

Principals' Definition of School Instructional Mission and Its Influence on Learners' Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract

It is critical for principals to provide effective leadership when their schools formulate shared instructional goals which provide structures that focus schools towards student learning and improved academic achievement at national examination. This study sought to determine teachers' perception of actions taken by principals in defining school instructional mission and goals in public secondary schools in Baringo County. The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey that adopted a survey research design and employed mixed methods of inquiry in a concurrent procedure. It used a sample of 48 public secondary schools, 12 principals and their deputies, and 253 teachers. Stratified sampling was used to categorize schools, simple random sampling to select the teachers and purposive sampling to select the principals. A structured teacher response questionnaire and unstructured interview guide were used to collect data from the teachers, principals and their deputies respectively. Descriptive statistics were run, and their means and standard deviation presented on tables and a graph. The findings revealed that teachers in Baringo County's public secondary schools agreed at MR=3.99 that their principals formulated and communicated the schools' instructional mission and goals to enhance teaching and learning and improve students' academic achievement at national examination. However, it further showed that teachers agreed at MR=4.01 that principals communicated instructional goals

to their schools' constituents compared to framing instructional goals at MR=3.88. They also agreed at MR=4.12, 4.04 that principals developed instructional goals in high and average performing schools compared to low performing school MR=3.88. The study recommends that principals provide leadership when their schools formulate and implement instructional goals, Kenya Management Institute should empower principals in district and low performing schools so as to better their management and instructional leadership in framing instructional mission.

Keywords: *Instructional Leadership, Instructional Goals, Academic Achievement*

Introduction

The success of an organization is determined by its effectiveness and the extent to which it realizes its set objectives (Vathukattu, 2004). According to Chitiavi (2002), school improvement and effectiveness leading to high academic achievement can be contributed by various inputs that include; effective teaching – contributing 75% of good academic results, adequate text books / Tuition (15%), good physical facilities & equipment effectively used (9%) and others e. g; supervision, inspection and community support (1%). However, school leadership (by the Principal) which is second to classroom instruction (Leithwood, et al 2004) facilitate instructional activities and coordinate curriculum in the school. This way, principals play crucial role in providing instructional leadership which ensure quality academic results are achieved every year at national examination in an effective school. The principal, while coordinating school management is expected to run the school effectively and efficiently to produce quality results every year in external examinations (Vathukattu, 2004). The quality of leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school, since good performance does not just happen; it is a result of good teaching and overall effective headship (Lydia & Nasongo, 2009). Principals' role in the new education dispensation represents a balance between instructional leadership and management (Botha, 2004).

Instructional leadership establishes the conditions for the possibility of improving teaching and learning where much of the work of school

leaders is done through the development of artifacts that reshape organizational practices around desired instructional goals (Halverson, 2005). To achieve good academic results, therefore, the principal (headteacher) who is the central factor determining academic achievement in a school (Lydia and Nasongo, 2009), should play an active role in instructional leadership by spearheading the formulation of the school's instructional goals. Instructional leadership entails instructional functions of a principal which Hallinger & Murphy's Model groups into three broad dimensions namely definition of the school mission and goals, managing the instructional program, promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) and developing a supportive work environment (Murphy, 1990).

The principal manages the instructional program, which according to Weber, in his model, must be consistent with the mission of the school (Weber, 1996) and where the principal focus on those activities that involve the principal's working with teachers in areas specific to curriculum and instruction. Promoting a positive school learning climate entails the principal establishing a school culture and climate conducive for effective teaching and learning (Republic of Kenya, 1999). This encompasses promoting teachers' professional development (Barber et al, 2010) which is the most influential instructional practice as it is instrumental in furthering the quality of student outcomes (Scheerens, 2009); provide incentives for teachers by recognising and giving them incentives for excellent performance (Barber et al, 2010; Halverson, 2005), and providing incentives for learning (Ballard & Bates, 2008). School leadership should be open, supportive and friendly to the students but should establish high expectations (Leithwood, 2007). However, since effective teaching and learning may not take place in a non supportive work environment, Murphy's (1990) observed that in developing a supportive work environment the instructional leader establishes organizational structures and processes that support the teaching and learning process, creating safe and orderly learning environment, providing opportunities for students' involvement, developing staff collaboration and cohesion.

