

Forgotten Leaders? The Leadership Role and Workload of Directors of Studies (D.O.S) in Secondary Schools in Teso North Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: *Directors of Studies (D.O.S) in Kenyan secondary schools are significant contributors to the academic success of secondary schools. The purpose of the study was to determine the role and workload of the D.O.S in secondary schools and establish their perception on roles and workload in Teso North Sub- County Busia County, Kenya. The objectives of the study included to establish the perceived position of the D.O.S in the school leadership and management hierarchy; determine the motivational role of the D.O.S in academic leadership; identify the skills and competencies important to the roles and responsibilities of the D.O.S; identify professional development needs of the D.O.S and desirable strategies for their delivery and to find out the benefits of appointment to D.O.S position. This study would be significant to the teachers' employer (Teachers Service Commission) and school administration in highlighting extra roles and workload undertaken by Directors of Studies. Descriptive survey design was employed using generalized statistics that resulted when data was abstracted from respondents. Purposive sampling was applied in choosing 26 D.O.S's from 26 public secondary schools and the Sub-county Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (DQASO). Simple random sampling was used to select 18 Head teachers and 50 teachers. Instruments' reliability was determined by piloting the instruments and lecturers from Kibabii University College examined content validity. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) aided in data analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed and presented using frequency distribution tables while common themes in responses were used for qualitative data. The findings revealed that a majority of the D.O.S's are lowly motivated in their duties, the position of D.O.S is highly recognized as a leadership position in secondary schools, the role and workload of the D.O.S is relatively high compared to the other teaching staff and that the D.O.S's are human resource managers in the school. It further revealed that the teachers' employer (T.S.C) does not appoint teachers to the position of D.O.S in secondary school but it is an innovation of head-teachers, yet it remains an important position since the holder supervises and co-ordinates the H.O.Ds, who are appointed by T.S.C through a competitive process. The study recommended that the D.O.S should be motivated in leadership, management roles and responsibilities and that the T.S.C should consider setting up a policy on identification, selection, appointment, deployment and training of D.O.S's.*

Keywords: Director of Studies, Leadership, Management, Motivation

1. Introduction

The organizational management of schools greatly influences the academic outcomes of students. The position of 'Director of Studies' started as a simple innovation of some school head-teachers but has now taken root across the country and now it is widely accepted. Innovation is essentially a social process and so takes place over a period of time. The D.O.S position is an innovation that has taken root in every school, having been began by just a few head-teachers in the early 1990s as part of the school management strategy [1]. An innovation which clearly offers advantages over current procedures and other alternatives is more likely to win support than one that does not. The D.O.S position is an innovation that has won such support [2].

Leadership is as a process of encouraging and helping others to work enthusiastically in order to achieve organizational objectives [3]. Keith defined leadership as part of management and an ability to persuade others to seek desired objectives enthusiastically [4].

It is through the position of D.O.S that school head-teachers facilitate and inspire academic leadership and progress. Leadership can be perceived as an act of influencing people so that they strive willingly and enthusiastically to achieve

group goals [5]. It is the ability to influence others to do certain things, which they may not necessarily believe in, for the attainment of organizational goals [6]. The leadership role and workload of the D.O.S remains one of the least researched and least discussed in professional journals and books, yet it is highly discussed by teachers at school level owing to its lack of clearly defined job description.

The position of the D.O.S has been viewed with due controversy by the holders of the position as well as their juniors in school leadership and management. One significant issue of concern to this study is that it is a position not officially recognized by the Teachers' Service Commission (T.S.C), hence it is not exactly known "where?" in the school's hierarchy of leadership and management, the position holder ought to fall. Whereas T.S.C has clearly defined the roles of the Head-teacher, the Deputy Head-teacher, the Heads of Departments and Assistant Teachers, it has not clearly defined roles or job description for the D.O.S; hence the role is open to ambiguity and variation from school to school. The impact t of this is vast implications on school leadership. Most teachers end up viewing the position as the head-teacher's act of stamping his/her authority through his/her staunch sycophants. This is especially so in the cases where a relatively young teacher in the profession is appointed by the head-teacher to the position of D.O.S.

