

# Principal's Leadership and Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Bondo Sub-County, Kenya

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.71073>

Received: 20 September 2023; Accepted: 25 September 2023; Published: 23 October 2023

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the relationship between school climate and academic achievement of students at KCSE in public secondary schools in Bondo Sub County. The study was guided by four research questions: To what extent does principal's leadership relate to academic achievement in public secondary schools in Bondo sub-county? How does teaching and learning resources relate to academic achievement in public secondary schools in Bondo sub-county? What is the relationship between quality of teachers and academic achievement in public secondary schools in Bondo sub-county? What is the relationship between size of the school and academic achievement in public secondary schools in Bondo sub-county? The study applied the Scientific Management Theory whose four principles have been applied in education institutions in order to create effective management and administration. The study adopted mixed method research design. The target population comprised of 41 principals 492 heads of department and 820 students in 41 public secondary schools in Bondo Sub County. Stratified random sampling, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to identify the sample. Questionnaire, interview guide and document analysis were used to collect data. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of 0.799 was used to test for reliability of quantitative instruments while trustworthiness of qualitative tools and process was established. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and findings presented in tables, frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically guided by research questions and report given in narrative form and direct quotes. Hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance using Pearson correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that there is a positive relationship between school climate and academic achievement of students. The study recommended that principals should ensure they supervise and monitor the implementation of curriculum, ensure the use of professional documents, support teachers to attend professional development programs, the Ministry of Education equip schools with adequate teaching and learning resources, TSC to recruit and post more teachers in schools.

**Keywords:** Principal's Leadership, Academic Achievement, Public Secondary Schools, Bondo Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

The responsibilities of school administrators affect every aspect of the learning environment and foster a forum for the discussion of social and professional issues. Without effective leadership, the environment at school could suffer. Kor and Opare (2017) conducted an empirical study to examine the function of head teachers in the management of important school climate variables required for better student academic improvement. The study reported that head teachers roles directly impacted students' academic success.

Moss and Brookhart's (2019) posits that the goal of supervision of instruction is to jointly cooperate and enhance teachers' delivery of content rather than to evaluate their abilities or exert control over them. As instructional leaders principals are urged to spend a lot of time in classrooms observing teaching and learning in their capacity. Principals are better positioned to monitor instruction, support teachers, and affect

the instructional climate of their school when they regularly observe what is happening in the classrooms (Nduku, Onyancha and Ayiemba, 2016). In India, Kapur (2018) found that the principal is primarily in charge of making decisions. These decisions can be made independently or after consulting with other school staff members and teachers to get their ideas and suggestions.

A study by Sobandi and Saud (2016) in Indonesia sought to examine principal's leadership, school climate and productivity at Vocational High School in Bandung. The results of the study revealed that the principals' leadership and school climate have a positive and significant influence on school productivity.

In Kenya, instructional supervision has often been seen as the main vehicle to improve teaching and learning in school with principals as instructional supervisors. As noted by Republic of Kenya Report (2015), head teachers as the managers of their schools have the responsibility to ensure teachers implement the set curriculum and that learning actually takes place, this means that principals have the sole responsibility of ensuring the teaching and learning process is done as recommended by the ministry of education and they too are answerable should it fail.

According to the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP), there are five key functions of a principal: shaping a vision, creating a climate, cultivating leadership, improving instruction, and managing people (Jacobs, 2018). Successful principals have strong hiring procedures that entice the best teachers and have a clear understanding of the mission and goals for the school. When a principal is very supportive to the learners and teachers, and even the support staff in the school, everybody is likely to be motivated and committed to their duties and responsibilities hence improving the academic achievement of the students as evidenced in high achieving schools.

Makau, Ronoh and Tanui (2016) carried out a study to determine if there exist a relationship between principal's instructional supervision and student academic performance in sciences, in Makueni County. The results showed a strong relationship between the practice of instructional supervision and academic performance in all the science subjects. Waweru and Orodho (2014) reported association between most of the identified management variables such as effective planning of human and physical resources, organizational strategies, curriculum leadership and students' academic performance in most of the top performing schools in the county.

