

Challenges Encountered By the Principals in Their Performance of the Various Operational Management Tasks Areas in Secondary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

All the heads of schools are tasked with the responsibility of promoting student academic achievement through organization and management of curriculum in schools. There are circumstances which hinder principals from fulfilling this responsibility to the letter. This implies that principals are facing challenges in their daily routine of promoting student academic performances. This study sought to find out the challenges encountered by the principals in their performance of the various operational management task areas in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. It adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods. The target population was all the principals/deputy principals, heads of departments, teachers, students' leaders and members of the Boards of Management of all public secondary schools in Nairobi County. A sample of 30 schools and their 30 principals / deputy principals, 60 heads of departments, 120 teachers, 180 student leaders and 20 members of the Boards of Management participated in the study. Stratified random technique was used to select the schools, the teachers and the heads of departments to participate in the study. All principals/deputy principals, senior student leaders and their student leaders and heads of Board of Management of the selected schools automatically participated in the study while the other student leaders and other members of Board of Management were selected through random sampling procedure. Data was collected using questionnaires, focus group discussion and interview guide. The quantitative data collected was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The findings of the study established that the principals faced various challenges in performance of the administrative tasks. These challenges included; inadequate funds, shortage of teachers, student indiscipline, teacher indiscipline, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, political interference, weak student leader's bodies and poor school community relations. The study recommends that training of principals is of utmost importance so that the current and prospective principals possess the requisite certification in school management and this training of principals should also emphasize human relations skills to help them cope with students and staff personnel problems.

Keywords: Principals, Performance, Challenges, Operational Management

1. Introduction

The school principal, more than any other person in the school is responsible for school climate, for the outcome of productivity and for satisfaction attained by students and staff; he/she is the cog around which the wheel of the school activities and operations revolve at (Sullivan, 2006). Daft, (2008) emphasized on the same point that the principal was the major component of school administration on whose ability and skill, personality and professional competence was largely dependent on the tone and efficiency of the school. For a principal to be able to manage and improve the performance of the various operational management task areas, he/she should have; a full knowledge of the methods and techniques of educational practices, an understanding of the interdependence of the various sections of the school community; sound knowledge of school finance including accounting procedures and a full understanding of the national goals of education as well as the mission of the school (Good, 1998). The principal occupies that important position of management that controls the characteristics of school effectiveness and is therefore able to determine school outcomes in many respects. However, there are numerous challenges encountered by the principals in their performance of the various operational management task areas at their respective schools, therefore this requires them to be well competent enough so that he/she should be able to stand out strong to overcome those challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Education in Africa

Mbamba, (2002) opines that, viewed as a profession or discipline, educational management is relatively young in the African continent. Professional educators in Africa have for a long time managed their educational systems, but they have very much depended by and large on their educational background and on-the-job experience out of which they were expected to acquire knowledge, skills and attitude needed to manage the educational systems effectively and efficiently. Available evidence shows that it is lack of formal or other training in managerial skills which has been largely responsible for the great deal inefficiency and ineffectiveness observed in

performance of many educational systems in Africa.

Indeed, the practice in many African countries like Kenya has been and continues to be the appointment of principals from among classroom teachers who are without any pre-service training. This, many educationists believe, does not guarantee that any good classroom teacher can make a good school manager (Dean, 1995). There have been persistent calls for professional development of principals in many forums. Lingu, (2003) points out that “it is better to train than not, however, for through training, practitioners become more aware or sensitized to various issues of administration.” He further asserts that, rapid socio-economic changes as well as emergent needs within the African continent have among other things made education become complex. Consequently, the management of education system demands sophisticated skills that would enable managers to steer systems effectively. In this regard, there is need for all African countries to institutionalize and reinforce the training of educational managers.

2.2 Education in Kenya

Education in Kenya, like many other African countries for that matter constitutes an important sector in the overall macro level framework of national growth and development. Proper management of the education sector at all levels is of absolute necessity for the successful operation of the education sector. As already pointed out, one of the major constraints to effective and efficient management of education in the country in general and educational institutions in particular is poor management. This problem can best be understood against the background of the growth of educational management as a subject of theory and practice in Africa

2.3. The Contribution of a Principal in the Operational Management

Good leadership is required for a successful organization. Principals, the target group of this study must lead effectively in order to influence their teachers towards the accomplishment of their schools’ objectives. Fiendler, (1999) established that highly skilled leadership was required to reconcile and utilize constructively different abilities, viewpoints, attitudes and ideas in the performance of group tasks and organizational missions. Principals therefore, are expected to be highly skilled leaders in order to be effective in attaining school goals. They have responsibility in the development of quality of education which they share with teachers. Principals should be the education leaders who create a school climate and a learning centred atmosphere that encourages professional development of the teachers and the highest success levels of the students (Hyden, 2007). In addition, the principals should possess competencies in administrative task areas such as human resource management, financial resources management and instructional leadership (Hale, 2003). Competence consists of two components, namely knowledge and skills and is defined as “possessing the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to exhibit behaviour (Daft, 2008)”. This requires that a principal need to be trained in both cognitive and psycho-motor competencies.

