Principals’ Transformative Leadership Practice of Setting Institutional Direction As a Determinant of Students’ Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya

John M.Kilonzo¹, Dr. Gideon M. Kasiva², Dr. David M.Mulwa³
¹Ph.D Candidate: South Eastern Kenya University
²Lecturer, South Eastern Kenya University
³Machakos University
*Corresponding Author

Abstract: leadership skills are regarded as the basis of all administrative operations in any organization. The performance of any school is determined by the effectiveness of the principal and the leadership practices put in place. School leadership influences students’ academic performance and therefore understanding how different school leadership practices impact on students’ academic performance is important in setting the institutional direction the members should follow. This study was carried in Machakos county to investigate principals’ transformative leadership practice of setting institutional direction in determining students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was 331 principals and 3,600 teachers. The study sampled 100 principals and 500 teachers. Data collection instruments included questionnaires for principals and teachers which had both closed and open-ended questions. The instruments were validated through piloting while reliability was achieved through test retest technique. Data was analyzed by use of SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics like regression models were used to analyze the quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented in in reported version. The results revealed that there was statistically significant relationship between principals’ setting of institutional direction and students’ academic performance which was positive at (r= 0.67) and significant at (p = 0.011). Based on the results, the study concluded that principals’ transformational leadership practice of setting institutional direction influenced students’ academic performance. The study recommended that the principals should increase transformational leadership practice of setting the school direction since it influences students’ academic performance.

Key words: Transformative leadership, Leadership practice, Direction setting. Institutional direction, Students academic performance

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The desire for quality education all over the world has increased the demand for effective school leadership and higher student academic performance in institutions of learning. Globally there is the recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their students (Sergiovanni, 2013). Dubrin (2010) defines leadership as the ability to inspire confidence and support among followers who are expected to achieve organizational goals. Leadership plays a big role in determining organizational excellence. Bass (2010) advance that transformational leadership focuses on unifying staff in the pursuit of goals that match the leader’s vision. In transformational leadership style, the leader inspires and motivates the people by developing an attractive vision, instilling it into the people and focus on developing relationships with followers as a teacher, mentor, and coach.

Akpan (2015) argues that a school principal who practice transformational leadership encourages followers to transcend the school interest over their own. Akpan (2015) further says that the school principal is a force that motivates and coordinates the organization towards attainment of school goals. Pokharel (2014) maintained that principals, need competency to transform, lead and run their schools in order to achieve school effectiveness. School academic performance globally is dependent on the quality of leadership and leadership styles adapted by those appointed to the leadership positions (Muriel, Ogoti, Jepkoech & Momanyi, 2015). An effective school principal will influence teachers, students and other stakeholders so that they enthusiastically and willingly make every effort towards the achievement of school goals. School leadership is expected to deliver high educational outcomes setting institutional direction focuses on the activities of the leader that builds a clear school vision, establishes school goals, and creates high performance expectations. Ling and Ibrahim (2013) posits that transformational school heads who set institutional direction to the members are likely to achieve high learning outcomes. Ling et al (2013) further says that the principal builds a mental picture or vision for the school and sells the vision continually. This brings helps to clarify the reasons for
Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate Principals' transformative leadership practice of setting institutional direction as a determinant of students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to establish principals' transformative leadership practice of setting institutional direction as a determinant of students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

Hypothesis of the study

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between principals' involvement in setting the institutions' direction and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of the principal is to establish a purpose for all teachers to be motivated and committed to their profession and to the students. Rutledge (2010) and Leithwood (2012) describes direction setting as a function of building a shared vision, developing a consensus about goals and creating high performance expectations. Transformational leadership practices of setting institutional direction according to Bass (2010) involves the concept of inspiring and motivating members towards achievement of organizational goals. Bass (2010) further argues that leaders wishing to set institutional direction create enthusiasm for subordinates to have an enhanced effort in pursuing organizational goals. Similarly Burns (2008) posits that setting institutional direction involves the leader translating the organization’s vision and mission to members of the organization for purposes of motivating, inspiring, and unifying the organization as a whole. They encourage and empower members of organization to achieve the organization’s desired outcomes.

According to Rutledge (2010), principals who embrace setting of institutional direction establish effective staffing practices, provide instructional support, monitor school activities, and buffer staff from excessive and distracting external demands. Rutledge (2010) further posits that principals provide useful assistance to teachers and students in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning which demonstrate high expectations for the teachers and student performance. Robison, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) on the same view advance that school principals provide focus on what teachers should be doing for students improved performance. Robin et al (2009) further asserts that principals are capable of having significant positive effects on student learning and other important outcomes when they set institutional direction towards achievement of the institutional goals and targets.