It is against this background that the study sought to address the plight of the holders of the position of D.O.S in secondary schools in relation to their expected roles and workload. The problem of study focused on Teso North sub-county as an example of a Kenyan sub-county where secondary school head-teachers appoint directors of study to provide their respective schools with academic leadership and management.

The following research questions formed the basis for this study: What is the position of the D.O.S in school leadership and management? What is the motivational role of the D.O.S in the school's academic leadership? What are the skills and competencies important to the roles and responsibilities of the D.O.S? What are the main professional development needs of the D.O.S and desirable strategies for their delivery? What are the benefits of being appointed to the position of a school's D.O.S?

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- 1) Establish the perceived position of the D.O.S in the school leadership and management hierarchy.
- 2) Determine the motivational role of the D.O.S in academic leadership.
- 3) Identify the skills and competencies important to the roles and responsibilities of the D.O.S.
- 4) Identify the main professional development needs of the D.O.S and the desirable strategies for their delivery.
- 5) Find out the benefits that come with appointment as the D.O.S in secondary school.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study attempted to determine the role and workloads of the D.O.S in secondary schools in Teso North sub-county. Whereas important positions in school leadership and management such as the Head-teacher, Deputy Head-teacher and Heads of Department, are addressed T.S.C, the position of D.O.S has remained elusive since its inception in the early 1990s. The identification, selection, appointment and specification of the D.O.S's roles and responsibilities have not been adequately addressed by past researchers in education. It is consequently hoped that the findings of this study might contribute to a deeper understanding of the role and workload of the D.O.S in secondary school. It is also hoped that the study findings would provide relevant information to the T.S.C for policy formulation and implementation on identification, selection, appointment, deployment and training of secondary school directors of studies. Finally, it is hoped that the research will add to the current knowledge about the role and workload of the D.O.S.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

The study concentrated on public secondary schools and collected data was based on perceived opinions that are bound to be subjective. In some schools due to the nature of school administration in existence, some respondents were hesitant to give their perception. This still occurred despite the assurance of the researcher that even after that their responses would be treated very confidentially.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Research methodology describes the overall approach to research design. It is a strategy or plan of action that links methods to outcomes. It governs that choice and use of methods [7]. The study adopted descriptive survey research design because it is suitable for collecting descriptive data [8]. The design is suitable for exploring the present status of a phenomenon in order to provide useful information as a guide for immediate future practice [9].

2.2 Study Area

The area of study was Teso North sub-county. The sub-county is located in Busia County in Western Kenya. It is located between latitude 0°29' and 0°32' North and longitudes 34°01' and 34°07' East. It has an average area of 236.8 square kilometers. Most parts of the sub-county receive between 1279 and 1790 mm mean annual rainfall (Republic of Kenya, 2002). It is bordered to its north by Bungoma West sub-county, to its east by Bumula sub-county, to its south by Teso South sub-county and its entire west by the Republic of Uganda, only separated by the Malaba River. The sub-county has two administrative divisions, namely, Amagoro and Ang'urai [10]

The sub-county's economic activities include subsistence crop cultivation of cassava, sweet potatoes, millet and sugarcane. Tobacco is grown as cash crop, though still on a small scale. The 2002 projections showed the population to be estimated at 85318 people with an average density of 360 people per square kilometer. The sub-county's major urban centre is Malaba town, a major international border-point town between Kenya and Uganda [10].

2.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

Teso North sub-county has 26 secondary schools. This was confirmed by the statistics at the sub-county's education office. Each of the schools had one director of studies, hence a total of all the 26 directors of studies as well as the one quality assurance Officer of the sub-county were purposively sampled.

Purposive sampling was used to select the sub-county of study, considering that all the schools in Kenya have directors of studies and would be equally picked. Simple random sampling was then employed to select 18 Head teachers and 50 teachers from the 26 secondary schools. Hence the representative sample size was 95 out of a total population of 317.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire was used. It had closed-ended questions with a few open-ended items. The questionnaire was administered to each of the respondents and soon after, a short face-to-face interview conducted, just as a way of exhausting the possible responses and making further clarifications on the responses to the open-ended

items on the questionnaire. It also helped to establish a rapport with each of the respondents.

Before developing the questionnaire, related literature was reviewed and the necessary recommendations were taken from specialists in education research at Kibabii University College.

