

**LEVEL OF INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AS A
COMPONENT OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY ON
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN PUBLIC
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN USIGU DIVISION-BONDO
DISTRICT, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Every country is interested in ensuring that its citizens make a good contribution to its development. This is especially true in less developed countries where it is assumed that a higher competitive advantage may come from a knowledge-based economy. This could be achieved through ensuring good academic performance in learning institutions. The education system in Kenya is largely examination oriented. The quality of education tends to be evaluated in terms of students passing national examinations (Eshiwani, 1993). Poor student academic performance results from factors related to pupils' personal characteristics (Thompson & Stanford, 1975) and factors related to the pupils' environment- the school and the home (Little & Thompson, 1983). Disparities in performance continued to be noticed as one of the many challenges facing education and had raised a lot of concern. The study has been guided by the following objective: To investigate the extent to which school leadership as a component of institutional capacity influences academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Usigu division.

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INTRODUCTION

The literature on poor academic performance by school pupils reveals as causes factors related to personal characteristics of pupils (Thompson & Standford, 1975; Reinhart, 1976 and Belkin, 1981) and factors related to the pupils' environment - the school and the home (Little & Thompson, 1983). In support of the pupil environment as a factor in academic achievement, Little and Thompson, (1983) note that the difficulties resulting in failure by the pupils may not necessarily lie with the child but with the educational system and in particular the school. According to them, if we control for the student background, school characteristics have significant effects on academic achievement and that in many cases the effects of the school characteristics are greater than the effects of family background. According to Wehlace and Rutter (1984), a number of study findings reveal that academic failures are caused by factors related to the social, family and personal characteristics of the pupils. However, these results have been negligible in the obvious implications they carry for shaping school policy and practice. They were therefore of the opinion that research efforts should be better focused on understanding the characteristics of the school and how these affect the student performance rather than trying to identify factors which are least responsive to change. They further argue that search efforts continue to focus on the relatively fixed characteristics or attributes of the students- the effect of such research efforts may tend to absolve schools from blames for their lack of success with the pupil academic performance. What is performance then and how is it measured in the context of schools? Brumbach (1988), as quoted in Armstrong (2004), contends that performance refers to both behaviors and results, and adjusting organizational behaviors and actions of work to achieve results or outcomes. The issue therefore is: What are these school-related characteristics or factors which adversely affect student academic performance? These are the factors which constitute institutional capacity of public secondary schools. There is enormous variation in the institutional capacity of these secondary schools to carry out their function, that is, ensuring good student academic performance. In this paper the researcher develops an index to capture these institutional differences across several cases and how they influence the institutions' academic performance.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study would be guided by the following objective: To investigate the extent to which school leadership as a component of institutional capacity influences academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Usigu division.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership incorporates the accomplishment of a task, which is the organizational requirement and the satisfaction of employees, which is the human resource requirement (Okumbe, 1999). Maicibi (2003) contends that, without a proper leadership style, effective performance cannot be realized in schools. Even if the school has all the required instructional materials and financial resources, it will not be able to use them effectively, if the students are not directed in their use, or if the teachers who guide in their usage are not properly trained to implement them effectively. Armstrong (2004) defines leadership as influence, power and the legitimate authority acquired by a leader to be able to effectively transform the organization through the direction of the human resources that are the most important organizational asset, leading to the achievement of desired purpose. They further support this by arguing that good leadership commits to doing less and being more. However, Cole (2002) defines leadership as inspiring people to perform. Even if an institution has all the financial resources to excel, it may fail dismally if the leadership does not motivate others to accomplish their tasks effectively.

There is unprecedented international interest in the question of how educational leaders influence academic performance of student in schools. In consequence, a number of reviews of empirical research on the direct and indirect effects of leadership on student academic performance have appeared recently (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). A major reason for the interest in the links between leadership and student academic performance is the belief that leaders play a vital role in reducing the perpetual disparities in educational achievement between various social and ethnic groups, (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development, 2001).

The literature on sustainability also sees the quality of school leadership as a key to continued organizational learning and improvement. However, the picture one gains from the qualitative evidence for the impact of leadership is very different from that gained from quantitative

analyses of the direct and indirect effects of leadership on students' academic performance. In a meta-analysis of 37 multinational studies of the direct effects of leadership on student outcomes, Witziers reports an average effect (reported as a z score) of 0.02, an estimate that is typically interpreted as indicating no or a very weak impact (Witziers et al., 2003). Most subsequent quantitative research has conceptualized the relationship between leadership and student outcomes as indirect, with leaders establishing the conditions through which teachers make a more direct impact on students.