The purpose of this study was therefore to examine how principal's leadership relates to academic achievement in public secondary schools in Bondo Sub-County, Kenya.

## **METHODS**

This study used a combination of correlational research and phenomenological design because it offers a more thorough understanding of the research problem than either approach alone, while also potentially balancing the drawbacks of using each approach separately.

A sample of 12 schools was selected from a total of 41 schools from the sub county using stratified sampling where schools were classified into three strata as mixed day/boardings, mixed day and single gender schools. Twelve principals of the selected schools were automatically included in the study, with 144 heads of department and 240 students selected through simple random sampling from the 12 schools.

### **Research Instrument**

The questionnaire for the principals was divided into five sections. Section A sourced for data on the demographic information of the respondents. Section B assessed principal's leadership and academic achievement while section C assessed teaching. Interview guides were used to obtain qualitative data.

## RESULTS

### Principals' leadership and academic achievement

The study sought to determine the extent to which principal's leadership relate to students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Bondo Sub County. Both the principals and the heads of departments were given statements concerning leadership of the principal during the teaching and learning process. They included classroom observation, supervision of professional documents, checking students' academic work and principal involvement in classroom teaching. These responses from the principals and the heads of departments were analyzed and results presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Respondents' response with regard to principals' leadership**

Statements on Principal's leadership	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
n=12								
Principals	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I do classroom observation	8	66.7%	2	16.7%	1	8.30%	1	8.3%
I supervise professional documents	1	8.3%	7	58.3%	3	25%	1	8.3%
I checks students' academic work	1	8.3%	9	8.3%	1	8.30%	1	8.3%
I am involved in classroom teaching	4	33.3%	4	33.3%	3	%	1	8.3%
n=120								
Heads of Departments	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
The principal does classroom Observation	63	52.5%	48	40%	3	2.5%	6	5.0%
The principal supervises Professional documents	55	45.8%	49	40.8%	6	5.0%	10	8.3%
The principal checks students Academic work	56	46.7%	54	45%	6	5.0%	4	3.3%

From Table 1 above, it is clearly shown that the principals agreed and strongly agreed that they effectively carried out their supervisory roles during the teaching and learning process. The principals agreed that they did classroom observations, supervised professional documents of teachers, checked students' academic work and were involved in actual classroom teaching as teachers. Similarly, the HODs had similar opinions concerning the principals' supervisory roles. This could be attributed to the fact that most principals delegate these classroom supervision to their deputies. In most schools, it is the deputy principals who check the professional documents of teachers at the beginning of the term, for example, the schemes of work and class notes. It is the same deputies who also check the students' academic work throughout the term. The deputies, through the class prefects also keep the teachers attendance records at the end of each lesson and submit to the deputy at the end of the week.

Majority of the principals during interview agreed that supervision enhances effective implementation of the curriculum. However, further probing revealed that supervision was done by the deputy principals and class prefects. One of the principals expressed his opinion:

Supervision is very important for the success of academic programs but the problem with us principals is the we are overburdened with administrative and managerial duties, therefore, strategies have been developed by majority of principals for supervision to be delegated to deputy principals and class prefects [ P4: 18/5/2022]

Therefore, this means that the principals indirectly supervised classroom teaching and learning process through delegation to their deputies. This implies that principals in most public secondary schools in Bondo Sub County carry out their supervisory roles effectively and therefore this is a strength in their leadership as

principals. Poor leadership in school creates unfavorable school climate which eventually negatively impact on the academic achievement of students.

