

Factors Influencing Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools: A Survey of Trans Nzoia East Sub County Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of study carried out an analysis of strategies influencing academic performance in public secondary schools in Trans Nzoia East Sub County Trans Nzoia County Kenya. The main objectives were: establish the effect of motivational strategies on academic performance of public secondary schools; to establish the influence of principals' strategy on work environment on students' performance and examine the instructional leadership practices on academic performance in public secondary schools in Trans Nzoia East Sub County. The study was theorized by effective schools' model theory by Lezotte (2001). The target population of the study were all principals and head of departments in the public secondary schools in the sub county. The study population comprised of all public schools in the sub county, all principals, and heads of departments. The sample was chosen using census technique as all targeted units were respondents. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the field. Simple descriptive statistics were used as they had an advantage over more complex statistics since they could easily be understood especially when making results known by a variety of readers. The coded data was processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. Based on the findings of the study,

it was concluded that all schools employed strategies that were aimed at enhancing academic improvement. It was also concluded that there were not difference on strategies used in well performing schools and poor performing schools. The study further concluded that improvement on academic performance did not depend on the use of improvement strategy since schools that performed well and those that performed poorly claimed to employ the same strategies in the same way. In the light of the research findings the researcher to made the following recommendations: schools must seek to establish factors that lead to poor academic performance and hence find ways of addressing such factors; the government should be involved in the running of schools by providing the necessary resources and materials that would enhance improvement of academic performance; schools that deteriorate every year should evaluate all aspects of learning to establish the root cause of the same hence find ways of solving the problem.

Keywords: Academic performance, Effective school, Strategy, Motivation

1.2 Introduction

Human capital is a key determinant of economic growth and emerging evidence indicates that it is also associated with a wide range of non-economic benefits such as better health and well-being. Investment in human capital, and by implication in education, has thus moved to the centre stage in solutions to promote economic prosperity, fuller employment and social cohesion. As a result, education is increasingly considered an investment in the collective future of societies and nations, rather than simply in the future success of individual (OECD, 2000). It is important to note that the development of education reiterates the right of every Kenyan to education in order to be equipped with appropriate skills to enhance the realization of self-reliance and work actively towards the maintenance and development of their society (Aluko, 2006). In the same vein, Lewin and Coillods (2001) contend that there is no question that educating the citizenry pays off in benefits to the nation as a whole. Fullan (2007) defines school as a community of active people where teachers in a classroom environment convey formal education to learners and therefore, school facilitates education. He further argues that, schools, whether government aided or private sponsored, have stakeholders who undertake various activities. In light of this, students' academic performance has been a key issue in education with many believing that the education programmes are not well interpreted in schools; thus resulting in poor academic performance. This has resulted into finger pointing among stake holders. However, the fact of the matter is that something should be done to improve the current situation.

Many governments in both the developed and developing countries allocate much of their resources to education (UNESCO, 2005). This has resulted to considerable growth of educational activities world over. To date, education is one of the largest sectors in most countries (UNESCO, 2005). Kenya is no exception to this trend of increasing allocation of resources towards education. For the investment in education to bear fruits, students are expected to progress from one level of education to the next. However, this progression can be hampered by poor academic performance at national examinations. Otieno (2002) argues that examinations tell children how they are succeeding or failing. He contends that education is very important and failure in the national examination especially at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) spells doom for the students whose life becomes uncertain and full of despair. Examination performance determines whether the students will proceed to university or to other tertiary institutions. Therefore, a student's life is determined by academic performance in the national examinations.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The school principal is the most important person in a school setting. As the chief executive of a school, he/she is charged with the responsibility of managing the day today affairs of the institution, and ensuring that all members of the school community are moving in the right direction. A prime task of school heads is to exercise leadership of the kind that results in a shared vision of the directions to be pursued by the school, and to manage change in ways that ensure that the school is successful in realizing the vision. In a world of increasingly rapid change, what is the terra firma on which a robust concept of the principals as a leader and manager of change can be built? Sullivan and Glanz (2000) have proposed that the profession should adopt school improvement as its centre of gravity. This means that the head teacher, in making school-related decisions, should always have school improvement in mind. This research therefore will seek to find out if financial funding in public school has an impact on access and retention in Trans Nzoia East Sub County, Trans Nzoia County.

1.4 Literature Review

Motivational Strategies

Motivation is a process that begins with a deficiency that is psychological or a drive aimed at satisfying a goal (Okumbe, 1998). So it can be said that motivation is made up of needs (deficiencies) that bring up drives (motives) that then assist in acquiring the incentives (goals). Motives are action-oriented while incentives do isolate a need. To Marques (2010) motivation can be said to be what is required for people to perform better in any activity. Every educator needs to be concerned about motivation. It is a quality that students, teachers, parents and members of the community must have if education system is to prepare young people adequately for the challenges and demands of the coming century.