In another meta-analysis of such research, Marzano reports an average effect of approximately 0.4 between leadership and student academic outcomes (Marzano et al., 2005). There are several possible reasons why the estimate from the Marzano meta-analysis is considerably greater than that of Witziers. First, the latter analysis included both direct and indirect effects of leadership and because leadership effects are typically modeled as indirect, the Marzano studies were more likely to capture how leaders make a difference. Second, the Marzano work included only United States studies and the Witziers studies were multinational. Because the impacts of leadership are typically found to be stronger in the United States than in international studies, these contrasting research sampling strategies could explain some of the difference. The typical conclusion drawn by quantitative leadership researchers is that school leaders have small and indirect effects on student outcomes that are essentially mediated by teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Mpierwe (2007) conducted a study to examine the effect of management of instruction materials on teacher performance in primary schools in the Kampala district, Uganda. This study was intended to investigate the head teachers' leadership style and the performance of secondary schools in Uganda. It was also thought that an investigation in this area would shed light on the factors affecting performance and in particular the effect of leadership styles on school performance. From the study it was apparent to Mpierwe that leadership plays a very critical role in galvanizing all the other factors in the school together. However, in spite of the importance of leadership, its contribution to improved school performance will not be maximized, unless leadership is distributed and shared with the significant others. The Mpierwe agrees with the school of thought that the concept of leadership must change, as Grant (2006) argues that a different understanding of leadership is needed; a shift from leadership as headship to distributed form of leadership. Thus, there seems to be a contradiction between the evidence that leaders

have a weak indirect effect on student outcomes and the expectations of the public and policy makers that leaders make a substantial difference.

This study is a close follow-up of the observation that in Kenya, there are no set criteria enumerating the skills a person should possess to qualify for appointment as a head teacher (Eshiwani, 1993; Okumbe 1999; Mutai, 2003). This creates a leadership gap in public secondary schools since without basic managerial training, the head teachers are less likely to be knowledgeable in elementary management practices and cannot readily grasp the provisions of the Education Act. In the Kenyan context, a number of researches have conducted research on head teachers' training needs and made various recommendations. For example, Okumbe (1999) recommended that for purposes of effectiveness of school teachers, school managers, and curriculum implementers, an effective in-service training should be provided to them. In his study, Ogembo (2005) observes that for one to be a head teacher, he/she must be a qualified teacher, and must have been in an administrative post already such as a deputy head teacher. If empirical research indicated that some leadership practices have stronger impacts on student outcomes than others, then both researchers and practitioners could move beyond a general focus on the impact of leadership, to examining and increasing the frequency and distribution of those practices that make larger positive differences to student outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Influence of School Leadership on the Academic Performance of Students.

The researcher investigated various aspects of school leadership. These were: leadership styles, delegation, staff motivation, and mode of supervision.

Leadership styles

When the head teachers were asked about their preferred styles of leadership, the all went for the democratic style of leadership.

Table 4.20: Leadership styles adopted by head teachers

<i>Leadership style</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>Democratic</i>	8	100.0	100.0	100.0

They argued that it was the style that embraced fruitful consultation. They however observed that certain circumstances could call for an autocratic approach especially at the school policy implementation stage, and when correcting teachers who did not observe professional ethics. To determine the relationship between the leadership style and academic performance, a Pearson's correlation test was carried out and the results were as follows:

Table 4.20: Pearson's correlation of leadership styles of head teachers and academic performance of students

		years of experience	leadership styles adopted by head teachers
years of experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.(a)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
	N	8	8
leadership styles adopted by head teachers	Pearson Correlation	.(a)	.(a)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
	N	8	8

The results in the table above was a clear indication that the academic performance was not in any way a factor of the style of leadership since all the head teachers adopted a similar leadership style yet the academic performance of their students was as varied as the number of head teachers themselves. This finding was contrary to that of Mpierwe (2007) that leadership plays a very critical in the realization of high academic achievement.

Delegation of work and authority

When the assistant teachers were asked whether their head teachers delegated work and authority, they had varying opinions. Their responses were tabulated in table4.21 below:

Table 4.21: Delegation of work and authority by head teachers

<i>Delegation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>agree</i>	41	46.1	46.1	46.1
<i>disagree</i>	6	6.7	6.7	52.8
<i>strongly</i>	37	41.6	41.6	94.4
<i>agree</i>				
<i>Strongly</i>	1	1.1	1.1	95.5
<i>disagree</i>				
<i>undecided</i>	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

From the findings in table 4.21, 41(46.1%) of the assistant teachers agreed that the head teachers delegate work and authority, whereas only 6(6.7%) of the teachers disagreed. 37(41.6%) of the teachers strongly agreed while only 1(1.1%) strongly disagreed. 4(4.5%) were undecided. These results led the researcher into a conclusion that most head teachers delegated work and authority to their teachers. But as to whether the delegation had a bearing on the academic performance of students, the researcher carried out a Pearson's correlation test and obtained the results posted in table 4.22.

Table 4.22: Influence of delegation on academic performance

		average school mean covering the years 2007, 2008, and 2009	head teacher delegates work and authority
average school mean	Pearson Correlation	1	-.256(*)
covering the years	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.015
2007, 2008, and 2009	N	89	89
head teacher delegates	Pearson Correlation	-.256(*)	1
work and authority	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.
	N	89	89

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

The results in table 4.22 revealed a weak negative correlation of $-0.256(*)$ at 0.5 level of significance(2-tailed), between delegation of work and authority by the head teachers and the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Usigu division. This meant that the more the heads delegated work and authority to their teachers, the poorer the academic performance was more likely to be. This presents an argument against that of Mpierwe (2007) who maintained that in spite of the importance of leadership, its contribution to improved school performance will not be maximized, unless leadership is distributed and shared with the significant others.