Majority of the principals through interview confirmed that they do not personally carry out classroom supervision. One of the principals had this to comment:

I do not check professional records and documents of teachers because that is the work of the heads of departments. Sometimes I did check only the lesson plans and supervise the progress of students in terms of report form given them thrice a year and conduct some inquiry with some students since it is the condition of good supervision. Otherwise, it is very rare because I am also a teacher [P2: 16/5/2022]

Another principal confirmed this by saying:

Classroom observation befits teachers on teaching practice, otherwise the permanently employed teachers can take offense. I personally don't comprehend why I should observe qualified teacher teaching whose subject may be different from mine and I may not be able to guide the teacher since I lack qualifications in the said field [P12: 20/5/2022]

The researcher disagrees with the principal's attitude towards supervision of classroom. As custodians of learning in their schools, it is obligatory to execute their duties accordingly. When a principal supervises classroom instruction, he creates a conducive classroom climate that he is concern about the teachers and the students and this will positively influence the performance of both teachers and students. Supervision of teachers by the principal generally improve their instructional performance. This is because the principal will be able to note any inadequacy in both human and material resources and make recommendations and improvements where necessary and this obviously will create a favourable climate for academic improvement. The researcher therefore concludes that classroom instruction supervision by the principals is fully done and this is a major boost to good performance in most public schools.

### Students View on Principals Supervisory Roles

This study sought to triangulate information from the HODs and principals with that of students to find out if the principal carried out their supervisory roles. Students were requested to tick how many times in a week the principal did classroom supervision in their classes as follows: i) very often, ii) often iii) rarely. The results are as seen in the table below.

**Table 2 Students' view on Principals' supervisory roles**

Areas of supervisory practices	Very Often		Often		Rarely	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>N=211</b>						
Principal makes regular visits to the classroom	12	5.6%	40	19.1%	159	75.3%
To observe teaching						
Principal checks teachers' attendance and Punctuality	9	4.4%	59	27.9%	143	67.7%
Principal does regular checking of students exercise books	11	5.1%	31	14.7%	169	80.2%
To find out teachers output of work						
Principal checks class attendance records	3	1.5%	71	33.8%	137	64.7%
Principal checks students' notes regularly	13	6.0%	43	20.6%	155	73.4%

The results in Table 2 indicate that majority (75.3%) of students reported that the principal rarely made regular visits to the classroom to observe teachers, 67.7% of students also indicated that the principal rarely observed teachers' attendance and punctuality. Similarly, majority of the students acknowledged the fact

that the principals rarely checked students’ notes (73.4%) and (80.2%) exercise books. This report from the students concurs with the respond that had already been given by the principals and the HODs. Consequently, it is worth noting that when principals do not carry out their supervisory roles effectively like classroom observation, checking students’ books, teachers’ attendance and punctuality in class, this creates unfavorable and uncondusive school climate that is chaotic, in which students and teachers do whatever they want and this eventually impact negatively on performance. This implies that principals need to discharge their responsibilities with a lot of seriousness for realization of good performance among students.

Finally, in order to make inferences concerning the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable in line with question one, the first null hypothesis for this study was formulated and tested at 0.005 level of significance. The formulated null hypothesis stated that “ $H_0$ 1: There is no significant relationship between principals’ leadership and academic achievement at KCSE in public secondary schools in Bondo sub-county”. In order to test the validity of this claim, a correlation analysis was performed.

To test the null hypothesis, the p-value was used to make a decision on whether to reject it or accept it. When the p-value obtained was less than 0.05, then the null hypothesis was rejected, but when the p-value obtained was greater than 0.05, then the null hypothesis was accepted. The researcher then computed Pearson’s Product-Moment Coefficient of correlation between the scores of the two variables, and the results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3 Correlation between principals’ leadership and academic achievement at KCSE**

KCSE Performance		
Principals’ leadership	Pearson Correlation	0.680
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.037
N		343

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

Results from Table 3 show that there was a positive relationship of  $r +0.680$  which was significant at  $p 0.037$  a level lower than  $p \leq 0.05$ . This means that principals’ leadership and academic achievement have a positive significant relationship. Consequently, the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between principals’ leadership and academic achievement at KCSE was rejected and alternative upheld.