2.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (Frequencies and Percentages), were used to analyze the data. Such analysis was suitable for this study because it involved simple description, analysis and interpretation of the circumstances prevailing around the role and workload of the D.O.S. Basic statistical techniques that included averages, percentages, frequencies and totals were used and tabulated. Frequencies and percentages easily

communicate the research findings to a majority of the readers. Tables and charts were used to present the data [11].

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are based on the objectives, the research questions used to generate data and the analysis of the data. From these, the themes investigated emerged as follows:

3.1 Perceived Position of the D.O.S in School Leadership , Management and the Workload

The responses of all the directors of Studies indicated that leadership derives its authority and identifies leaders from bottom to top, whereas management emphasizes a top to bottom approach as shown in the fig.1 below.

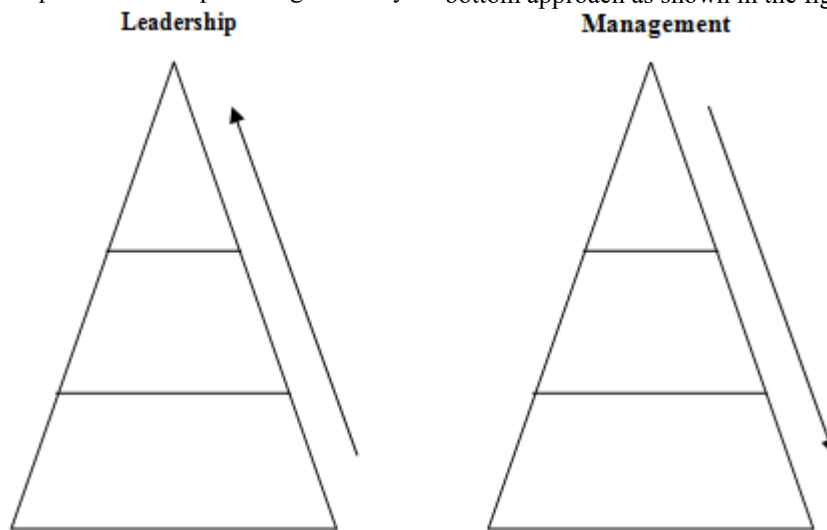


Figure 1

The responses indicated that there should be balance between leadership, administration and management. In the leadership and management hierarchy, the directors of studies perceived

the position of D.O.S as being third in the tier, from top downwards as in the fig.2 below

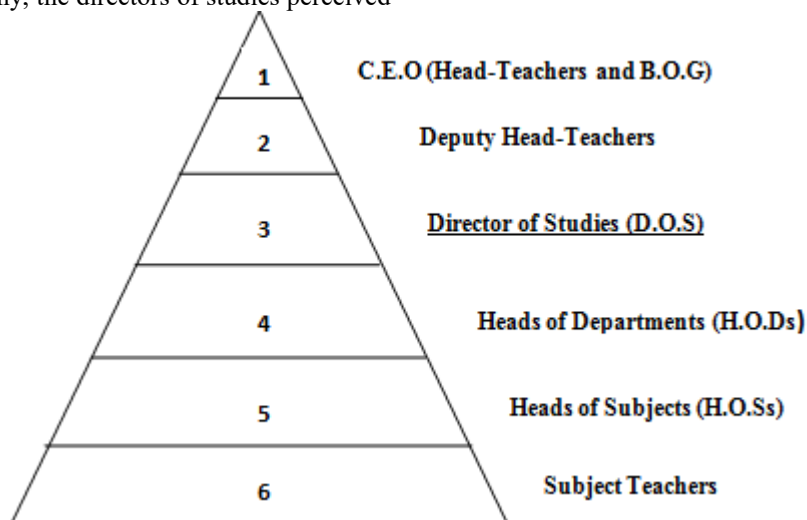


Figure 2

The director of studies' perceptions tallied with the perceptions of the teachers under them, whom they manage. The directors of studies indicated that they are mostly informally referred to as "Number 3" in the school setting. On the other hand, the head-teachers are referred to in their

respective schools as "Number 1", while the deputy head-teachers are referred to as "Number 2". This means that following the levels of delegation done by the school's head teacher in executing his/her functions, the D.O.S is perceived

by the rest of the school as being third, after the Head-teacher and his/her deputy.