The principal as instructional leader, frames school instructional goals which contain a school-wide purpose focusing on student learning as being a significant factor of school principalship (Sindhvad, 2009) and communicates them to all members of the school community (Hallinger &

Murphy, 1985). This is meant to establish a strong sense of overall purpose (Mulford, 2003) and the shared goals would provide organizational structures that guide the school toward a common focus (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). Headteachers play a significant role in determining academic performance in a school due to their tasks and roles (Lydia & Nasongo, 2009) through organizational management of schools. It is for this reason, therefore, that the accountability movement in education placed attention on students' achievement and also placed responsibility on the school leader (UNICEF, 2000).

According to Vathukattu (2004) school leadership which is coordinated by the principal and which is expected to run the school effectively and efficiently to produce quality results every year in external examinations ensures congruence through defining the school mission and goals. A school principal, while influencing and redesigning the activities of the school towards setting goal achievements, is expected to manage the students, teachers and the school community around the common goal of raising the students' performance (Awiti 2009). A principal of a successful school is expected to define the school mission and communicate a clear vision of what the school should be attempting to accomplish to students and staff in such a manner that a shared purpose that unites the efforts of the school members is developed (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985).

Locke & Latham (1990) assert that goal setting is an effective way to increase motivation and performance. They postulate that goals increase attention to obtainment of the task, increase the effort expended on goal relevant activities, increase persistence to achieve, and increase the development of strategies to obtain the goal (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). Sinha, (2009) noted that the characteristics of principals of effective schools include taking strong initiative in identifying and articulating goals and priorities for their schools, holding themselves and their staff personally accountable for students' achievement in basic skills. According to Meigs, (2008), principals are expected to set a clear vision for the school community, support teachers in the work and at the same time being responsible for all the details that allow a school to function smoothly. Barber, Whelan & Clark, (2010), added that the role which school leaders play include practices and building a shared vision and sense of purpose. A number of studies reveal school goals [containing a

school-wide purpose focusing on student learning] as a significant factor of school principalship (Sindhvad, 2009).

However, despite this fact, the overall Kenya's student performance in KCSE examination is poor. In 2010, 27.17 % scored C+ and above (Makabila, 2011), 2013 (28.3%) and implied that 72.83% and 71.7% of the KCSE candidature failed to get automatic admission into the Kenyan universities. Between 2006-2010 and in 2013 respectively, the same scenario was replicated in Baringo County where 71.54% and 71.1% of the total candidature in public secondary schools scored a mean grade of C and below (28.46 % and 28.9 % got C+ & above); this is despite very high expectations by education stakeholders in Kenya (and especially Baringo County) of public secondary school whose success is measured in terms of good performance in national examinations and belief that principals are the persons responsible for this (Nandwah, 2011).

Little has been done to understand how principals' definition of school goals impact students' academic achievement through instructional leadership practices which is an emphasis everywhere in contemporary leadership literature in the developed world (Mascall, Leithwood & Straus, 2008). Education scholars and practitioners in Kenya need to pay closer attention to what principals do in their day-to-day enactment of leadership (Mwangi, 2009). This is because the principal's leadership can make a difference in students' learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) and that there is a link between high quality leadership and positive school outcomes, including student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2009).

This study therefore sought to determine teachers' perception of actions taken by principals in defining school instructional mission and goals in public secondary schools in Baringo County. The following objectives guided this study;

- i) To determine teachers' perception of how principals' frame their schools' instructional goals
- ii) To establish teachers' perception of how principals communicate their schools' instructional goals
- iii) To find out the extent to which principals' definition of instructional goals differ in different categories of public secondary schools in Baringo County.

- iv) To establish how definition of schools impact on students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

Materials and Methodology

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey research that adopted survey research design and employed mixed methods approach of inquiry in a concurrent procedure. It involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to best understand the research problem (Creswell, 2009). This is because educational institutions are social setups which face various complex challenges that beg for solutions which are appropriately addressed through researches that make use of both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms (Clabo, 2010) and attempts to fit together the insights provided by these empirical research paradigms into a workable solution (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It brings an intersection of pragmatic philosophical worldviews, strategies of inquiry and research methods into the study (Creswell, 2003; 2009). This provides an opportunity for the researcher to utilize the complementary strengths of qualitative and quantitative paradigms to strengthen inferences (Clabo, 2010) and triangulate the research findings.

