

Effects of the Principals' Decision Making in the Management of Private Secondary Schools in Kisumu District, Kenya

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i4/1013>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i4/1013

Published Online: 24 December 2014

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the level of high school principals decision making in the management of sponsored schools. Objective of the article was to determine the effectiveness of principals' decision making in the management of church sponsored secondary schools in Kisumu District, Kenya. The research question was; how does the principals' decision making affect the management of private secondary schools Kisumu District, Kenya? The study design was survey. The study population included all the principals, in the 21 private high schools. Purposive sampling was employed in the study. Data was collected by use of interview schedule and questionnaires. Four of the schools were used in pilot study to act as pre-test to the instruments of data collection to ensure their reliability. Face validity of the instruments was determined by three experts in the department of Educational Management and Policy Studies of Moi University. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics in form of frequency counts, percentages. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 18) software was used for data analysis. Findings revealed that principals were involved in decision making but most of their contributions were controlled by the sponsors. It was recommended that the principals should be more empowered in decision making so as to assist the BOG and sponsors effectively. It was also recommended that the sponsors, PTA and BOG should be trained in areas of high schools financial management, budgeting, procurement and security so enable them effectively take part in the smooth running and control of the schools.

Keywords: Kenya, Sponsors, Principals, Decision making, Private, Schools Management

Introduction

The Principals work under the government, and are answerable to the BOGs and the Ministry of Education as they make pertinent school decisions. They are in the first level of management as supervisors (Yambo, 2012). School management has run a long race over the

past years all over the world. In Kenya, the Education Act (1968), Cap 211 laws of Kenya, section 10, gave rise to the establishment of Board of Governors (BOG) for all private, maintained or assisted schools, other than a primary school which have School Management Committees (SMCs). Therefore, the Act in essence paved the way for the establishment of school boards for secondary schools, teacher colleges, polytechnics, institutions of technology, where the principals are the secretaries. Principals are mandated to manage private secondary schools on behalf of the BOGs. All high school principals decision making effort in schools lead to one goal, summative evaluation which is towards better performance in national examinations. Every year there are candidates taking their National examination. Examinations results are used in decision making and determining who is going to which grade. Tanner and Tanner (1975) support this and added that in the crucial formative years of the public high school, admission to high school was by examination. Secondary school principals are experienced teachers and principals are selected on the basis of their seniority in teaching and school management (Mulkeen, 2005). They manage at least three different aspects of school life including academics, finances and general administration. They are part of the BOGs and have an influence on the appointment of members of the BOG members in consultation with the sponsors (Yambo, 2012). Studies done by Kindiki (2009), indicated that many school principals often emphasize the selection of less educated BOG members who will rarely question their ineptitude in running of school. Thus, rather than selecting more qualified BOG members they end up selecting close relatives or less qualified and knowledgeable members of the BOG. This anomaly confirms the Kenyan report of task force of student unrest in schools which pointed out the poor educational background of BOGs as a factor towards the unrest (MOEST, 2001). Age and experience is also mentioned as another challenge considered alongside academic qualifications that face members of the BOGs (Kindiki, 2009). This affects principals' decision making and management of private schools where some churches are managers of such schools (Wachira and Kigotho, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Principals as the secretaries to the schools board of management have specific roles that they should perform as spelt out by the M.O.E despite the challenges they face. Various commissions like Gachahi Report (1976); Kamuge Report (1988); Koech Report (1999) had recognized their roles. A lot of researches have been done on various areas pertaining to improvement of private secondary schools in Kisumu District. Various issues as academic performance, discipline, girl child education among others, have been captured but no proper decision has been made in the areas of challenges facing school management in schools in Kisumu district despite the government efforts to empower principals. It is for this reason that the study sought to find out challenges faced by high school principals' in decision making in the management of private secondary schools and make recommendations to enhance the improvement of the secondary schools management in Kisumu District.

Effects of the Principals' Decision Making in the Management of Private Secondary Schools

Decisions made in school management are various and are made at different levels. Studies done by Cole (2004) contend that decisions can range from those of a vital, once-for-all nature to those of a routine and relatively trivial nature. They can be immediate in their effect or they can be delayed. High school principals Due to rapid population growth in Kenya, public secondary schools only cannot contain the ever increasing number of students. According to MOEST (1988) the contributions of private secondary schools are recognized. The Teachers

Service Commission (TSC) has a uniform guideline for both public and private school principals. Their duties particularly on decision making are crucial in schools management. Supervision as one of their duties is imperative for their decision making. This is rightly pointed out by Rue (1993) when he defined supervision as the first level of management in the organization and is concern with encouraging the members of a work unit to contribute positively toward accomplishing the organizational goals and objective. In Kenya, The Education Act (1968), cap 211 laws of Kenya, section 10, gave rise to the establishment of private schools and BOGs for any maintained or assisted schools, other than a primary school managed and maintained by a local authority. While some principals are effective in decision making and executing their duties as leaders, some are ineffective. The effective ones have a characteristic as it is attributed by Hughes (1993) that the glue that hold together the myriad actions and decisions of highly effective principals is the goal that they and their staff have developed for their schools and sense of what their schools need to look like and to do in order to accomplish those goals.