The workload of the D.O.S includes setting the academic agenda for the school. Whereas the head-teacher is an overall leader, the respondents indicated that the head-teacher delegates issues of student discipline and parents' issues to the deputy head-teacher. On the other hand, the head-teachers delegate academic responsibilities to the D.O.S, the core functions of the school. Hence, from the day students are admitted, every function and action of the D.O.S impacts on the students' perceptions and ultimately on their acclimatization to the school's academic atmosphere and culture.

The findings showed that the D.O.S, apart from his teaching duties, arranges for and conducts admission interviews, does the admissions, orientates the new students, organizes tuition and examination time-tables and administers the examinations, analyses all the school examinations, is in charge of remedial teaching in the school and academic counseling. All these accrue to an overwhelming task for the D.O.S as compared to the other teachers; hence there is high need for official recognition of the position by the teacher's employer (TSC).

3.3 Motivational Role of the D.O.S in Academic Leadership.

According to the respondents, the D.O.S is in charge of, and is the supervisor and coordinator of the Heads of Departments in the school; hence, he/she should provide adequate motivation and drive to the Heads of Departments. This should be translated downwards to the Heads of Subjects and eventually to the students, in achievement of set academic goals.

The findings indicate that the D.O.S is the coordinator and overall facilitator of all core curriculum activities, an enormous task that requires that he/she motivates the H.O.Ds in order for them to help him/her achieve. This has to start with departmental goal and target setting, from where the D.O.S can have a clue of the academic direction of the school. From the departmental goals and targets, he/she can derive the overall academic goals and targets for school.

In attempt to make a school achieve academically, the D.O.S experiences a variety of challenges. A number of teachers under the authority of the D.O.S in the school as a human enterprise, exhibit negative traits based on the assumptions of Douglas McGregor's theory X. It was found from the respondents that in their schools, most teachers are naturally lazy, they have a tendency to avoid work, they complain and grumble, they dislike responsibility, are self-centered and just indifferent to organizational goals, they are lowly motivated, are resistant to change, they have no initiative and are less creative.

The D.O.S therefore has the challenge of attempting to utilize the power at his disposal to enable the school achieve its academic goals and objectives. In so doing, some staff members under him (including some H.O.Ds), show and avenge their hunger to him/her, yet all he/she does is on

behalf of the Head-teacher. This is how they end up criticizing the activities of the D.O.S as an outfit sycophant of the Head-teacher. This comes at its worst when such critics are on higher job-groups than the D.O.S, are older with more years of teaching experience than the D.O.S and have T.S.C appointments as H.O.Ds when the D.O.S, who has to lead them on behalf of the Head-teacher, has no direct appointment from the T.S.C.

3.4 Skills and Competencies Important to the Roles and Responsibilities of the D.O.S.

In considering their roles, the respondents were asked to identify the key skills and competencies required to undertake their challenging roles. The responses are shown in TABLE 1. First, they considered that the most important is the ability to manage change for self and others. A significantly high percentage (91%) agreed that the D.O.S should be competent in managing to bring a positive change in a school's academic performance.

The second important competency of the D.O.S is the capacity of the D.O.S to delegate and empower other people whom he leads in the academic committee. 87% of the respondents ranked this as the second most important competency.

The third competency is the ability to inspire a vision and provide an academic challenge for the school, through giving proper advice to the head-teacher. 85% of the D.O.S ranked this as the third most important competency important to the D.O.S's role.

Other important skills and competencies that were mentioned in the open-ended items section of the questionnaire and the interview are: the ability to manage uncertainty and capacity to develop networks with other people, schools and educational organizations. Leadership and management skills that embrace Information-Communication Technology (I.C.T) were also mentioned as being critical competencies to this role.

Table 1: Skills/Competencies Desirable of the D.O.S

<i>Skills/Competencies Desirable of the DOS</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Manage Change for Self and Others	120	80%
Capacity to Delegate and Empower Other People	99	66%
Ability to Inspire Vision and Academic Challenge for School	85	57%
Ability to Manage Uncertainty	50	33%
Capacity to Network with other People, Schools & Organizations	40	27%
Embracing ICT	38	25%
Others	10	7%

3.5 Main Professional Development Needs of the D.O.S and Desirable Strategies in Meeting them.

The respondents were asked in the interview and open-ended items of the questionnaire, to identify their main professional development needs and strategies on how they could be met. The responses are shown in TABLE 2.