Today academic performance continues to be understood as a precise proxy for aptitude and is a core determinant of career paths and status performance even though some doubt its value (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2010)

Academic performance is vital to understanding the development of today's well known psychometric "tool": the intelligence test. Because academic performance was thought to mirror individual differences in ability, it became the top criterion for intelligence tests (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2006). Alfred Binnet(1857-1911) developed the pioneer intelligence test to identify children who were challenged by the school curriculum and their academic performance. Future ability tests continued to be validated by educational performance as accurate measures of intelligence. Indeed if an intelligence test failed to account for individual differences it was not regarded as a meaningful measure of intellectual capacity (Bolton 1892). The association between cognitive ability and academic performance persists across educational levels although it tends to decrease in more advanced academic settings due to differential range restrictions. To concur with this research recently has assessed the degree to which individual differences in academic performance can be explained by personality factors.

Although intelligence is a vital predictor of academic success, recent research has shown that personality dispositions mostly traits assessing typical individual levels of persistence and hard work account for substantial amounts of variance in academic performance (O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). For instance, (Chamorro-Premuzic,2003) discovered that personality traits accounted for four times as much variance in exam results of elite college students than intelligence. Psychologists have noted that excessive use of extrinsic form of motivation such as praise and rewards may lead to resentment, limitation of transfer, may cause dependency

on teachers, the undermining of intrinsic motivation and viewing learning as a means to an end (Covington 2000) They suggest that to limit the negative effects of extrinsic forms of rewards teachers should use extrinsic forms of reward only when correct or desired responses occur

What constitutes academic motivation in students? The bottom line indicator is sustained task management leading to improvement in academic skills. The very functional view of motivation has split psychologists into two different camps. The cognitivists (Ryan& Deci 2000) distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on the basis of whether the driving force of an action originates inside or outside of an individual. They view intrinsically motivated behaviour as self-determined and extrinsically motivated behaviour as shape by external consequences.

Work environment

An effective principal requires a number of competencies. Leithwood et al. (2004) outline three sets of core leadership practices. The first is developing people and enabling teachers and other staff to do their jobs effectively, offering intellectual support and stimulation to improve the work, and providing models of practice and support. The second is setting directions for the organization developing shared goals, monitoring organizational performance and promoting effective communication. Lastly is redesigning the organization such as creating a productive school culture, modifying organizational structures that undermine the work, and building collaborative processes. Brueckners and Burton (2005) highlighted the huge impact that enabling environment has on teacher morale and job satisfaction and thus their classroom performance. The key factors in the study were workload (number of pupils and working hours), general classroom conditions, collegial and management support, location, living arrangements and distance to work. In countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone and Zambia, it is noticeable that the large majority of teachers in rural areas indicate that working conditions are 'poor' and 'very poor'. While concerted efforts are being made to improve working conditions, the daily challenge for most teachers remains daunting (Brueckners & Burton, 2004).

Effective school leadership is mainly related to the competency, commitment and performance of the head teacher. Performances are actions, products or processes that can be specified and assessed, and which rely on knowledge, abilities and skills for delivery and which have an appropriate weighting among the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains for the purpose. It is the accomplishment of work assignments or responsibilities and contributions to the organizational goals, including behavior and professional demeanor (actions and manner of performance) as demonstrated by the employee's approach to completing work assignments. Teachers' working conditions affect their ability to provide quality education. As mentioned above, the condition of infrastructure, availability of textbooks and learning materials and class sizes all influence the teacher's experience as an educator. Teachers' remuneration also matters. In many countries, teacher salaries have declined in recent years, and teachers are not always paid on time. Low and late remuneration may lead teachers to take on another job, which hurts student learning. Effective teachers are highly committed and care about their students (Craig, Kraft, and Du Plessis, 1998); they need supportive working conditions to maintain these positive attitudes.

Instructional leadership practices

Schools require good leaders to organize the process of teaching and learning to ensure that the mission of the school is achieved (Lydia & Nasongo, 2009). The core role of the

instructional leader is to ensure the performance of the established mission through creating a good environment for the schools (Lezotte, 2001). A Kenyan study by Musungu and Nasongo (2008) on the instructional leadership role of secondary school principals revealed that they supervised teachers' work by inspecting records such as schemes of work, lesson books, records of work covered, class attendance records, and clock in/clock out book.