To exert significant influence on academic outcomes, the principal need to increase teachers’ job satisfaction, commitment and motivation so as to increase their output which is reflected in students’ outcomes. Hall, Johnson, Wysocki, and Kepner (2002) in Kamola (2016) opine that principals who set institutional goals inspire those around
them by displaying enthusiasm and optimism, involve the followers in envisioning the goals, communicate high expectations and demonstrate commitment to the goals. Mendez-Keegan (2019) argue that an overall goal of the principals is to create a positive environment where teachers are satisfied with their job and motivated to achieve improved learner outcomes.

Studies by Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn and Wu (2018) reveal that setting institutional direction increases commitment and motivation among the teachers and students that is reflected in improved students’ academic performance. Sun and Leithwood (2015) on a similar note, through review of several studies established that unified direction for learning goals increases student academic performance. Cook (2014) agrees with that view and adds that teachers and administrators should set a common institutional direction by working collaboratively to accomplish specific school goals especially those touching on learner academic performance. In the same vein Handford & Leithwood, (2013; Makura, 2011) posits that effective institutional direction is an important component in inspiring and guiding teachers and students as well as improving the performance of teachers and students.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive survey design. The targeted population was 331 principals and 3600 teachers. The study sampled 100 principals and 500 teachers. The study used stratified proportionate sampling to get the sample size of the principals and teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires for both principals and teachers. Content validity of the research instruments was ascertained through piloting of research instruments and analysis by experts in the field of educational administrators. Test re-test technique was employed to enhance reliability of the instruments. Data analysis was done by use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data which was presented in tables. Qualitative responses from open ended questions were transcribed and organized into themes and presented in reported version. Coefficient of Correlation was used on hypotheses to determine the relationship between principals’ transformative practice of setting institutional direction and students’ academic performance.

IV. ANALYSIS ON PRINCIPALS’ TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICE OF SETTING INSTITUTIONAL DIRECTION IN SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

Analysis of independent variable; Principals’ setting of institutional direction practices

In order to determine the role of Principals transformative practice of setting institutional direction in students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County the principals and the teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with some statements on principals setting of institutional direction in schools on a Likert scale of SA-strongly Agree; A-Agree; U- D-Disagree and SD-Strongly Disagree. The responses were presented in Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals practices in setting institutional direction</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal helps clarify the reasons for school’s improvement initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal provides useful assistance to teachers and students in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal demonstrates high expectations for teachers and student work performance</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals provides meaning for the tasks at hand by focusing on what teachers should be doing for students improved performance</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information presented in Table 1.1 indicates that 55% and 45% of principals strongly agreed and also agreed respectively that principals help clarify the reasons for school’s improvement initiative while none of them strongly disagreed or agreed with that statement. On the same statement 60% and 30% of the teachers strongly agreed and also agreed respectively that Principals help clarify the reasons for school’s improvement initiative. Only 7% and 3% of the teachers disagreed and also strongly disagreed respectively that principals help clarify the reasons for school’s improvement initiative in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The findings in this analyses implies that...
most school administrators and teachers in public secondary schools in Machakos County have realized that school administrators help in clarifying the reasons for school’s improvement initiative and the same time providing useful assistance to teachers and students in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning was a key element in improving students’ academic performance. These revelations confirm position advanced by Ling et al (2013) who says that the principals clarify the reasons for school’s improvement initiative while at the same time it brings collaborative partnership learning in the school that enhances overall student academic.

The statement that principals provide useful assistance to teachers and students in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning was confirmed by 70% and 25% of the principals who strongly agreed and agreed respectively. On the same note 5% of principals disagreed with the view while none of the principals strongly disagreed with the statement. On the same statement, 55% and 45% of the teachers both strongly agreed and agreed respectively that principals provide useful assistance to teachers and students in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning while no teacher disagreed or strongly disagreed with that position. This position was confirmed by Rutledge (2010) who posited that principals provide useful assistance to teachers and students in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning which demonstrate high expectations for the teachers and students’ performance.

Principals demonstrate high expectations for teachers and student work performance statement was strongly agreed and also agreed to by 80% and 20% of the principals. None of the principals either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view. On the same statement, 25% and 65% of the teachers respectively strongly agreed and also agreed that Principals demonstrate high expectations for teachers and student work performance while 8% and 2% of the teachers disagreed and strongly disagreed with that statement respectively. The findings in this analysis demonstrate clearly that principals have realize that direction setting in institutions was a critical feature in students’ performance a similar view expressed by Rutledge (2010) who argued that principals should demonstrate high expectations for the teachers and student performance.