The Population and Samples of the Study

A population of 24 provincial and 31 district public secondary schools in Baringo Central, Baringo North, Marigat, East Pokot districts, Koibatek and Mogotio districts (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rift_Valley_Province), 55 principals and their deputies, and 738 subject teachers were accessed. Based on a precision rate and a 95 % confidence level (Kothari, 2004) the sample size calculator (<http://www.surveysystem.com/index.htm>) was used to draw a sample of 48 schools by simple random method, 48 principals and their deputies and 253 subject teachers from provincial and district schools respectively as shown on Table 3.1 below. Quota sampling was used to obtain the two sub-groups basing on their respective population ratio of the school type (Orodho, 2009). The public secondary schools were stratified into provincial and district schools to reduce sample error due to difference in group composition (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996) since the two categories of public secondary school had heterogeneous characteristics.

Table 1: Research Population and Sample Sizes

District	Number of Teachers	Category of Schools		Total Number of Schools
		Provincial	District	
Koibatek	221	10	7	17
Baringo North	128	3	9	12
Baringo Central	241	5	8	13
Mogotio	80	4	2	6
Marigat	50	1	4	5
East Pokot	15	1	1	2
Total Pop.	738	24	31	55
Sample Pop.	253	21	27	48

Source: District Education Office of the respective Districts (Baringo County-2011)

Instruments

A structured questionnaire developed to use a set of five response categories of the Likert type scale was used to collect data from teachers and unstructured interview guides from the sampled principals and their deputies. In a concurrent procedure the quantitative data was collected alongside qualitative data (Creswell, 2005), where the structured questionnaire was a superior instrument (QUAN) while the interview guide was a complementary instrument (quali). The instruments were validated by the supervisors and the questionnaire piloted, its reliability calculated, and a reliable Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha of 0.912 obtained and used.

The quantitative data was organized, summarized and descriptive statistics worked out. Their outputs were presented using percentages, frequencies

and contingency tables for easier understand and conclusions drawn based on the research objectives with regard to principals' definition of their schools' instructional mission. The process of analysing data from the principals and their deputies involved breaking down the data, conceptualizing and putting it together in categories and sub-categories (Backman & Kyngäs, 1999) based on the research objectives and the emerging themes reported jointly with the quantitative data.

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' perception of principals' definition of school's instructional mission and goals in public secondary school in Baringo County. The quantitative data on the two subscales of the principals' definition of instructional mission and goals is presented below and the qualitative data reported alongside the analyzed data.

Table 2: Teachers' perception of Principals' Instructional Leadership practices on defining school's Instructional mission and goals

Subscale	N	M.R	Std Deviation
Framing school's instructional goals	253	3.8827	.80419
Communicating instructional goals	253	4.0183	.73953
Overall	253	3.9896	.68018

Table 2 shows that teachers agreed at MR = 3.88, SD = .80 and MR = 4.02, SD = .74 respectively that their principals frame and communicate their school goals to the relevant members of the school and stakeholders. This agrees to Jacobson (2008), that principals' essential practices include framing school goals that encompasses setting goals that emphasize academic achievement for all students and communicating regularly formally and informally to the school community. This also confirms the fact that the principal should create, communicate and deliver a vision

for the school, taking account of the concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders in the school (OECD, 2007).

If a principal establish and clearly communicate goals that define the expectations of the school with regard to academic achievement and rally a constituency of teachers and students to support those goals, then the motivation to achieve the goals is likely to follow (Deal, 1987). He added that if motivation and academic achievement are to be a definitive part of a school culture, they must be communicated and celebrated in as many forums as possible. On being interviewed, the principals and their deputies were in agreement that schools' instructional mission and goals were formulated in collaboration with students, subject teachers, and teaching staff, Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA) and Board of Management (BOM) at the beginning of the year and every term. This therefore concurs with Musungu (2007) who indicated that at the beginning of every year, session, term or month there is need for collective goal setting and strategizing on a mission to achievement of school objectives. This is because effective instructional leadership establishes clear instructional goals (McEwan, 2000) which enhance teaching and learning.