Improving poor performance or maintaining excellent ones is the major task of an instructional leader. The principal have to employ and manifest characteristic which will help them achieve their intended objectives. The type of leadership style he uses matters immensely for it influences the kind of decisions made. Richardson (1995) rightly pointed out that the principal role must change from a dictator to a leader of leaders. As part of decision making team, the principal will find it necessary to facilitate the implementation process. Providing support for the teachers while they adjust to role changes and guiding the school through the process of implementation will be only two of the many new roles of the principal assume. Decisions which are made collectively in a team spirit are normally implemented because all members share the responsibility. The opposite is likely to fail as it is suggested. Forcing teachers to use new skills that make them uncomfortable may create a challenge to the principal's leadership ability. A principal of a school does not work in isolation. A research on leadership (Hart, 1996), particularly leaders in professional group work with highly educated and independent adults affirms that successful leaders draw on the knowledge and skill of all group members and functions interactively. This shows that influence is reciprocal. Sometimes the people have solution to problems and situations. Being a principal is very demanding indeed. According to Hughes (1993) to be a principal is to be a generalist. Although many principals have expertise in certain areas, most principalship does not require a principal to be curriculum specialist, an assessment expert or a financial wizard. The level of the school, its size, and community expectations have an impact on the principals role and decision making, but on the whole the nature of the job requires a generalist. As the leader and overseer of the school activities, the principal helps in designing curriculum, but not as their major curriculum responsibility. Their function is the management of the curriculum and making necessary decisions thereof that will make eventual implementation.

It has been noted that, traditional clerical and administration responsibilities as well as organizational structures of schools influenced the evolution of the role the school principal today; however, the principal's job is more than just an outgrowth of history. The principalship traces its heritage to various antecedents, but it is not limited to them. Besides the broad historical factors influencing the role of the principal, the school in which you become a principal also has a history of principals; this history brings with it sets of expectations and beliefs about your leadership role. Many individuals inside and outside your school will actively attempt to shape your administrative role. As a principal, you will need to

combine requirements of the job itself (functional task and duties) with your personal skills, competencies and characteristics with the particular social settings (Hart, 1996).

The role and the influence of the principal decision making has been a centre of concern and interest for long. A report from U.S senate (1979) revealed that if a school is vibrant innovative, child centered place in teaching; if students are performing to the best of their ability, one almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success. It is therefore important to underscore that principals orchestrate school activities. School principals are important social actors in education today. As teachers, principals, students, school boards, parents and community members established over time that would do what in schools, the formal leadership role of the principal emerged. Social and cultural norms institutionalized practices and board policies all contributed to the legitimating of the principal as the school's formal leader. This view of placing the principal at the vortex is supported by Hart (1996) as quoted in Boyer, (1985):

"In school where achievement was high Invariably the Principal made the difference." p. 191.

For this to be realized, the principals must be engaged in daily, weekly, and annual behavior that affects the successful student outcome or ultimate performance especially in decisions they make in schools. Donaldson (1991) cited from Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Schein (1989), argues that; what the principal does him or herself has great consequences for the institution on both practical and symbolic planes. A function description of principal's activities then, depicts the professional expertise of the person and value structure he or she brings to the work. Hence, the principal's functions are defined in terms of other people and the facilitation of their success Hart (1996) continues to elaborate that school principals play vitally important role in the creation and nurture of successful teaching and learning environments. The job responsibilities, functional tasks, competencies required to be an effective principal suggests however real, superhuman, qualification for practicing principals. In fact, none is superhuman. Understanding of just what it is that effective principals do and how and why they spend their time in particular ways to bring about desired educational outcome is crucial to each new principal who is thinking about the preparation for the principalship.

Results and Discussion

The demographic information of the principals was based on their gender, highest level of education, age and the sponsor. Data on the gender of principals indicated that 13 (63.3%) were males while 8 (36.7%) were female. These data shows that there was gender disparity in terms of gender representation in the schools. The male principals are more than female in Kisumu District.