Motivation of teaching staff

When the teachers were asked whether they were motivated in their places of work, they gave varying responses. Their level of motivation was measured by determining whether they were happy in their places of work. These responses were summarized in table 4.23:

Table 4.23: Happiness of teachers in their current work stations

Happiness	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>no</i>	30	33.7	33.7	33.7
<i>yes</i>	59	66.3	66.3	100.0
Total	89	100.0	100.0	

From the frequency distribution table 4.23, 30(33.7%) of the teachers were not happy in their work stations, while 59(66.3%) were happy in their work stations. This implied that most teachers in Usigu division were happy with their work and therefore motivated. Those who were motivated cited good working environment, good payment for work done, especially those on BOG employment, and other incentives offered by the school leadership. Those who expressed their dissatisfaction cited reasons such as having served enough in the formal employment, high handedness of the head teachers in certain issues, lack of motivation and even overstaying in the same work station.

The researcher sought to determine the relationship between teachers' motivation and academic performance of students and the findings were tabulated as shown in table 4.24 below:

Table 4.24: Pearson’s correlation of teachers’ motivation and academic performance of students

		average school mean covering the years 2007, 2008, and 2009	happiness of teachers in their current work stations
average school mean covering the years 2007, 2008, and 2009	Pearson Correlation	1	.043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.692
	N	89	89
happiness of teachers in their current work stations	Pearson Correlation	.043	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.692	.
	N	89	89

Pearson’s correlation revealed no significant relationship between motivation of teachers and the academic performance of students. This is a different view from what is held by Balunywa (2000) that reinforcement characteristics like recognition, conditions of service and morale building, coercion and remuneration are of relevance to academic performance of students.

Mode of supervision

The head teachers had varying way of conducting supervision of teachers’ discharge of duty. When asked to give their views on which mode of supervision was effective, their responses were as tabulated in table 4.25 below:

Table 4.25: Method of supervision

<i>Method of Supervision</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
<i>closely</i>	6	75.0	75.0	75.0
<i>trust</i>	2	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

From table 4.25 above, the researcher found out that 6(75%) of the head teachers supervised their teachers close and carefully while only 2(25%) of the head teachers trusted their teachers and allow them to work on their own. It was evident that most of the head teachers supervised their teachers closely and carefully. To establish the relationship between method of supervision and academic performance, a Pearson's correlation test was run and the results presented in table 4.26 below:

Table 4.26: Pearson's correlation of method of supervision and academic performance of students.

		method of supervision	average school performance mean score for 2007, 2008 and 2009
method of supervision	Pearson Correlation	1	.707(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.050
	N	8	8
average school performance mean score for 2007, 2008 and 2009	Pearson Correlation	.707(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.
	N	8	8

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

The results of the correlation reveal a very strong positive correlation of .707(*) at 0.5 level of significance (2-tailed). Most of the head teachers who used close and careful supervision method tended to obtain low academic performance, while those who trusted their teachers and left them to work on their own tended to obtain higher academic performance. This would be probably so because of the conducive working atmosphere rather than one that would infringe on the freedom of the teachers as they performed their duties.

CONCLUSIONS

All the head teachers were employing the democratic style of leadership for fruitful consultation. They sometimes used the autocratic approach. The academic performance was not in any way a factor of the style of leadership since all the head teachers adopted a similar leadership style yet the academic performance of their students was as varied as the number of head teachers themselves. Most head teachers delegated work and authority to their teachers. However, there was a weak negative correlation between delegation of work and authority by the head teachers and the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Usigu division. This meant that the more the heads delegated work and authority to their teachers, the poorer the academic performance was more likely to be. Most teachers in Usigu division were happy with their work and therefore motivated. There was no significant relationship between motivation of teachers and the academic performance of students.

It was evident that most of the head teachers supervised their teachers closely and carefully. However, most of the head teachers who used close and careful supervision method tended to obtain low academic achievement, while those who trusted their teachers and left them to work on their own tended to obtain higher academic achievement. This would be probably so because of the conducive working atmosphere rather than one that would infringe on the freedom of the teachers as they perform their duties.

Several strategies were identified for improving academic performance. These were: early coverage of syllabus, frequent testing policy, benchmarking and networking, internal quality assurance through the DOS, monitoring delegated work by the head teacher, motivational programmes for teachers, students and support staff, keeping the students in school most of the time, use of supervised academic consultations, acquisition of more teachers, utilization of field trips and academic tours, guidance and counseling for the students, inviting motivational speakers to talk to the students and the teachers, group discussions, allocating a given number of students to a teacher for enhanced supervision(also known as tutor-tutee), and frequent meetings with the support staff to enhance their efficiency.

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