This research established that principals' frequency of internal supervision contributed towards better performance. This involved proper tuition and revision, thorough supervision of teachers and pupils' work, proper testing policy, syllabus coverage, teacher induction courses and team building. Similar findings have emerged from various Kenyan studies, all which reveal that poor performance in secondary school examinations is a function of poor administration and leadership practices (Ackers & Hardman, 2001; Githua & Nyabwa, 2008). The role of instructional leader is a relatively new concept that emerged in the early 1980s, influenced largely by research that found effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of leadership in this area (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982). In the first half of the 1990s, attention to instructional leadership seemed to waver, displaced by discussions of school-based management and facilitative leadership (Lashway, 2002). Recently, however, instructional leadership has made a comeback with increasing importance placed on academic standards and the need for schools to be accountable.

Instructional leadership has been expanded to include deeper involvement in the core business of schooling, which is teaching and learning. As emphasis shifts from teaching to learning, some have proposed the term "learning leader" over "instructional leader" (DuFour, 2002). Blase & Blase (2000) cite specific behaviors of instructional leadership, such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities, and giving praise for effective teaching. Instructional Leader Inherent in the concept of instructional leadership is the notion that learning should be given top priority while everything else revolves around the enhancement of learning. Instructional leaders need to know what is going on in the classroom. Without this knowledge, they are unable to appreciate some of the problems teachers and students encounter. That is why, on any given day, teachers and students will see me walking the halls, praising student work, and acknowledging what teachers are doing. Instructional leaders need to work closely with students, developing teaching techniques and methods as a means for understanding teacher perspectives and for establishing a base on which to make curricular decisions.

Skills and the Instructional Leader The principal must possess certain skills to carry out the tasks of an instructional leader: interpersonal skills; planning skills; instructional observation skills; and research and evaluation skills (Lashway, 2002). According to Zepeda (2004), such features include: Commitment to success for all; flexibility and responsiveness; Shared vision; climate of challenging and stimulating teaching; strong and fair disciplinary climate. According to Lamb (2007), the most effective programmes were: foster connectedness; increasing the trust placed in students; Provide tasks with immediate tangible benefits; Make spaces within schools and curricula for diverse student needs. Principals in schools achieving high retention rates and good performance, Socias, Dunn, Parrish, Muraki and Woods (2007) were clear that these implementations should not be ad hoc.

Professional development can help overcome shortcomings that may have been part of teachers' pre-service education and keep teachers abreast of new knowledge and practices in the field (UNICEF, 2000). This ongoing training for teachers can have a direct impact on student performance. Dialogue and reflections with colleagues, peer and supervisor

observations and keeping journals are all effective ways for teachers to advance their knowledge (UNICEF, 2000). A programme in Kenya, the Mombasa School Improvement Project, built on this approach to professional development showed that teachers supported with in-service as well as external workshop training improved significantly in their abilities to use child-centered teaching and learning behaviours (Andersen, 2000). Monitoring and evaluation of learning should be a continuous process to ensure schools meet their targets. Each district should have mechanisms for monitoring on a continuous basis the performance of both teachers and students for remedial action early when needed (Kimbui, 2012). According to Mobegi, Ondigi and Oburu (2010), principals should take up their roles as quality assurance officers in their schools and ensure that there is adequate departmental supervision. They should introduce staff appraisal through locally designed forms to enhance standards and engage in evaluative class observation to ensure that a variety of teaching methods apart from class discussion is utilized. Principals should devise school income generating activities to alleviate current financial problems that result in student absenteeism, transfers, indiscipline and inadequate facilities. They should frequently invite quality assurance officers to advice on school affairs and community relations.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

