Impact Of Principals' Communication Skills On Students' Academic Performance In Kenya

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Abstract: Ability to communicate is a characteristic of effective leadership. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of Principals' communication skills on students academic performance. The study adopted a mixed methods approach and a descriptive survey design. Using purposive and simple random sampling techniques, a sample size of 44 principals, 369 class teachers and 369 class prefects was selected to participate in this study, giving a sample size of 782 respondents Data was collected by administering a likert scale questionnaire and an interview schedule. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. Qualitative data was analyzed by describing emerging content from the respondents in relation to the study objectives. The study established that communication skills influence teaching and learning. From the results it is concluded that academic performance is improved if school communication was enhanced. The following recommendation was made: ICT should be totally integrated in the schools communication and instruction.

Keywords: Principal, Communication skills, Academic performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Foster's (1985) discussion of leadership stresses the importance of communication. He states that leadership is conditioned on language (in Mazzavella and Grundy, 1989, P. 18). Mazzavella and Grundy (1989) noted that "effective school leaders in particular, are good at communication'' and have the aptitude and skills " they need to interact well with others, they know how to communicate'' (P. 18). Principals' assume a proactive role in supporting teachers' instructional efforts. They communicate directly and frequently with teachers about instruction and student needs. They make a conscious effort to interact in a positive manner with every teacher on a daily basis (Reitzug, 1989, p.54). Effective principals consistently communicate that academic gains are a priority (Andrews et al., 1986).

Researchers describe the ability to communicate as a characteristic of effective leadership (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Niece, 1989). Blumberg and Greenfield in their in-depth study of eight outstanding principals noted that, among the five characteristics they had in common, one was extremely well developed expressive abilities. The school administrators use communication as the basis for developing sound relationships with staff through behavior that is consistent, objective and fair. Sergiovanni (1984) describes communication of vision as "purposing" – process of emphasizing selective attention and modeling important goals and behavior in such a manner that signals of what is valued in the school.

Teachers perceive that communication with principals who are strong instructional leaders results in improved instructional practice in their classrooms, help them to understand that the relationship between instructional practices and student achievement provides a basis for clearly understanding evaluative criteria and establishes a clear sense of the direction of the school (Andrews & Soder, 1987). In management practice, effective communication is a basic perquisite for attainment of organizational goals (Okumbe, 1998). Okumbe further says communication is important educational management because:

✓ It helps to control the behavior of students, teachers and support staff as it is used to induct school population into various aspects of their jobs and organizational regulations. Students are informed of their expected behavior.

✓ It motivates teachers and students as they are informed about what is to be done, how well they are performing their tasks and how to improve on the performance through feedback.

✓ It provides a release for the emotional expression of feelings and for fulfillment of social needs. Teachers and students show satisfaction or feelings of frustration through communication.

✓ It facilitates information making as communication provides information which they require for making appropriate decisions (pp, 128-129).

In organizations, communication is generally dealt with in terms of the following:

✓ The content of communication (factual information, discussion points, formal notices etc).

✓ The form of communication (memos, reports, bulletins etc).

✓ The media of communication (face-to-face, written, reports/memos emails, fax, telephone, audio-visual etc).

✓ The skills of communication (report writing, chairing meetings, interviewing, telephone selling etc).

✓ The organization of communication (formal channels of communication, committee structure, authority levels, communication procedures, disciplinary issues etc) (Cole, 2004, p 220)

Interpersonal communication refers to communication which is primarily between two individuals. Through interpersonal communication, employees at all levels of an organization interact with others, secure desired ends, request or extend support and make use of, and reinforce the formal design of the organization (Robbins, 1989).

In organizational communication; there are three general directions in which a message can flow (Okumbe, 1998). These are:

✓ Downward – It is a superior –subordinate (top –bottom) communication. It is used by the principal to influence the activities of teachers and students who are at the lower hierarchical levels.

✓ Upward (Bottom –up) communication – It is feedback from teachers, students and other workers about their feelings and performance.

