

Head Teachers' Role in Enhancing Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Baringo North Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: *The head teachers are agents of quality assurance within the schools under their head ship. Since 2006 however, the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) analysis has indicated low academic performance, with most schools performing dismally, raising a great concern on the quality of learning in secondary schools vis-à-vis the academic performance. The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies put in place by head teachers towards improving student academic performance. The study employed mixed method approach and used descriptive survey design. The population studied included 30 heads of schools and 120 teachers which yielded a response rate of 100% and 67% respectively. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews whose reliability and validity were assessed accordingly. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The study noted that few schools laid strategies to ensure improved academic performance. Head teachers did little about resource mobilization while capacity building for teachers was a rear occasion. It is recommended that head teachers be apt in formulating and implementing strategies geared towards quality education. Such strategies should include: mentorship program for teachers, individualized programs for learners and empowering parents to observe fees payment policies.*

Keywords: Academic performance, education standards, education strategies, quality education, secondary schools

1. Introduction

In 1990, the World announced a compulsory education for all. These committed countries to improve the quality of education. The declaration acknowledged quality as a requirement for achieving the basic equity goal. It recognized that increasing access to education without quality would not contribute fully to the development of individuals and society. A decade later, the Dakar agenda declared the right of every child to acquire quality education, which was defined by the dimensions of quality to address desirable characteristics of students, procedures, physical facilities, learning materials, content, management, and school outcomes (UNESCO, 2000). Quality of outcome involved academic attainment and achievement, value added through education and results of internal and external examinations (Ampiah, 2016).

In Kenya, the head teachers, are the Chief Executive Officers in their institutions and play a big role in ensuring consistency in academic achievement. Head teachers oversee the implementation of quality education policies and monitoring processes. They are expected to teach, motivate, guide, steer development and produce good results in national examinations. According to Ojiambo (2014), the challenge in Kenya is the lack of effective and adequately financed quality system for teachers and learners in institutions. This, he asserts, cannot enable the education system to realize the Vision 2030 alongside other educational objectives as spelt out in Sessional Papers and policy frameworks. The major concern is in regard to the learners' academic performance in many regions across the country.

Baringo North in particular faces the challenge of low performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Most of the secondary schools in the sub-County

are relatively new. 60% were established less than 15 years ago. Since inception, these schools have struggled with resource mobilization, which has affected the quality of education adversely. Few students in the area achieve the minimum university entry grade for admission to pursue a Bachelor's degree. For example, the statistics obtained from 2014 K.C.S.E. results indicate that out of 1,173 students who sat for KCSE examination in the Sub-county, only 28 students scored B+ and above which was the minimum admission grade to university in 2015 in Kenya. This accounted for 2.4% of the total student population who sat for the exam. In the previous year, the figures were: 29 students which translated to 2.4% respectively. Other Sub-counties within Baringo County recorded a good number of students with a grade of B+ and above. An example is Baringo Central, which in the same year, that is, 2014 had 249 students who scored B+ out of a total population of 1,928 accounting for 12.9%. Considering that students from both sub counties experience similar socio-economic and political factors, the issue of quality academic performance would squarely lie on the heads of these secondary schools.

2. Literature Survey

The quality of education is always considered important in the development of every nation. Any country whose educational system is of high quality, enables its citizens achieve personal socio-economic aspirations and fosters community development (UNESCO, 2015). Academic outcomes, being one of the dimensions of the quality of education at all levels of education has therefore been among the most important concerns of the world governments and educationists (Luke & Mavis, 2014).

The core business of secondary schools is to provide quality teaching which in turn yields high academic results in national examinations. Learning is incremental and leads to

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cognitive development of learners. This was affirmed by Ibrahim, Arshad and Salleh (2017, p.102) who noted cognitive development of learners as an indicator of quality education being provided. However, successes in educational outcomes require a concerted effort of all education stakeholders (Robert & Keonyatse, 2017). Studies such as that of Suri (2015) and Mestry (2017) assert that school administration (head teachers) and teachers as having a crucial role in ensuring high academic achievements to students.

In a research conducted in Botswana in 2013 by a panel on nominees from government, the ministry of education was castigated to explain the annual drop in academic performance in schools. This trickled down to schools to provide answers, which unfortunately gave unconvincing reasons. There was a rift between the ministry and the teachers as each party blamed the other for the poor results in national examination. The teachers were blamed for incompetence; while the ministry bore the blame for teachers' low morale due to unbalanced teacher-student ratio, lack of consultations, hasty introduction of syllabi, inadequate resources and low level of preparation by teachers (Luke & Mavis, 2014).