Graiger, (2005) highlights the importance of principals acting as leaders and emphasizes the fact that educational administrator training programmes should be based on five aspects; that is, theoretical, technical, problem-solving, controlled application and completion of projects which offer a chance to exhibit acquired skills. Coker, (2006) summarizes the responsibilities and duties of principals under five similar categories. These include; working effectively with people, an effective business management, preparing a sufficient school building and environment, developing education programme and serving profession.

According to D’Souza, (1997), the main services that a principal should provide include; ability to provide professional leadership to all sections of the school community; ability to understand each part of the school curriculum and how each part relates to the learning programme as a whole; ability to plan ahead and bring such plans to fruition, ability to communicate with, motivate and harmonize the various sections of the school community to work in the interest of the school and a capacity to work effectively with and through other people, singly or in groups. According to Muchiru, (1998), many teachers are elevated to head schools without proper training in management practices and therefore lack the requisite leadership competencies for the management of the various administrative tasks. Dadaey (1999), define competencies as “the ability to use knowledge and other capabilities necessary for successful and efficient accomplishment of an appointed task, transition, work, goal realization or performance of a certain role in the business process.” According to him, competencies encompass knowledge, expertise, skills, personal and behavioural characteristics, beliefs, motives and values, among others.

3 Challenges Encountered By the Principals in Their Performance of the Various Operational Management Task Areas

Fiscal management doubtless is a major and challenging task for the secondary school principal, and its management calls for foresight, integrity, wisdom and firmness,. Fiscal management reflects the school’s

programme in terms of educational priorities and more importantly therefore determines the way the school is managed. It also determines the relative success of the school in meeting its goals (Orlosky & McCleary, 2004). However, in spite of the heavy responsibility placed on the principals in financial management, they faced numerous challenges in this administrative task. Among these were disparities in vote head allocation and actual expenditure where money allocated to each vote head did not match the actual expenditure; problem with collection of fees from parents which made it difficult for them to meet their targets; erratic disbursement of funds by the government; adjusting the budget midstream due to price fluctuations and inadequate knowledge in financial management especially in preparing budget estimates and balance sheets, among others (Kimemia, 2009).

Another challenge is managing staff requires certain specific skills on the part of the principal. It is an open secret that in an organization where managers show empathy and care about staff, the output or productivity of staff has been shown to increase (Grainger, 2005). It is important for the principal to keep in constant touch with what the staff members are doing, share in their success, constraints and problems.

The school staff comprises of people of different personality orientation. Conflicts among staff members are therefore inevitable. The principal therefore has the responsibility for managing conflicts in the school. Managing conflicts entails keeping conflicts at a level that maintains viability but does not hinder the school performance. As Everard and Morris, (1985) clearly states, the ability to handle conflict is a key factor in managerial success. Conflicts normally arise by the way the school or department is run and limits understanding relating to responsibilities, ideology, relationships.

Many of the management tasks pertaining to student personnel and student services are delegated, but the principal has the ultimate overall responsibility of all activities relating to students. The principals' responsibilities over the students revolve around; organizing and accounting for students; provision of special services; managing student behavior; among others (Onyango, 2001).

4. Discussion of Findings

The researcher sought to identify some challenges that the principals encountered as they performed the various management tasks in their schools. These were highlighted by the teachers, heads of departments and the principals through the questionnaires as well as the student leaders and the members of the Boards of Management through the focus group discussions for the student leaders and interview guide for members of the Boards of Management respectively. Top among the challenges faced by the principals was inadequate funds. The majority of the principals cited unpredictable incomes, price fluctuations due to high inflation rate and late disbursement of funds by the government as some of the issues and challenges they faced. Inadequate funding was mainly caused by insufficient government grants, inability of parents to pay fees on time and poor community support. Moreover, some schools had limited ways of generating funds within their schools for lack of facilities such as land. The grants from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology donations and other revenues were far from enough to cater for the myriad financial needs of the schools in the face of the rising cost of living. Shortage of teachers and teacher management was another challenge expressed by the teachers, the principals and the heads of departments. The principals especially cited teacher shortages, new government policy on recruitment of teachers, unbalanced staff, high staff turnover, low morale of the work force due to poor working conditions in some schools, among other as some of the issues and challenges faced. Teacher indiscipline was also cited through chronic absenteeism for no good reasons, failure to attend to their classes even when they were in schools, lateness in class attendance or even in reporting to schools, general laxity and drunkenness while in school especially the male teachers. All the principals as well as teachers and heads of departments said that they were faced with emerging issues in education some of which led to student indiscipline. Among these were; increased use of internet and mobile phone among the students; regular curriculum changes due to changes in the society, permissiveness all around on the part of parents and the society, lack of interest in education among the students and high dropout rate. Others were; homosexuality and lesbianism among students in boarding schools and indiscipline in schools due to the recent removal of corporal punishment.