The most frequently mentioned professional needs included: The need for appointments to this position to be done by T.S.C using a clearly laid down policy procedure as is done for other position such as the Head-teacher, Deputy Head-teacher and Heads of Departments. Other needs included in-service training in Information-Communication Technology (I.C.T) and Financial management skills.

The desirable strategies for the professional development of the D.O.S were mentioned as opportunities to attend seminars specifically organized for holders of the office and provision of mentorship for those appointed.

Table 2: Main Professional Development Needs for D.O.S

Main Professional Development Needs for D.O.S	Frequency	Percentage
Appointment to be done directly by employer (TSC)	125	83%
In-service Training on ICT and Financial Management	80	53%
Others	15	10%

3.6 Benefits and Challenges of Being Appointed as a D.O.S.

Following the specification of duties indicated in their letters of appointment, it was noted that the D.O.Ss lead as chairmen of a team popularly known in the school as the “*Academic Committee*”. This is a team that is composed of the Heads of Departments – Sometimes simply referred to as the “*Senior Management Team (S.M.T)*”.

A majority of the respondents (81%) felt that they were not very satisfied in their roles as D.O.S. These, they attributed to the fact that they do not see immediate benefits, leave alone not just even a letter of appointment to the position from T.S.C. It was their unanimous view that T.S.C should take up the role of appointing Directors of Studies (DOS) in secondary schools and not leave it to the whims and manipulation of the Head-teacher. A letter of appointment from the employer (TSC) would give the office holders some form of security to discharge the duties well and more confidently, and offer better chances for professional development, just as they do for the Heads of Department.

The D.O.S’s felt that it is unfair for them to supervise and coordinate a team of H.O.Ds who are appointed by T.S.C when they, themselves are merely appointed by the head-teacher.

It was a feeling of a majority of the respondents (90%) that the appointments to the position of D.O.S in secondary schools should be competitively done by the T.S.C, just as is done for the positions of Head-teacher, Deputy Head-teacher and H.O.Ds. The responses on challenges are shown in TABLE 3.

The respondents felt that if the position was also pegged on as a stepping stone to the deputy headship as is done with the H.O.D’s position, it would be a more competitive position and of greater benefit to the holders of the position. They would be more motivated in their job just as the deputy head-teachers are motivated by the fact that they are immediate

followers of the principals in terms of school leadership and management position.

Table 3: Challenges of Being Appointed as a D.O.S.

Challenges of Being Appointed as a D.O.S.	Frequency	Percentage
No Immediate Benefits to Individual	135	90%
No Direct Appointment to the Position by Employer (TSC)	105	70%
Appointment to the Position Easily manipulated by Head-Teacher	100	67%
Others	24	16%

4. Conclusion

The results generally indicate that there are glaring concerns of the D.O.Ss in secondary school in Teso North Sub-county, a view that could easily be related to the countrywide experiences. The study made the following conclusions:

- That each of the schools had a D.O.S and on average, they are lowly motivated in their duties.
- That what began as an innovation of the school head-teachers in their school leadership, the position of D.O.S has come to be officially recognized as a leadership position in every secondary school.
- That the workload of the D.O.S in secondary school is relatively high compared to the rest of the teaching staff members.
- It is evident that the D.O.Ss are human resource managers in the school as perceived by other staff members, students and school non-teaching staff. They perceive the D.O.S as being ‘*third*’ in the hierarchy of school leadership and management after the Deputy Head-teacher and Head-teacher, who are ‘*second*’ and ‘*first*’ respectively.
- That T.S.C does not appoint teachers to the position of D.O.S in secondary schools, having been a position that is a mere innovation of the school head-teachers. Yet, this remains an important embraced position, given that the holder of the position supervises and co-ordinates the H.O.Ds, who are appointed by T.S.C through a competitive process.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- That the D.O.S should be motivated in their school leadership and management roles and responsibilities.
- That the T.S.C should consider setting up a policy on identification, selection, appointment, Deployment and Training of schools D.O.Ss just as it has done for the Head-teachers, Deputy Head-teachers and H.O.Ds.

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