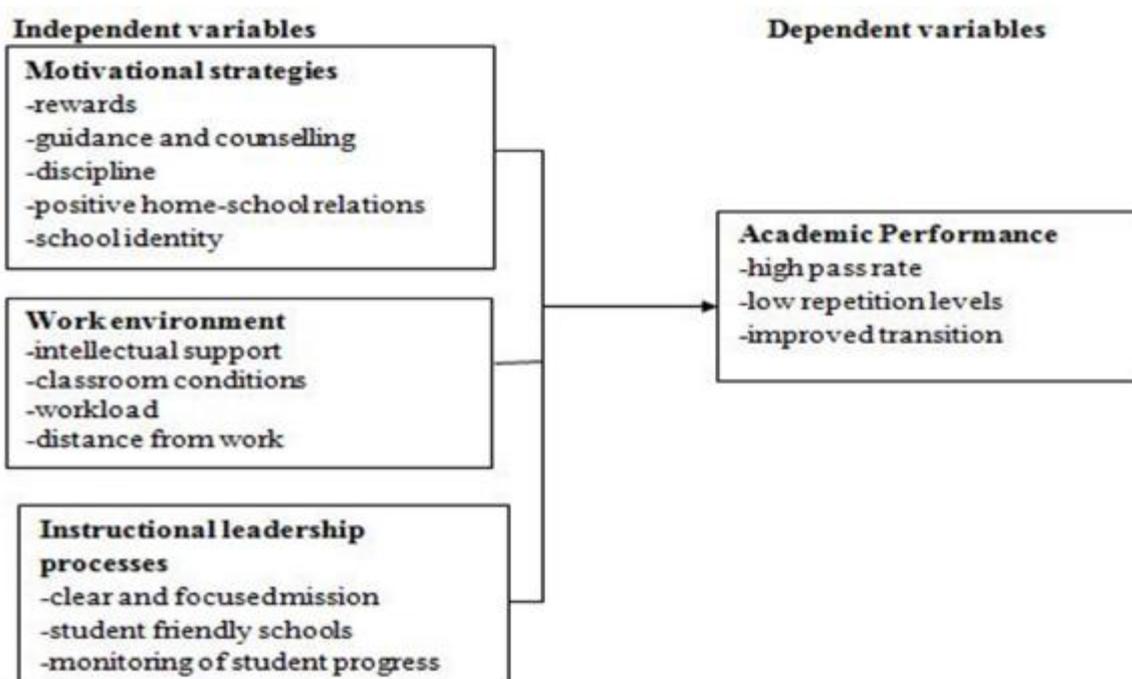


Figure 2.1 Conceptual frame work

From the conceptual framework above, the independent variables were motivational strategies used, management information systems used and instructional leadership practices. The observed variables were the academic performance was observed through high pass rate, and low repetition levels. There were other factors that might influence academic performance but, were not subject to investigation. They include: entry behaviour, intelligence quotient, parental social economic status and willingness to learn. The researcher took care to minimise these variables from interfering with the study.

1.4 Research Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research studies are those studies which are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group. This research design was used because the researcher must be able to define clearly, what he/she wants to measure and must find adequate methods for measuring it along a clear cut definition of the study population (Kothari, 2004). The role of the researcher is to report the findings as they are gathered from the field. According to Kothari (1993) the design is concerned with describing, recording, analyzing and reporting conditions that exist naturally. Descriptive studies are not only restricted to fact findings but also to formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. It is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2008).

It is a reliable design for collecting information about people's attitude, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education and social issues (Orodho and Njeru, 2003). This design involved the measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data. In this study the variables of the study were effectiveness of education bursary fund and access and retention of students in secondary schools Constituency.

1.5 Findings

Motivational Strategies

The findings reveal that majority of the principals 82% strongly agreed to recognize their teachers when they perform well, 12% agreed to recognize teachers when they perform well. 56% disagreed to use trophies as a form of motivation, 40% strongly agreed to use trophies. 66% disagreed of the schools do not provide accommodation to their teachers, 30% strongly agreed while 4% agreed. 42% disagreed to schools providing free meals as a form of motivation to their teachers, 32% strongly agreed and 26% agreed. 48% disagreed to providing financial assistance when teachers have emergencies while 32% agreed to the same. 52% attested that they did not compensate teachers for extra work done and majority of the principals used rewards and organized parties as a form of motivating their staff when they have performed well, 28% strongly agreed, and 26% agreed. This study correlated with findings of Ryan & Deci 2000, whose study distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on the basis of whether the driving force of an action originates inside or outside of an individual. They view intrinsically motivated behaviour as self-determined and extrinsically motivated behaviour as shape by external consequences. The descriptive scrutiny by the researcher revealed that some of the variables were viewed by the teachers as being positive in morale building. In fact, the most effective teachers' motivational factors included; the school provides accommodation for teachers, and recognizing teachers' performance with standard deviation of 19.47 and 15.20 respectively.

The descriptive scrutiny by the HODs revealed that some of the variables were viewed by the teachers as being negative in morale building. In fact, the most affected teachers' extrinsic motivational factors included; the school provides accommodation for teachers where 28.58 disagreed to having accommodation while 25.71 strongly agreed to the same. Payment for extra work done rated at 65.71% disagreed compared to 34.29 agreed to being paid for extra work. On financial assistance to teachers when they are in need, 77.14 disagreed to having the assistance compared to 22.86% on the same.

