus coverage negatively. Absenteeism among pupils was highly attributed participation in funerals, and they could hardly concentrate in class. Truancy, poverty, family conflicts, child labour,

drug abuse, sickness, pregnancies, and other retrogressive cultural activities were named as causes of absenteeism. A number of head teachers alleged that attempt to discipline pupils attracts family wrath against teachers. Absenteeism among teachers was reportedly caused by personal engagements, laziness, and poor attitude towards their work and protection from local politicians.

This absenteeism was common in teachers of higher grades and those born in the school neighborhood. In five of the schools, a high number of teachers come from one extended family, making disciplining them difficult, as they gang against heads of schools.

Head teachers (60%) indicated that they monitored attendance of lessons by staff, syllabus coverage and tests administered, marking and revision. Sixty percent of head teachers through class prefects. This structure of monitoring teaching appeared weak and open to abuse by uncooperative teachers who can easily intimidate class prefects. Such roles should be delegated to senior staff members if it has to achieve desired purpose. One of the head teachers, who attempted to address laxity by teachers summarised her experience by saying:

*I warned them verbally to stop coming to school late when this did not work, I wrote warning letters and copied to local education office. After two days, one of the teachers brought the same letters from education office and told me that he 'knows' people in big offices. I felt helpless, community members confronted me on my way home. They reminded me that the school has its owners and if am unhappy i should go away and leave their sons and daughters alone .....*  
(Respondent, 2013)

This experience was an indication of external influence on staff discipline, and inability of heads to address it due to fear of confrontation with locals and lack of support from the

local education office. Problems of absenteeism and laxity of staff could be addressed by head teachers acting as role models and exercising human relations skills by teaching, coming and leaving school on time, and posting quality results in his/her subject.

**Quality Assurance:** Quality Assurance Officers are mandated to inspect schools, establish, maintain and improve quality and standards of teaching-learning processes. Asked how often these officers visit their schools, the respondents (68.29%) agreed they rarely visit. It was noted that the presence of these officers during inspection, is not appreciated as some teachers run away, hide, others regard them as bullies and unprofessional as they request for money for lunch and transport at the end of the exercise. This indicated laxity on the part of education office in facilitating these officers and evaluating field work. Majority of the participants (68.97%) said that the officers never come back. Staff perception of inspection by Quality Assurance Officers and lack of follow up indicates low understanding of teaching-learning processes in schools by local education office. Head teachers should be able influence staff to work for common goals, even in the absence of regular external inspection.

**Parents Involvement in School Academic Activities:** Asked how often parents were involved in school activities, 44.83% said parents rarely get interested in school events. However, informed parents are sensitive to time wasted in activities such as funeral dances at night, absenteeism and truancy among others. Parents are central in instilling

discipline in their children and guiding them on academic paths. Involvement in school activities is a chance for them to understand academic capabilities of their children; this would curb annual demonstrations against results. Head teachers provide informed leadership; remind stakeholders of what is important, and mobilise them to achieve common good.

**Syllabus Coverage:** Many of the head teachers (70.5%) confirmed that syllabus coverage is delayed due to many challenges facing their schools, including inadequate material, human and financial resources. Poverty levels are high in the locality and when pupils are asked to go home to collect required money for various activities, a number of them don't report back on time because parents are unable to raise funds. Due to time wasted, syllabus coverage is poor and teachers literally 'teach examinations', with little concerns about intellectual, emotional, psychomotor development of pupils. Unfortunately most head teachers do not have lessons to teach. This is an indication that majority of them do not understand classroom behaviour of pupils in their schools; therefore, they appear as 'strangers' in relation to teaching-learning process. Under these circumstances they cannot be productive in contributing towards improved teaching in their own schools.

## Conclusions

**Facilities:** In this study, human, financial and infrastructural facilities were inadequate and also overstretched and in pathetic conditions. No meaningful learning can take place in the absence of adequate facilities. Heads have a responsibility to plan the best way to use what they have and how to source for more facilities.

**Absenteeism:** Absenteeism from school by both teachers and pupils was common and affected the learning process. Heads should curb this through human relations skills and by being firm and fair and lead by example. Head teachers do not regularly monitor attendance of lessons by teachers. The role was delegated to class prefects instead of senior teachers. Heads of schools need to have lessons to understand the academic abilities of pupils. They should endeavour to promote team work among staff to improve learning outcomes.

**Quality Assurance:** Inspection from Quality Assurance Officers was irregular or none at all with no follow ups on recommendations made. The exercise was not done professionally; local education officers had no mechanisms in place to evaluate field work of these officers. This exercise should be taken seriously by national, local officers and head teachers. The weak monitoring and evaluation of teaching – learning in schools indicated that problems would not be identified on time and addressed to improve learning standards in schools.

**Parents Involvement in School Academic Activities:** Parental involvement in academic progress of their children and school activities play a very critical role in improving learning outcome. Yet it was a weak area in this study. Schools that collaborate

with families to support learning help learners to succeed not only in school but also in life. Head teachers should motivate parents to get interested in school programs to help instil discipline and encourage learning.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Ministry of Education should consider training potential head teachers for leadership roles before appointment. Headteachers' leadership skills impact on performance of pupils in KCPE. They should therefore be held accountable to parents and the Government on the learning outcomes of pupils.
2. All parents should be encouraged to get involved in school activities and academic progress of their children, their strength and weaknesses
3. Quality Assurance Officers at local level should be professional in performing their duties; education offices should monitor and evaluate their field work, and be accountable to the national office.
4. Informed leadership by head teachers can reduce to a larger extent absenteeism in schools. This should be supported and reinforced by regular inspection and by the teachers' professional body.

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