**DISCUSSION**

The principal is expected to be accountable as determinant of curriculum implementation in schools and not delegate their duties to the deputies. This is supported also by Basic Education Act No.14 (MOE, 2013) that states that when the principal controls instruction, it will ensure that tasks are carried out effectively, observing and evaluating work through feedback then compares actual performance with the set standards. The findings of this study earlier mentioned that the deputy principals in Bondo Sub County carried out classroom supervision during teaching and learning process to ensure teacher punctuality and student attendance as administrative and management function. This is against teaching ethics as a noble profession which requires principals to be accountable and worthy determinants of curriculum implementation.

The findings are supported by Mutiso, Kirimi and Itegi (2020) who studied the effects of principals’ instructional supervisory practices on students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The study found that instructional supervision by principals was inadequate and insufficient, thus negatively impacted on the academic performance of students. According to the study, the



government need improve the termly in-service training programs for principals to teach them how to use different supervisory techniques. From this study, it is worth noting that principals' failure to carry out their supervisory roles could be attributed to the fact that some of them lack adequate knowledge on supervisory techniques hence the recommendation to attend in service courses for induction of these techniques.

This is in agreement with Elenwo (2018) who confirms that to check on the condition of the learning resources, the principal must purposefully visit the classroom. He further asserts that instructional supervision, particularly in the areas of teacher observation, has a significant impact on students' performance. The principal who made these visits, according to Elenwo (2018), were able to gain insight into the actual state of instruction, which improves performance. In other words, if class visits are taken seriously, students would stay alert and study, which would positively affect their performance. This therefore means that classroom observation is a fundamental aspect of principal supervision. The principal watches the teacher during a classroom observation to see how he organizes his work for delivery to the students.

Similarly, Shillow (2022) agrees in his study that school administrators who ensure teachers give and grade assignments in class, assist teachers in identifying their teaching challenges as a means of professional development, and reward teachers will see an improvement in students' academic performance. School principals' recommendations to teachers to revise on challenging areas as seen in evaluations, as well as their guidance to teachers on how to create lesson plans and schemes of work, have a positive impact on students' academic performance. The regular and frequent observation of student attendance by school administrators, the assurance that students consistently complete their classwork on time, and the assurance that they have access to the necessary learning resources all have a positive impact on students' academic performance. This implies that the students' academic performance will suffer if the principal is unable to effectively perform his supervisory duties. In order to improve the performance of their schools, school principals are therefore urged to faithfully carry out their duties and responsibilities to the letter; failure to do so would be the equivalent of planning for dismal performance.

This study concurs with a study by Okoth (2018) on principals' supervision of teachers and students performance in KCSE in public secondary schools in Migori County. He confirmed that professional negligence was a cause of poor performance in schools in Migori County. He noted that principals were never supervising instruction and this made teachers to have inadequate preparations for teaching leading to poor syllabus coverage hence low performance in KCSE. Some teachers were found not to be attending their lessons promptly while others were always late for lessons. The researcher concurs that individual teachers need to be responsible in their duties but the buck stops with principals who have the obligation to supervise and ensure implementation of curriculum in their schools. Therefore, the principals need to take their responsibility seriously and ensure curriculum implementation.

Similarly, Oloo (2017) in his study agrees with the findings of this study when he claims that leaders in higher performing schools stand out from their counterparts in other lower performing schools because of their personal involvement in the planning, coordinating, and evaluation of teaching and teachers. These leaders and the staff work together to achieve the school's main objective, which is to improve teaching. He continues by saying that participating in classroom observations and receiving the ensuing feedback were also associated with schools that outperformed others. This suggests that the leadership abilities of these schools' principals are the cause of the performance gaps between various schools.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study underscores the vital role of principals in shaping the learning environment and students' academic success. Principals who actively engage in classroom observations and supervision of academic work contribute positively to the instructional climate. However, many principals delegate these tasks to

their deputies, highlighting the need for training in effective supervision. The research emphasizes the importance of principals' direct involvement in teaching, as it fosters a conducive classroom climate that positively influences both teachers and students. These findings emphasize the crucial role of principals in curriculum implementation for improved academic outcomes in public secondary schools.

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