Other component of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation fairly boosts the morale of the teachers. The finding is supported by Aacha (2010) who found that extrinsic motivators had to a minute degree increased teachers' morale to perform. Ahiauzu, Diepruje and Onwuchekwa (2011) study on relationship between motivational factors and teachers' performance on the job findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between motivational factors and teachers performance.

Enabling Work Environment

Findings from the principals found out that majority of the resources required for efficient teaching and learning to take place were lacking. 76% disagreed that there were enough teachers, 20% strongly agreed, while 4% agreed. 64% disagreed to lack of enough classrooms, 24% strongly agreed that classrooms were enough and 12% agreed to the same. 84% disagree to enough laboratories and 16% agreed. 42% strongly disagreed, that, desks and lockers were enough, 36% disagreed and 22% agreed. 58% were neutral due to their schools being day schools while 22% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed to lack of dormitories. This study correlates to a study done by Lydiah & Nasongo, (2009), schools require good leaders to organize the process of teaching and learning to ensure that the mission of the school is achieved.

On HODs: from the findings above, 88.57% strongly agreed that adequate infrastructural facilities contribute to academic good academic performance and 11.43 disagreed to the same. 100% agree strongly that adequate tools and equipment are necessary for better academic performance and this was nearly similar to other resources as seen in the table. This finding correlates to Leithwood et al. (2004), who argued that, an effective principal requires a number of competencies which they outlined as three sets of core leadership practices. The first is developing people and enabling teachers and other staff to do their jobs effectively, offering intellectual support and stimulation to improve the work, and providing models of practice and support. The HOD's findings too agree with Brueckners and Burton (2005) who highlighted there is huge impact that enabling environment has on teacher morale and job satisfaction and thus their classroom performance.

Instructional leadership

Findings from the principals indicated that on average 100% of principals made sure that kept and updated their professional records. On visiting teachers in class, 72% said sometimes, 20% rarely and 8% always visited the teachers in their classes. 100% of them gave teachers all necessary materials. On team building, 84% of the principals do build teams and 12% sometimes. 100% held regular staff meeting and 92% held staff appraisal meeting and 8% of the principals sometimes hold staff appraisals. The core role of the instructional leader is to ensure the performance of the established mission through creating a good environment for the schools (Lezotte, 2001).

Findings on the strategies used by the principals on ensuring instructional leadership indicated that 98.57% agreed to employ team building among teachers to ensure they support one another, 1.14% strongly agreed and 0.04% was neutral. 82.85% agreed to holding staff appraisal meetings to discuss strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for academic improvement, 11.43% disagreed and 2.86% strongly agreed to the same. 42.86% agreed to have visited teachers in their classrooms, 25.71% strongly agreed and 24.29% disagreed to having visited their teachers in class. Majority of principals ensured that teachers updated records as 57.14% strongly agreed and 31.42% agreed that they updated records.

On ensuring that teachers were given room to make decisions, 42.86% agreed, 25.71% strongly agreed/24.29% disagreed and 7.14% were neutral. This findings agreed with Kenyan study by

Musungu and Nasongo (2008) on the instructional leadership role of secondary school principals which revealed that they supervised teachers' work by inspecting records such as schemes of work, lesson books, records of work covered, class attendance records, and clock in/clock out book. Ackers & Hardman, 2001; Githua & Nyabwa, (2008), established that principals' frequency of internal supervision contributed towards better performance. This

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	-.296	.250		-1.184	.242	-.798	.207
Motivation	.778	.220	.380	3.529	.001	.334	1.221
Creation of enabling work environment	.446	.060	.601	7.457	.000	.326	.567
Management instruction	.143	.200	.082	.714	.479	-.260	.545

Dependant Variable: Academic Performance

involved proper tuition and revision, thorough supervision of teachers and pupils' work, proper testing policy, syllabus coverage, teacher induction courses and team building. Similar findings have emerged from various Kenyan studies, all which reveal that poor performance in secondary school examinations is a function of poor administration and leadership practices.

Quantitative Analysis

Figure 2 Regression Coefficient Model

It can note from the "Sig." column that all independent variable coefficients are statistically significantly different from 0 (zero) apart from ratio of creation of environment to performance. Although the intercept, B_0 , is tested for statistical significance, this is rarely an important or interesting finding.

In general, a multiple regression was run to predict motivation, creation of enabling environment and management of instruction leadership. These variables statistically significantly predicted performance, apart from creation of enabling environment with a 0.0significance value. All other two variables added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$.

1.6 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that motivation and management of instructional practices had a significant influence on performance. The study further concluded that creation of enabling environment did not have any influence on performance.

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