

Improving Instructional Leadership in Schools through Building Principals' Capacity

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Abstract

The school principal is the pivot of curriculum and instructional process in the school. His/her responsibilities are numerous but in reality good instructional leadership skills are seldom practiced. This study explores information about the skills and tasks required to support practices of instructional leadership. It has used secondary data analysis to inform readers of the Kenyan context of instructional leadership and recommend ways of improving instructional leadership skills, tasks and knowledge base. The principal's instructional leadership behavior should have much more immediate influence on the internal structure of the school than the external. The school's internal structures include its instructional practices, organizational structure, climate, and culture. It is through the design, development and interaction of the internal structures that the principal has maximum influence on the students' outcomes. Effective instructional leadership depends upon a very complex set of relationships between principals and their beliefs and the surrounding environment of the school. The principal's values and previous experiences, as well as the expectations of the community must be taken into account in leadership and decision making.

The authors have concluded that transformational leadership is the best practice for principals as they carry out instructional leadership role.

Key Words: Principals, Instructional leadership, Curriculum supervision, curriculum Improvement

Introduction

School administration and governance encompasses both general and instructional leadership. Both of them are aimed at school improvement practices. This paper will focus on instructional leadership/supervision. This is an act of administration, curriculum work, instruction, human relations, management and the leadership role (Wiles & Bondi, 1991). It is concerned with the pupil or the student leadership in the pupil or the student learning in the classroom (Okumbe, 2007). Instructional leadership takes various dimensions such as helping in the formulation and implementation of schemes of work; evaluating modifications; delivery of instructional resources, helping, conducting and coordinating staff in-servicing, advising and assisting teachers involved in instructional programmes; procuring funds required for instructional purposes and receiving community feedback about school programmes (Wiles & Bondi, 1997; Okumbe, 2007).

Although we recognize the importance of the instructional leadership responsibilities of the principal, in reality, good instructional leadership skills are seldom practiced. There is need for information about the skills and tasks required to support practices of instructional leadership in Kenya, so as to provide the best possible instruction to the children in our care. Okumbe (2007) states that 'instructional leadership is crucial during teaching practice' (p.185) but this is a misconception. Instructional leadership cannot end with teaching practice as this implies. It should be an ongoing process for school improvement. This paper will attempt to give suggestions on making principals effective instructional leaders by explaining the importance of instructional leadership, characteristics of a good instructional leader, knowledge and skills required for the principal. It will explore best practices in Kenyan schools.

Instructional leadership means becoming a leader of leaders (learning to work with others) (teachers, students and parents) to improve instructional quality. Fullan (1991) asserts that 'the role of principal has become dramatically more complex, over loaded and unclear over the past decade' (p. 144) indeed, the role of the principal has been in a state of transition, progressing from the principal as an instructional leader or master teacher to the principal as a transactional leader, most recently to the role of transformational leader. Many researchers (Flath, 1989) stress the importance of the instructional leadership responsibilities of the principal but state that effective instructional leadership is seldom practiced. Stronge (1988) calculated that 62.2% of the principal's time is focused on school management issues whereas 6.2% of their time is focused on program issues. He adds that a typical principal performs various tasks each day but only 11% relate to instructional

leadership. (p. 32) .Berlin, Kavanagh and Jensen (1988) conclude that, if school is to progress “the principal cannot allow daily duties to interfere with the leadership role in the curriculum “ (P. 49).Fullan adds that “ effective instructional leaders are in the minority”(p .151) therefore there is a gap between what is and what needs to be. Why the dilemma? Flath (1989) outlines reasons for the dilemma which are; lack of education, training and the time for the institutional leadership role, leadership activities being set aside for more immediate problems and increasing volume of paper work. The public expectation for the principal’s role is mainly managerial and to a principal, this is a safe and a comfortable zone.

Wiles & Bondi (1997) suggest knowledge and technical skills that an instructional supervisor should possess so as to advance teaching and learning in schools. These skills include supervisors as developers of people, curriculum developers, instructional specialists, human relation workers, staff developers, administrators, managers of change and evaluators.