Principals and their deputies reported that school constituents were informed about the set instructional goals in different forums such during assemblies, principals and other teachers charged with curriculum matters articulate the school's instructional goals, displayed the school goals and policies are on the school and class notice boards. Parents were informed during academic days and the schools' annual general meetings, while the BOM/PTA members were informed during their meetings by the principals who are their secretaries. They added that principals used subject teachers to emphasis the schools' academic goals while teaching students, class teachers and house teachers during class and house meetings respectively, and their schools' director of studies while releasing examination results.

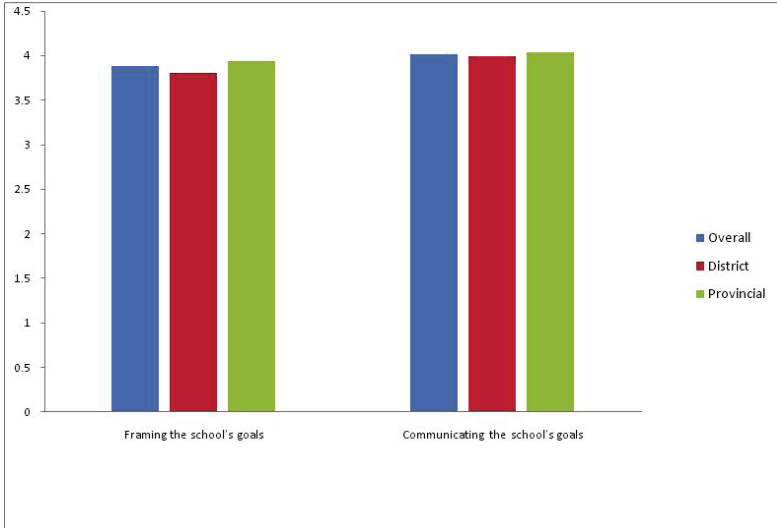
However, respondents agreed at a higher mean response that their principals communicate the school's goals than framing the school's goals. On the overall, respondents agreed at a relatively high MR=3.99 and matched by a low standard deviation index (SD = .68) that their principals frame and communicate school's instructional mission and goals.

An analysis of the responses based on the category of schools (provincial and district) is shown on Table 3 below.

Table 3: Teachers' perception of Principals' Instructional Leadership practices for Category of schools on setting instructional mission and goals

Category of Schools	N	M.R	Std Deviation
Provincial	146	3.9844	.74149
District	107	3.9055	.815645

The table indicates that teachers agreed at MR=3.98 and MR= 3.91 that principals set instructional mission and goals in provincial secondary and district secondary schools respectively. The table further, shows that principals in provincial secondary schools prevalently set instructional mission and goals compared to their counterparts in district secondary schools at a relatively higher MR=.82 compared to MR=.74. It was established from the interviews that this was an established routine in majority of the provincial school and that in few well established provincial schools, their instructional school goals were guided by the school mission, vision and objectives in their strategic plans which they said have pre-determined projected level of performance and strategies to achieve the academic targets.



This is also shown on Figure 1, which further confirms the data on Table 2 that teachers perceive the principals as communicating more than framing their schools' instructional goals.

However, it was reported that the set instructional goals were not strictly pursued and attained by the principals except in most established provincial and the high performing schools. This concurs with the analysed data shown on Table 3 above and 4 below, which shows that respondents lead in generally agreeing at $M.R=3.9844$ and $MR=4.12$ that principals in provincial and High performing schools respectively in defining instructional mission and goals. Most principals and deputies reported that in most schools, principals preside the planning of instructional activities but had weak implementation system of the planned strategies. They added that planning of the instructional strategies every term and communicating them to the school stakeholders is usually done in most schools as a routine exercise that is not effectively implemented to optimize on their outcomes. This was reported to be worse in district secondary schools and the low performing secondary schools which had relatively lower $MR=3.9055$ and $MR= 3.85$ respectively as shown on

Table 3 and Table 4. They added that there was also lack of strategic follow up or commitment to implementing the set academic targets among most principals.

An analysis of the responses based on schools' level of performance on defining Instructional mission and goals in high, average and low performing schools is shown on Table 4 below.