✓ Horizontal (lateral) communication – Takes place among members of work groups at the same level. It used to co-ordinate activities or project between departments. It is also referred to as interactive communication because it is about people and their behavior and people find it easier and comforting to communicate with the peers (pp. 134-137).

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a concurrent mixed methods approach and its research design was descriptive survey. Orodho (2003) and Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) describe descriptive survey as

a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. A survey, according to Kodhari (2003), is a method of securing information concerning an existing phenomenon from all or a selected number of respondents of the concerned universe. From the sample results the researcher generalizes or makes claims about the population (Cresswell, 2003). The study was descriptive because it looked at effect of principals' communication skills on students academic performance that already existed. Class teachers and class prefects of Form I-IV each responded to a questionnaire and the principals were interviewed to get their views on the role of curriculum practices on teaching and learning. However, Kodhari (2003) says the main weakness of descriptive survey is that it may give low response rates especially in mailed questionnaire

The target population was 175 principals, 1433 class teachers and 2865 class prefects of the 175 sub-county secondary schools. The sample size selected for this research from the study population was 782. Using purposive and simple random sampling, a sample of 44 principals, 369 class prefects and 369 class teachers was chosen to participate in the study as respondents.

This study used questionnaires and interview schedules to elicit responses from the study subjects. The questionnaire titled class teachers and class prefects was used to gather data for this study. Interviews were scheduled for the principal to get qualitative data. Gay (1992) maintains that questionnaires give respondents freedom to express their views and their opinions and also make suggestions. According to Nzubuga (2000), qualitative data gives the researcher much information and helps them identify significant factors to measure.

The researcher conducted a pilot study in the neighbouring county using 2 schools to establish reliability of research instruments through the test re-test method. To validate the research instruments the researcher used the technique of content validity which showed whether the test items represented the content that the test intended to measure (Borg and Gall, 1989). Content validity ensured that the instruments covered all the areas to be examined. Two supervisors from the department of curriculum, instruction and Educational Media, and colleagues, Moi University scrutinized the instruments and made necessary adjustments so that the instruments were adequate and able to elicit adequate data. Validity was also further ascertained through the results of the pilot study.

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse data. Results from quantitative data were presented by use of percentages mean rates and standard deviations, while qualitative data were recorded, grouped in themes and findings reported. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v. 20) for easy interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective of this study was to establish the impact of principals' communication on teaching and learning. To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked to react to several statements pertaining to communication. Their results were summarized as follows in table1. The findings in table 1

indicate that 22.8% of the class teachers and 21.4% of the class prefects rejected the statement that school vision is clearly communicated. 1.9% of the class teachers and 12.5% of the class prefects were undecided. 75.4% of the class teachers and 66.1% of the class prefects supported the statement. The results indicate that majority of the schools have a clear vision. Lezotte (1991) proposed that in effective schools "there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability" (p.6). Studies conducted in Kenya (KEMACA, 2008; Ngware, Wamukuru and Odebero, 2006) have shown that schools perform poorly in setting missions. The study by Kenya Education Management Capacity Assessment (KEMACA, 2008) established that 27% of Kenyan schools did not engage in strategic planning at all. In addition, of those who claimed they did, only 49% were able to produce the strategic plans. KEMACA (2008) concludes that mission and vision statements for Kenyan schools tend to be rather general and not sufficiently focused on outputs and outcomes. Studies by Ngware et al. (2006) also reveal that most schools did not have strategic plans. The researchers noted that even schools with strategic plans are weak in systematic follow-up to ascertain the implementation of the plans. In addition, there seemed to be no deliberate attempts to do a formal internal evaluation with a view to ascertain the extent to which quantitative and qualitative targets have been met.

Therefore, if majority of the sample schools have clear school vision and mission, and yet performance in KCSE is generally below average, it is possible that there is weak systematic follow-up to ascertain the implementation of the set schools plans and their plans could be rather general and not sufficiently focused on specific targets.