Consequently, heads of schools were tasked to identify factors that were negatively affecting students' performance and to come up with strategies to improve the declining student performance. The factors identified included: poor school leadership, low teacher quality, lack of parental support and student laxity. These factors, as eluded by Aurora (2016) affect the learners' academic performance. The strategies outlined in the report included: biannual training for teachers, introduction of learner centered approach of learning, devising sophisticated means of collecting school fees, regular involvement of parents in student academics and inclusion of all stakeholders in decision making. The researchers however failed to link the head teachers to the low academic performance in schools, against the factors identified.

Problem Definition

A careful review of the education system in Kenya reveals that quality measures have been set by the government to guide and ensure that quality is applied in different institutions of learning (MoE, 2015). Such measures include: employment of more teachers to reduce their ratios to those of students, issuance of standardized teaching materials for uniformity, putting in place school administration and establishing quality standards and Quality Assurance Office at County Education Headquarters to check and guide on the quality of education. However, as Kimani (2011) observes, laxity among head teachers has seen quality being compromised in secondary school education, as evidenced by poor performance in national examination results each year in most secondary schools in Baringo North. Nevertheless, this research underestimated the significance of other factors affecting academic achievements including resource distribution by the government.

Purpose and Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of head teachers towards enhancing academic performance in secondary schools in Baringo North sub County. The specific objective was to assess the strategies laid by head teachers towards improved academic performance in secondary schools in Baringo North Sub-county.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was utilized. The major consideration in survey research is to obtain data that can allow accurate description of situations. The units of analysis for this research were 30 public secondary schools in Baringo North sub-County. The study targeted head teachers who were the main respondents and teachers who provided supplementary information. This population was included in the study because it is directly involved in the curriculum implementation process which is a key factor in the provision of quality education in secondary schools. Mechanisms and strategies on how the curriculum and other systems are implemented affect ultimate students' performance in national examinations.

Considering the small population and effort towards minimizing sampling errors, all the 30 secondary schools and respective head teachers were included in the study. Four teachers from each school were purposively selected. This included the director of studies, guidance and counseling teacher, senior teacher and the teacher in charge of quality assurance within the school. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews whose reliability was assessed using the test-retest method. Validity was tested basing on the constructs and contents of the questionnaire. This was done with the assistance of research experts in the Department of Education at Kenya Methodist University.

Quantitative data obtained from closed ended questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, mode and percentages. Thematic approach was applied in analyzing qualitative data obtained from interviews and open-ended questions of questionnaires. A convergent design was used in combining and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative information.

3. Results and Discussion

Return Rate of questionnaires

Out of the 120 questionnaires that were administered to the teachers, the researcher managed to collect 80. This constituted a questionnaire return rate of 67%. All the questionnaires administered to the thirty head teachers of all the secondary schools were received and analyzed. However, the researcher managed to interview only eight of the head teachers due to tight schedules for the head teachers, though; this did not affect the findings significantly because most of the answers received from interviewees were largely found to propagate common idea. Majority (21, 70%) of head teachers concurred that it is them who facilitate the funding of projects that are identified by teachers and the PTA and further noted that little could be achieved without strong collaboration between the key stakeholders. From the interviews, other

contributions made by the head teachers for the benefit of the schools included time, revision materials, capacity building, mentorship and students' motivation programs. A summary of these responses is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Teachers' responses on head teachers' strategies

	Involvement in student academic work	Strategies to support needy students	Availability of h/trs in school	Motivation	Capacity building
Very high	3(4%)	1(1%)	0	1(1%)	2(3%)
High	12(15%)	10(13%)	6(8%)	7(9%)	7(9%)
Average	40(50%)	11(14%)	40(50%)	57(46%)	20(25%)
Not sure	20(25%)	48(60%)	34(43%)	5(6%)	1(1%)
Poor	5(6%)	10(13%)	0	10(13%)	50(63%)
Total	80	80	80	80	80

Teacher's responses showed that head teachers were less involved in students' academic work; 41 (52%) explained that the administration directed all its' energy to payment of fees, disciplinary issues and enrollments. When asked about the strategies put in place by head teachers to support needy and bright students, 48 (60%) of the teachers were not sure if a suggested listed of such programs existed in the schools. As a result of these, education quality was on the decline in the sub-county. The responses in Table 1 revealed that heads of county schools always availed themselves to fully support and run school agendas and also facilitate immediate replacement of teachers who leave the schools from time to time.

According to 46 (58%) teachers, resource contributions by school management was average, this especially emerged in the sub-county schools. The main reason for this was attributed to the introduction of free secondary education (FSE) fund with some parents having the notion that everything meant for the schools' operations were being provided for by the government. When interviewed for to shed more light on this matter, the head teachers suggested that the government should sensitize the parents on their roles since most of them believed that education was completely free which is contrary to what Cheema & Fuller (2017, p 222) said,

"The chief reason why dropout rates are relatively high in the lower income groups is that pupils cannot afford to remain in school. Even where schools are free, there are usually uniform and textbooks costs".