When high school principals were asked to indicate their roles in decision making, they responded as presented in table 1.

Table 1

High School Principals

Roles of High School Principals in Decision Making	F	%
To implement what the BOG has recommended	06	28.5
To make short term strategic decisions	03	14.3
To make operating and administrative decisions	05	23.8
Organize orientation/induction for newly employed teachers	04	19.1
Controlling approved school budget	03	14.3
Total	21	100.0

Findings indicated that their roles in school decision making included implementation of what the BOG/PTA has recommended, making short term strategic decisions, making operating and administrative decisions, Organizing orientation/induction for newly employed teachers and controlling approved school budgets. Data on how long they had served as principals indicated that most of them had served for more than five years. These findings show that the principals had a wide range of experience in decision making and hence were able to provide information of the challenges they faced in the management of schools. The high school principals were asked to indicate whether they had attended in-service course on the current emerging issue in schools management. This fact is supported by Yambo (2012) when he posited that the principals must be engaged in daily, weekly, and annual behavior that affects the successful student outcome or ultimate performance especially in decisions they make in schools. Data showed that 14 (66.6%) had attended a training on the on the current emerging issues on school management. They added that the in-service courses they had attended had made they perform in decision making duties better.

Principals were further asked to indicate what common challenges that they faced which hampers implementation of decisions made. They responded:

Table 2

Challenges Principals Face Which Hampers Implementation of Decisions Made.

Challenges Principals face	F	%
Lack of finance	11	52.3
Lack of government support	2	09.5
Interference from sponsors and politicians	4	19.1
Influence from the community	4	19.1
Total	21	100.0

Findings from the data showed that financial challenge was the major challenge hampering implementation of decisions made. This accounts for 52.3 percent. This challenge equally gives a lot stress to the principals. Studies done in Africa by Nhudu (2000) on 95 Zimbabwean experienced principals found that 29.03 percent rated their job stress as either very stressful or extremely stressful. Similarly, Yambo (2014) also found that 41.3 percent of school administrators rated their work as either very stressful or extremely stressful and most of it comes from general school routine management especially in finance.

Asked to indicate the possible solutions, they responded as presented in table 3.

Table 3

High School Principals' Possible Solutions on The Challenges Hampering Implementation of Decisions Made

Possible solutions to challenges	F	%
Government to re-examine education policies	3	14.3
Conflicts of interests of PTA/BOG members	2	09.5
Civic Education for community and all staff	5	23.8
Encouraging sponsors to support their schools	4	19.1
Viable income generating activities (IGAs)	7	33.3
Total	21	100.0

Data suggested that majority as private schools, would recommend that there should be vibrant and viable income generating activities (IGAs) in schools as indicated by 7 (33.3%). This would help in supplementing the schools financial deficits.

The high school principals were asked to indicate what challenges that they faced as principals which sometimes require urgent their decisions. They responded as indicated in table 4.

Table 4

Challenges That Require Urgent Decision Making In Schools

challenges that require urgent decision	F	%
School debts from suppliers	10	47.6
Poor academic performance	7	33.3
Indiscipline of students/staff in school	4	19.1
Total	21	100.0

The high school principals responded that they experience various difficulties in settling school debts from the school clientele and suppliers. This accounted for 47.6 percent as an area that requires urgent attention in decision making in school. According to Yambo et al (2012) in Kenya, most major decisions and power rests with the Board of Governors (BOG) leaving little power and authority with the principal to make independent decision. Sometimes dealing with members of the community proves to be difficult particularly when handling delicate matters like procurement and school debtors and creditors. Richardson (1995) rightly pointed out that the principals' role must change from a dictator to a leader of leaders for they deal with various groups of people.

For principals to operate well in their schools whether public or private they need sound education policies. There are organizational policies in every organization and institution which according to Sagimo (2002), are general statements which are intended to guide the actions of a firm's personnel, tell statements of understanding aimed at guiding or channeling thinking within a given organization. Policies define or delimit an idea within which to operate. They also assist in pre deciding issues and therefore reduce repeated analysis of any issue (Yambo, 2014).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the high school principals of private schools should be involved in decision making by the BOG/PTA. It was also recommended that the BOG and the PTA should be trained in areas of secondary schools management so that they can effectively take part in the running of the schools. More civic education should be given to the sponsors, members of the community on matters relating to education. The study recommended that the education stakeholders should work together with principals to come up with meaningful income generating activities to supplement merger school financial resources. Principals also to monitor financial matters in the school as use as budgeted.

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