Regarding the statement that instructional goals are communicated to us during meetings, 35.8% of the class teachers and 31.7% of the class prefects rejected it. 3.3% of the class teachers and 8.9% of the class prefects were undecided. 61% of the class teachers and 59.3% of the class prefects supported the statement. The findings therefore indicate that communication of instructional goals is done during meetings. Too et al. (2012) say that school heads give their institutions images of their potentialities through drive, support and skills to mould the mission, vision and motto statements to an appropriate reality. From the qualitative data collected, interviewed principals indicated that they held frequent staff meetings to discuss teaching and learning and school performance in examinations. Instructional goals are posted throughout our school. This statement was rejected by 30.7% of the class teachers and 30.1% of the class prefects. 2.4% of the class teachers and 11.7% of the class prefects were undecided. 67% of the class teachers and 58.3% of the class prefects supported the statement.

These findings indicate that teachers and students are aware of the school mission and vision statements and core values so that they can be internalized.

Principals interviewed during the qualitative study said that they communicate goals through class meetings, assemblies, notices, departmental meetings, staff meetings and staff briefs and individual meetings such as follow-up conferences to classroom observations.

Instructional goals are communicated to us in meetings after seeing us teach in class. From the findings, 31.8% of the class teachers rejected the statement. 2.7% were undecided, 65.6% of the class teachers supported the statement. These results show that majority of the schools hold post observation conferences. This aspect falls under clinical supervision of the theory used in this study which is an intensive process designed to improve instruction by confirming with a teacher on a lesson planning, observing the lesson, analyzing the observational data and giving the teacher feedback about the observation. Lineburg (2010) says that principals communicate school goals through faculty meetings and departmental chair meetings and individual meetings such as follow-up conferences to classroom observations. Sheppard (1996) found that communication of school goals, framing school goals, and promoting professional development together accounted for 57% of the variance in classroom innovativeness.

Statement	Respondents	SD F	SD %	D F	D %	UD F	UD %	A F	A %	SA F	SA %	TOTAL F	TOTAL %	MEAN RATE
School vision is clearly communicated.	C.TRS	17	4.6	67	18.2	7	1.9	150	40.7	128	34.7	369	100	3.83
	C.PRE	47	12.7	32	8.7	46	12.5	141	38.2	103	7.9	369	100	3.60
Instructional goals are communicated to us during meetings,	C.TRS	42	11.4	90	24.4	12	3.3	163	44.2	62	16.8	369	100	3.31
	C.PRE	53	14.4	64	17.3	33	8.9	124	33.6	95	25.7	369	100	3.40
Instructional goals are posted throughout our school	C.TRS	29	7.9	84	22.8	9	2.4	146	39.6	101	27.4	369	100	3.60
	C.PRE	42	11.4	69	18.7	43	1.7	145	39.3	70	19	369	100	3.40
Instructional goals are communicated to us in meetings after seeing us teach in class	C.TRS	36	9.8	81	22.0	10	2.7	174	47.2	68	18.4	369	100	3.43

The response categories were: 1=strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4 = Agree and 5=strongly Agree.
Table 1: Analysis of the views of respondents on communication

IV. MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION SCORES FOR COMMUNICATION

The results in table 2 indicate that the means for the influence variables were in the undecided to agree range, (between 3.40 and 3.83). The total mean and standard deviation for communication for the class teachers and class prefects is (mean=3.54, SD=1.279) and (mean=3.47, SD=1.336) respectively giving an average mean of 3.51. It could be concluded from the results that the sampled class teachers and class prefects perceive communication to be above average. Based on these findings, class teachers ranked communication as; School vision is clearly communicated (mean=3.83, SD=1.215),

Communication	Class Teachers			Class Prefects		
	Rank	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Mean	Std. Dev.
School vision is clearly communicated.	1	3.83	1.215	1	3.60	1.318
Instructional goals are communicated to us	4	3.31	1.311	2	3.40	1.400

during meetings,						
Instructional goals are posted throughout the school	2	3.60	1.312	2	3.40	1.291
My principal communicates instructional goals to us in meetings after seeing us teach in class	3	3.43	1.279	-	-	-
Total		3.54	1.279		3.47	1.336

Table 2: Mean and standard Deviation scores for principals' communication skills

Instructional goals are posted throughout our school (mean=3.60, SD=1.312), Instructional goals are communicated to us in meetings after seeing us teach in class (mean=3.43, SD=1.279) Instructional goals are communicated to us in meetings after seeing us teach in class (mean=3.31, SD=1.311).