On teachers' motivation, 25 (83%) of the head teacher respondents believed that there was high likelihood of improving education quality while 2 (3%) were not sure about the influence of teacher motivation on the quality of education. Although most head teachers believed in teacher motivation, very few committed themselves to the same and this was affecting performance negatively. In county schools, students, teaching and non-teaching staff are financially motivated where gifts such as laptops, touch screen phones and cash are given to those teachers and students who perform well in national examinations. Although the link between teachers' incentives and student achievement is highly debated in both public and education forums, there are evidences from researches such as Kaggwa (2003) and Gu & Johansson (2013) which indicates that students' performance improves when teachers are

rewarded for good performance. In his research of Empowering teachers to Perform, Simatwa (2013) found out that motivation and incentives of teachers are associated with high levels of students' performance in national examinations. It was also established that various professionals do visit those schools to give motivational talks and advice to students on real life issues.

Interview information gathered from head teachers indicated that some county schools were also having benchmarking programs to encourage students on possibilities of improving their performances. However, most sub county schools seemed to be lacking profound programs on the same; and could be the reasons why most schools in Baringo North Su-county continued to perform poorly in the region. Cheema and Fuller (2017), allude to this saying that highly motivated teachers are effective in their work and this would be manifested in students' performance in national exams.

From the interviews conducted with the head teachers, it was evident that their operations within the school were closely linked with the parents. Table 2 provides head teachers' responses on the performance of parents' teachers association (PTA).

Table 2: Head teachers' response on PTA performance

Rating	Coordination of class meetings	Programs to help needy students	Formulating and implementing policies	Meeting attendance
More vibrant	2(7%)	1(1%)	8(24%)	20(67%)
Vibrant	6(20%)	12(40%)	15(50%)	5(18%)
Less vibrant	12(40%)	16(52%)	6(20%)	5(18%)
Not sure	10(33%)	1(15%)	1(1%)	0
Total	30(100%)	30(100%)	30(100%)	30(100%)

When asked how PTA had contributed towards provision of quality education, head teacher HDT06 stated that *'PTA is like the heartbeat of quality education.'*

Of the head teachers interviewed, 5 (63%) agreed that a strong PTA helps in the co-ordination of class meetings between teachers and parents and encourages payment of school fees to enable schools to acquire basic materials needed for learning. According to the head teachers, PTA usually comes up with programs to help weak students improve and come up with plans to curb students' indiscipline. Head teacher HDT13 reiterated that the PTA members also mobilize and sensitize parents to participate on their children's education, especially on issues about academic performance and encourage school heads to report on progress of teaching and syllabus coverage at appropriate times. These sentiments agree with those of Rubinstein and McCarthy (2014) who cited some of the roles performed by PTAs as, promoting communication, involving parents in decision-making, fund raising, and petitioning the government on behalf of the school. As mentioned earlier in this study about parental involvement boosting students' academic achievement, research has revealed that parents are willing to partake school activities only with the directive of the school leaders (Ojiambo, 2014).

According to 16 (67%) of the sub-county school head teachers, PTAs are less vibrant and do very little in

implementing or formulating policies geared towards improving quality of performance in national examinations. In fact, in 14 (60%) of these schools, the PTA members expected the head teacher to know everything and provide solutions to all the problems bedeviling the school, and that whatever the head teacher said was unquestionable and the parents' representatives hardly contribute during meetings.

The head teachers further pointed out that many PTAs were not completing the four-year cycle owing to drop out of their children due to indiscipline related issues or inability to clear the school fees. Many parents were also less concerned with the performance of their children in sub-county secondary schools especially the continuous assessment tests. Head teacher HDT13 also observed that some board of management (BOM) members expected favors, such as not paying or delaying school fees for their children in school, and also expected to be adequately remunerated. It is clear from the foregoing findings that the academic performance is also influenced by the contribution of PTA. Rubinstein and McCarthy (2014) allude to this saying that the teacher-parent association is so important that it even influences the academic position of a learning institution. Ibrahim, Arshad and Salleh (2017) too support this when they talk about parental involvement bearing academic fruits.