The Kenyan Context

In Kenya, supervision of instruction aims at improving teaching and learning through a deliberate emphasis on ways and means of instilling excellence in the quality of instructions. This is not only concerned with overseeing , directing, conducting, regulating and controlling teachers and pupils. It also involves guiding and influencing teachers and pupils to strive towards desirable teaching and learning behaviors in order to achieve educational goals and objectives (Olembo, Wanga, & Karugu, 1992). The responsibility for the education system is vested in the ministry of education that until recently has been split into Ministry of Higher Education and Basic Education. The Kenyan philosophy of education emphasizes “the inculcations of a high quality instruction in the classroom” (Republic of Kenya, 1999). This quality has been equated with high standards namely a set of criteria against which an institution or system is judged. Among the determinants of quality of education are availability of qualified and motivated teachers, a conducive environment for teaching and learning, and the curriculum facilities, the resources available for their provision and tools of evaluation and the above all the leadership and governance of the institution. The provisions of the Education Act, Chapter 211, section 18 of the Laws of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 1980), empowers the Ministers of Education to promote the education of the people of Kenya. According to this Act, the management and the general control of the school system, in particular, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Today in Kenya, the ministry appoints Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QUASOs) who are supervisors / inspectors of the curriculum implementation in schools. Each district has QUASOs who interprets policy to the principal, who assist them to supervise instructions in schools (Wanzare, 2006). To play their role effectively QUASOs, also require special skills specific to the job (Etindi, 2001). However, just as there is no special training for principals in Kenya, there is none for QUASOs. They are appointed from among classroom teachers. The training of instructional supervisors/leaders in Kenya has therefore often been done through in-service training (Ajuoga, Indoshi & Agak, 2010).Furthermore there is no research that has been done nationwide by the Directorate of Quality Assurance to gauge the level of competence, knowledge and skills required to support practices of instructional leadership and governance. Disparities have also been noted through the learner outcomes and in most cases this is attributed to the leadership of the school. Principals are often blamed for poor results in their schools meaning that there are poor instructional leaders or they commit too much time on administrative tasks than instructional tasks.

The Kenyan school system has the principal as the chief executive officer of the school followed by the deputy principal and the senior teachers. Next in command is the dean of studies who oversees all academic matters in the school. Among his/her duties are making the school academic programs, examination dates and release of results, awards to best performers and ways of improving results. S/He recommends the list of text books , liaises with the heads of departments to monitor availability of various subject details, implements curriculum changes , supervises the syllabus , collects and files past papers , recommends in-service training for teachers and guides students to make application to universities and colleges . Liaises with parents on subject choices in connection with future career choices .The dean of studies also organizes academic days for parents, teachers and their children. The dean of studies is assisted by the heads of departments and subject heads. Together with the principal, deputy principal, senior master and the head of departments, they form the academic committee. The academic committee in big schools meets weekly to monitor and evaluate curriculum implementation and students progress. They receive reports from various subject’s heads about progress of the scheme of work, record of work and teacher attendance to classes. Class teachers also have weekly meetings with their classes where they monitor progress of the curriculum implementation in the school. The class prefect/ representatives have time log sheets in which they record lesson attendance of the teachers. All these measures assist the principal as the instructional leader to be effective.

In April 2009 the Ministry of Education through the department of quality assurance and standards, released a circular No. 2009 (QSA/2/1A/VIL.11/86). It stated that the directorate of quality assurance and standards (DQAS) will provide external scrutiny on how the curriculum should be implemented at the school / institution

level. Respective schools / institutions management have the responsibilities to ensure quality in the day today curricular delivery process. The secondary schools will be externally assessed every three years while primary schools once very term. This circular directed to institutional instructional supervisors to develop clear work plans on how to ensure that each and every teacher carries his/her responsibilities appropriately for the benefit of the learner. The curriculum leaders namely principals, deputy principals, heads of department and deans of curriculum were instructed to develop their own supervision schedules and monitoring tools for this purpose. The reports they make are expected to be tabled before respective schools management committee/ boards of governors. The circular further states that the internal quality assessments are critical to the achievement of required knowledge, skills and competence amongst learners. This is going to provide the backbone of the education system.