The results show that the communication that was mostly being carried out in the sample schools were; communicating a clear vision for the school with a mean rate of 3.83 and posting instructional goals throughout the school with a mean rate of 3.60. The communication with the lowest mean rate of 3.31 was on communicating instructional goals during meetings. The two variables with the highest influence are closely related. Having clear goals for the school, and posting instructional goals throughout the school, both have the same objective of making teachers and students know what the school stands for in terms of school vision, mission, motto and core values which in turn create a centre of focus. Lezotte (1991) proposed that in effective schools "there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability" (p.6). As a communicator, the principal articulates a vision of the school that leads everyone in the same direction. His daily behavior communicates that he has a firm understanding of the purpose of schooling and translate that meaning into programs and activities within the school (Wilma and Andrew, 1996).

The results of the sampled class prefects indicated that the rank of communication as follows: School vision is clearly communicated. (Mean=3.60, SD=1.318) Instructional goals are communicated to us during meetings, (mean=3.40, SD=1.400), Instructional goals are posted throughout the school (mean=3.40, SD=1.291

The findings in table 2 indicate that the means for influence variables were in the undecided to agree range (between 3.40-3.60). The results also show that communication having the highest influence according to the class prefects was my School vision is clearly communicated with a mean of 3.60. This perception of students indicate that majority of the schools have articulated clear vision statements. These results contradict the findings of KEMACA (2008) which concluded that mission and vision statements for Kenyan schools tend to be rather general and not sufficiently focused on outputs and outcomes. Ngware et al. (2006) also reveal that most schools did not have strategic plans. School heads according to Too, Keter and Kosgei (2012) give their institutions images of their potentialities through drive, support and skills to mould the mission, vision and motto statements to an appropriate reality.

On communication's impact on teaching and learning, principals gave the following responses:
QUESTION 12: TELL ME ABOUT GOALS THAT ARE UNIQUE TO YOUR SCHOOL?

All the sample schools had unique goals, clear mission and vision statements, but all focused on academic excellence. The goals, mission and vision were initiated by teachers, parents, board of management and students. The goals, missions and visions affected teachers' classroom activities in the following ways: created commitment and improved school attendance, made teachers to initiate and participate in various educational programs such as remedial teaching purchase of examination materials, group discussions and internal and external symposium and science congress, goals, missions and visions form the focus of teaching and learning, made teachers to work as team, led to proper preparation for teaching and teaching aids, made teachers request for more and more instructional materials, created a sense of ownership and positive attitude towards the school, students and subject and made teachers to set high targets and work towards achieving them. Alderman (2008) contends that setting performance goals has a positive impact on teacher motivation and performance. Goals, mission and vision therefore provide a tool for teachers to evaluate where their students are and where they want them to go in terms of academic achievements.

The sampled principals also said that they communicated instructional goals using class meetings, principals' open forum, education days, staff meetings and staff briefs, school news letter and magazine, departmental meetings, parade, notice boards, annual general meeting and use of banners-talking school.

These findings concur with the results in quantitative study where majority (75.4%) of the class teachers and 66.1% of class prefects said principals communicated a clear vision for the school. Lineburg (2010) says that goal setting influence instructional practices used by teachers.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The findings were that the perception of the class teachers and class prefects on the schools' communication was a mean of 3.54 and 3.47 respectively giving an average of 3.51, meaning that the sample of class teachers and class prefects perceived the schools' communication to be above average. According to the class teachers and class prefects, the communication roles schools were carrying out most were: communicating a clear vision for the school, posting instructional goals throughout the school and communicating instructional goals during meetings.

The findings therefore indicate that communication skills are key in the teaching and learning.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

ICT to be totally integrated in the schools' communication and teaching and learning.

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