Table 4: Teachers' perception of Principals' Instructional Leadership practices for schools' Level of performance on Defining Instructional Mission and Goals

Level of Performance	N	M.R	Std Deviation
High Performing Schools	83	4.12	.59
Average Performing Schools	73	4.04	.57
Low performing Schools	97	3.85	.80

Table 4 indicates that teachers agreed that their principals define and communicate schools' instructional mission and goals in their respective schools as showed by relatively high MR= 4.12 (High performing schools), MR=4.04 (Average performing schools and MR=3.85 (low performing schools). However, it is evident that the practice is more in high performing schools at at a higher MR=4.12 and a lower SD= .59 as compared to average and low performing schools with a lower MR= 4.04 and 3.85, and standard deviation in the teachers' response of .57 and

0.80 respectively. This agrees to Bossert et al (1982) who identified that principal's leadership emphasize goals and student achievement where principals in high achieving schools emphasize achievement through setting instructional goals, developing performance standards for their students, and expressing optimism about the ability of their students to meet instructional goals.

Summary of the Main Research Findings

The analysis of the data obtained in chapter four led to several major findings that are summarised below;

Principals play a significant role in defining schools' instructional mission and goals in public secondary school in Baringo County with teachers agreeing at MR=3.99. The respondents agreed at MR=3.88 that their principals frame the schools' instructional goals by developing academic goals in collaboration with teachers (MR=4.05), developing academic and school goals based on clear vision for teaching and learning (MR=3.99), developing school's academic goals using data on students academic performance (MR=3.78) and framing school academic goals to be achieved by the school staff while performing instructional and non-instructional responsibilities (MR=3.71).

On interviewing the principals and their deputies, the researcher established that principals formulate instructional goals in their schools to enhance teaching and learning in collaboration with students, teachers and their PTA and BOM members. During staff meetings chaired by the principals, teachers set targets on the completion of syllabuses, evaluation of students among others. They added that the set goals were presented to the PTA and BOM members during their meetings and their feedback used to revise the goals. In a few well established provincial and high performing schools, their instructional school goals are guided by their school mission, vision and objectives in their strategic plans which they said had pre-determined projected level of performance and strategies to achieve the academic targets.

The respondents agreed at MR=4.02 that once their principals have formulated the schools' instructional goals they communicate them to the school community during school forums such as AGMs, Prize giving ceremonies (4.33), promotes schools' academic goals during forums with teachers (4.27) and students (4.09) and ensure that the school academic goals were strategically displayed on the school notice boards and written on school buildings (3.70). The qualitative data revealed that during students' assemblies, the principals and teachers charged with curriculum matters articulate the school's instructional goals. They added that principals used subject teachers to emphasis the schools' academic goals while teaching students, class teachers during class meetings and their

schools' director of studies while releasing internal examinations. The principals inform parents during academic days and AGMs while B.O.M /PTA members were informed during their meetings.

Conclusions

The following conclusions of the study were drawn based on the main findings of the study;

The findings revealed that principals formulated schools' instructional mission and goals to enhance teaching and learning and consequently boost students' academic achievement by involving students, teachers, PTA and BOM members. The goals were developed based on clear vision for teaching and learning, using data on students' academic performance and to be achieved by the school staff while performing instructional and non-instructional responsibilities.

Principals communicated the formulated goals to the members of their schools and other stakeholders during various school forums with; students (e.g students' assemblies), teachers (e.g during staff meetings, briefs), parents (such as academic days, AGMs), B.O.M /PTA members during school management meetings and the stakeholders during general meetings such as the prize giving ceremonies. The school academic goals were also displayed strategically on the school notice boards and in some schools written on school buildings. The principals used all teachers to articulate the schools' academic goals during all school sessions with students and parents.

All respondents agreed that principals in provincial and high performing schools defined and communicated their schools' instructional mission and goals as compared to district, average and low performing schools. They cited this as accounting for the status in students' academic achievement in the respective categories of school. However, they generally agreed that principals participated more in communicating the defined mission and goals to the school constituents than in defining them.

Recommendations for Practice

Principals need to pay more attention, involve all the school constituents when formulating their schools' instructional goals and effectively

implement the defined goals so as to enhance effective teaching and learning and so to students' academic achievement.

Suggestions for Further Research

There is need to replicate this study in other parts of the country using a bigger population, difference sampling techniques and different approaches to data collection than the ones used in this study.

Studies may be carried out to establish how other principals' instructional leadership practices namely; managing the instructional program, promoting a positive school learning climate and developing a supportive work environment jointly and/or separately influence learners' academic achievement.

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