On whether Principals provide meaning for the tasks at hand by focusing on what teachers should be doing for students improved performance, 57% and 43% of the principals respectively strongly agreed and agreed to the statement while none of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view. That statement was also strongly agreed and agreed to by 75% and 25% of the teachers respectively while none of the teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with that view. The findings in this analysis indicate that principals and teachers in public secondary schools in Machakos County focus on setting direction for the school in order to improve students’ academic performance. This position supports the view held by Robison, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) who advance that school principals provide focus on what teachers should be doing for students improved performance.

In an open-ended questions, principals and teachers were asked to briefly mention other ways through which they practice setting direction. Academic days emerged as one of the prominent themes mentioned by majority of the principals where parents and teachers meet with students to set students’ academic goals.

For instance, one principal averred: “In my school, I ensure we hold academic open days where each subject teacher works with individual students to set subject goals in the presence of the parents. These forums provide an opportunity to teachers, students and parents in setting the academic direction of our school.”

On open day another principal affirmed; I make sure we hold academic open day forums where the school vision and academic goals are discussed. Teachers share with parent’s specific challenges such as needed teaching and learning resources and also the role they are expected to play during school holidays.

Majority of principal seemed to put a lot of emphasis on communicating the school vision. Majority of principals indicated that they use every opportunity to communicate their school vision to students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

Motivating teachers emerged as another common strategy principals employ in setting their schools’ directions. A principal from a national school responded, “I motivate teachers. For instance, I reward teachers when they perform well. Some teachers are rewarded a lot of money but the school mean improves as well enabling us to achieve academic excellence which is the focus of our vision.”

Similarly, teachers were asked to state the strategies that have been put in place in order to improve academic performance. Teachers provided several strategies which included early syllabus coverage; motivation; setting school and individual performance targets; and effective communication of school vision and goals.

The views of the principals and teachers analysed from the open-ended questions confirmed that principals were actually applying transformative practice of setting institutional direction in their schools to foster academic outcomes of their students. This view mirrors on the views held by Bass (2010) who advance that transformational leadership focuses on uniting staff in the pursuit of goals that match the leader’s vision. In transformational leadership style, the leader inspires and motivates the people by developing an attractive vision, instilling it into the people and focusing on developing relationships with followers as a teacher, mentor, and coach.
Analysis of the dependent variable: Academic Performance of Public Secondary Schools

This study sought to find out the academic performance of the public secondary schools of Machakos County. To achieve this, school principals were asked to indicate in their questionnaires the KCSE mean scores of their schools for the period 2015 – 2019. Table 1.2 gives the analyzed mean scores.

Table 1.2: KCSE Mean Score for the Period 2015 – 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4.598353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3.893238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>3.605030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3.993492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>3.73536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results from Table 1.2 show that the KCSE mean score of public secondary schools had been falling. The mean score sharply dropped from 4.598 in 2015 to 3.893 in 2016 and further to 3.605 in 2017 before rising slightly to 3.993 in 2018 then dropping to 3.73536 in 2019. The mean dropped by 0.863 during the time under review (2015-2019). This information shows there was decline in academic performance in the county that created the need for an investigation.

Hypothesis of the study

The hypothesis of the study was:

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between principals’ involvement in setting the institutions’ direction and students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

To test this hypothesis, the mean values of principals’ transformative leadership practices of setting institutional direction (Independent variables) were correlated with the mean values of students’ academic performance (dependent variables). The regression model is presented in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Correlations between principals’ transformative leadership practices of setting institutional direction (Independent variable) and mean values of students’ academic performance (dependent variable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (Constant predictor)</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>(r)</th>
<th>Sig. (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>principals practices of setting institutional direction</td>
<td>students’ academic performance</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings in table 1.3 show that principals setting of institutional direction had a significant and positive relationship with students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County with a strong positive correlation of (r) 0.67 which was significant at (p) 0.011. This indicated that there was high statistically significant influence between principals setting of institutional direction and students’ academic performance. This finding led to rejection of the study’s Null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between principals’ involvement in setting the institutions’ direction and students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that there is statistically significant relationship between principals’ involvement in setting of the institutions’ direction and students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya was taken. The study findings are in agreement with the views of Handford & Leithwood, (2013; Makura, 2011) who posited that effective institutional direction is an important component in inspiring and guiding teachers and students as well as improving the performance of teachers and students.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study concluded that principals in public secondary schools in Machakos county practiced transformative leadership style of setting institutional direction which enhanced students’ academic performance in the schools. The study also concluded that principals’ transformational leadership practices of setting institutional direction determined students’ academic performance. The study recommended that the principals should increase the practice of transformational leadership practice of setting the school direction since it influences students’ academic performance.

REFERENCES