The head teachers were also asked to rate how their various roles could improve performance in secondary schools in the sub county. Some of the roles that were investigated included the provision of financial assistance, development of school's infrastructure, motivation of teachers, monitoring and evaluation of school projects. Maintaining of discipline and development of strategy to support needy and bright students in the secondary school were also investigated among others. On financial provision, 25 (83.5%) of the respondents highly believed that provision of financial assistance and school infrastructure by the management was likely to improve quality of education while 2 (3%) of the respondents believed it would hardly affect the quality of education as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Impact of head teachers' roles on the quality of education

	Financial assistance	Improving school infrastructure	Evaluation of school projects	Motivation	Promotion of good relations with community
Very high	11(37%)	12(40%)	16(53%)	6(20%)	20(67%)
High	14(47%)	7(23%)	10(33%)	10(33%)	7(23%)
Low	4(13%)	5(17%)	2(7%)	9(30%)	2(7%)
Very low	1(1%)	6(20%)	2(7%)	5(17%)	1(1%)
Total	30	30	30	30	30

On whether proper monitoring and implementation of school projects by head teachers could result to improved academic performances, 26 (86%) of the head teachers concurred while 4 (13%) of the respondents, ranked it low. This finding agrees with Bornmann and Daniel (2009) who mention that the institution's development projects determine outcome of education. Good understanding and rapport between parents and teachers was considered by 27 (90%) of the respondents to be highly contributing towards improved educational achievement in secondary school,

while, 3 (8%) of the respondents were not sure about its contribution towards improving academic performance in secondary schools in Baringo sub-county.

The above responses implied that head teachers did little to improve on the above factors. Although most believed that they impacted positively on the learner's academic achievements, the students' performance in national exams in the sub-county was still on the decline.

Strict maintenance of discipline was considered to be a factor for improving academic performance by 24 (81%) of the respondents, while about 1 (4%) of the respondents was not sure or felt that it would have little impact on the quality of examination results in secondary schools. This shows that discipline is paramount for a school to improve, as Suri (2015, p. 17) denotes that lack of discipline amongst students and staff is advance failure.

On the promotion of good co-existence between schools and community by head teachers, 27 (90%) of the teachers felt that it could improve the quality of results, while 1 (4%) of the respondents was not sure of its effects. These findings imply that the head teachers play a significant role in improving the quality of education through promotion of good school-community relations, maintaining student discipline, financial assistance and motivation. This agrees with Ojiambo (2014) who noted how schools and families have worked together to give learners quality performances since the start of formal learning. The study by Ibrahim, Arshad and Salleh (2017) show that parental school involvement consists of activities like volunteering at school, communicating with teachers and other school personnel, assisting in academic activities at home and in attending school events.

The responses collected from open ended questions were categorized into the following themes that included: sensitization of parents, strategies to support needy students, bridging school-community ties, motivation and provision of financial support. Majority 65 (81%) of the respondents felt that head teachers' role of sensitization and mobilization of parents on enrolment, attendance and attention of their children in schools would lead to improved academic performance while only 2 (2%) of the respondents did not concur with this view. The head teachers' role in developing strategies to support needy and bright students in the school as a way of improving academic performance was supported by 70 (87%) of the respondents while 4 (4%) of the respondents were either not sure or believed that it would hardly impact on academic results. The head teachers, especially those of the county schools were fully involved in the listed activities and this correlates highly with their improved performance in KCSE examinations unlike the sub-county schools. This is evidenced in a research by Mestry (2017) who found that one sure way for principals to yield good performance, was to fully take charge of every activity touching on the teacher and learner.

In an interview, head teachers were asked on what they thought parents could do to improve academic performance in secondary schools in Baringo sub county. Their responses were categorized into three themes: attitude change,

disciplinary issues and material support for students. They cited change of attitude among parents, teachers and students as one of the issues that should be considered. They observed that most parents and the community at large laid more emphasis on economic activities as opposed to children's education and therefore, the society should be taught on the benefits of education for them to support efforts geared towards improving academic standards. They also felt that parents should take charge of their children in terms of discipline and supporting education improvement strategies like academic trips.

4. Conclusion

This study concluded that head teachers are central in the enhancement of student academic qualifications. They provide leadership and strategic direction. They help in coordinating and facilitating the provision of the necessary facilities, putting up measures that encourage prompt payment of school fees to enable schools to acquire basic materials needed for quality learning. The head teacher further comes up with specialized programs aimed at helping weak students improve their performance and institute mechanisms that help to curb students' indiscipline. Capacity building and mentorship programs for teachers impart new skill to teachers. Resource mobilization especially in the sub county secondary schools is at average, as compared to the county schools. This has led to dismal performance in Baringo sub county schools due to lack of requisite facilities and resources.

5. Future Scope

Unlike other studies, this study impacts on practice and policy on strategies geared towards learner academic improvement. It points out vital need for professionalism by the head teacher and sensitization on their role. However, the study has undermined other factors affecting academic performance. From the research findings, the researcher established a close link between the head teacher's role in improving academic achievement and the PTA. There is therefore need to study the role played by the PTA towards improved academic standards in Kenya.

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