Other emerging issues included; teenage pregnancies. They also cited inadequate capacity building programme for all the staff and inadequate manpower to handle emerging issues in schools. Student indiscipline according to the principals and the teachers also included; students reporting to schools late especially those in day schools with some coming to school when they were too tired to concentrate on their work especially those who walked long distances to the schools; high rate of absenteeism especially for day scholars; negative attitude to academics especially for those who came from slum areas. Inability of some students to complete their assignments due to

lack of some basic facilities in their homes such as reading rooms, electricity.

The principals also said that they had to perform too many tasks in the schools against limited time which made it difficult for them to take some classes to teach. This made it difficult for them to know their students since they had limited contact with them.

Another challenge expressed by teachers and principals as well as heads of departments whose schools were located in or near slum areas was insecurity. There were many unemployed people in these areas some of who were either drug dealers or vendors of traditional beers. Some were criminals out to attack any well groomed stranger they saw, including the teachers. Some other schools were located far from the main road where transport was not available. This took a lot of time and energy for both the teachers and the students, especially for day schools. It also posed danger for them especially if the school was in a slum area.

Mixed schools also had their unique problems especially in connection with girls and boys relationships some of which led to teenage pregnancies and school drop out for the girls. Another major challenge that was expressed by the teachers, heads of departments and principals was shortage of learning and boarding facilities including books, laboratory equipments, and inadequate classrooms for the many students, among others. For the boarding schools, they said they had limited boarding facilities such as dormitories, beddings, among others.

Other challenges expressed by principals, especially those of good performing schools were political interference. Occasionally they were forced to admit students who did not qualify for their schools by the well to do parents, who went through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology officials. Some teachers expressed dissatisfaction about the way some principals performed their management tasks. Among these was excessive delegation of their duties to their deputy principals and senior teachers and behaving like strangers in their own schools.

Lastly the major challenge that affected the schools including the teachers and the students was HIV and AIDS. Some principals had teachers in their schools who were infected and were perpetually absent from school to attend to hospitals or were too weak to attend to their duties.

5. Conclusion

The study also sought to find out the challenges encountered by the principals in performance of the various operational administrative task areas in the schools. The study established that the principals encountered a lot of challenges, most of which made their work very difficult. Some of the challenges reflected on the principal's incompetence while most of them were beyond their control. Among the former was on the findings as expressed by all the participants that very few principals observed teachers while teaching in class. Moreover, majority of the principals as reported by the study participants were unable to generate funds within the schools. Yet another challenge was on the principal's failure to involve the students in drawing up school rules and changes in school routine. This meant that students in most schools were not part of the decision making process and neither were the students leaders actively engaged in administrative tasks in the management structure of the schools. Another challenge which the principals failed to address was on teacher indiscipline. While all the participants reported on this challenge, majority of the principals failed to organize regular guidance and counselling programmes for the teachers. Other areas where most of the principals were incompetent included; their ability to motivate members of the community to support the instructional programmes of the school; ability to participate actively in development activities of the school community around the school, among others. Among the challenges that were reported which were beyond the principals control included; inadequate funds, shortage of teachers, emerging issues in education, student indiscipline, drug abuse, insecurity, teenage pregnancies and political interference. Others included; inadequate facilities, weak student leaders bodies, poor school community relations, ICT use in schools, curriculum implementation, financial management and human relations management, among others.

6. Recommendations

Training principals should also emphasize human relations skills to help them cope with students and staff personnel problems. Counseling and guidance skills should be emphasized as they are crucial in handling personnel problems. The principals also require training in conceptual skills to enable them co-ordinate the school with other schools, the community and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Since they have all the overall responsibility over the school programme, they are expected to possess superior knowledge especially on curriculum and instruction so as to provide expert leadership in all the areas of the school programme.

The study noted the dire shortage of finances in majority of the schools and came up with some recommendations for generation of funds for the schools. Among these was that the government should disburse funds in good time in order to enable schools run smoothly throughout the year; the principal together with the Boards of Management should devise ways of raising money for the school. Among these is fundraising by organizing 'harambees' to collect money for the school and involve the old boys, the school community, the parents, and well-wishers such as NGOs among others. For those schools which have extra land, they could start some income generating projects such as poultry keeping, livestock farming, and subsistence agricultural production for crops such as maize, beans, potatoes, and vegetables among others for their students. Over and above this, the schools should encourage timely fees payment by the parents by formulating and implementing a fees payment policy.

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