The circular further reports that the recent field visits and assessments by senior officers from the ministry and particularly QUASOs revealed cases of serious laxity in the teacher preparation and record keeping. There were poor and incomplete lesson plans in many primary schools, un updated, untimed and unstructured teaching notes, amongst many secondary school teachers, incomprehensive and incomplete schemes of work, inadequate records of learners' performance/progress reports, failure by teachers to keep records of work covered and unmarked class attendance registers. This is a reflection of the principals' failures and as a result, they cannot assure quality curriculum delivery in their schools. They are not carrying out their supervisory role as is required leading to poor outcomes. The circular advises principals to re-invigorate senior management committees (academic committees) and work closely with the QUASOs to ensure effective curriculum implementation. All external assessment reports should be availed to the principals so that they do a follow up and implement an action plan. Research needs to be done on how these directives by the directorate of quality and standards been embraced

The Role of the Principal in Instructional Leadership.

Wiles & Bondi (1997) have outlined 10 supervision tasks that are instructional in nature as follows:-

- Developing instructional plans- working with teachers to outline and implement instructional programs
- Initiating new programs by demonstrating new techniques and establishing the ground work for new programs. In Kenya, most principals visit better performing schools for bench marking.
- Redesigning instructional organization thus reviewing existing instructional organization for effectiveness and where possible make alterations.
- Delivering instructional resource- ensuring teachers have necessary instructional materials and anticipating future material needs.
- Advising and assisting teachers
- Evaluating facilities and overseeing modifications \
- Conducting and coordination in service programs
- Reacting to community needs and inquiries about school programs and sending information to parents of school children where appropriate.

Sushila Bakhda (2004) concurs with Wiles and Bondi (1997) and states that in Kenya the code of ethics stipulate the principal's roles as;

- To establish the academic requirements of the school and keep abreast of the latest changes and developments.
- To plan curriculum strategies with the staff.
- To plan and execute a timetable for the examinations.
- To manage teaching the teaching staff, support staff and office staff.
- To plan and execute budgets for the school resources, equipments and support services.
- To interview and appoint members of staff and plan their job descriptions.
- To ensure maintenance of the school building and facilities.
- To act as the public relations officer with the community.
- To report to the board of governors all matters pertaining the running of the school.
- To advice teachers on all best methods of teaching.

The principal as an instructional leader plays a crucial role which affects the quality of individual teacher instruction, height of the student achievements and the degree of efficiency in school functioning. Findley and Findley (1992) state that "if a school is to be effective it will be because of instructional leadership of the principal" (p.102). They further state that although the principal must address certain managerial tasks to ensure an efficient school, the tasks of the principal must be to keep focus on activities which pave way for higher students' achievements through instructional leadership. An instructional leader is an administrator who emphasizes the process of instructions and facilitates the interaction of teachers, students and the curriculum.

Qualities of an instructional leader

Qualities of an instructional leader can be grouped into four categories

- Goals emphasis :- set instructional goals, high expectations and focus on students' achievements
- Coordinates and organizes work for effectiveness and efficiency.
- Power and decision making: - secure resources / generate alternatives / assist and facilitate to improve the instructional program.
- Human relations :- Deals effectively with staff, parents community and students (Flath, 1989)

The instructional leader must present a person centered leadership approach which emphasizes sensitivity to working with teachers, peers, subordinates and members of the public. Miklos (1992) mentioned five general leadership qualities of effective leaders.

- a) Have a vision: They work towards a shared understanding of the goals, progress towards their achievements and coordinates curriculum, instructions and assessments.
- b) Translates the vision into action :- works as a team, emphasizes school wide goals and expectations
- c) Creates a supportive environment: - promotes an academically oriented orderly and purposeful school climate.
- d) Knows what is going on in the school: - finds out what teachers and students are doing and how well.
- e) Acts on knowledge: - intervenes as necessary accommodating different teacher's personality styles and teaching strategies.

Fullan (1994) adds that "schools operated by principals who are perceived by their teachers to be strong instructional leaders exhibit significantly greater gains scores in reading and mathematics than did the schools operated by average and weak instructional leaders. Other authors (Glickman, 1990; Myth, 1988; Wiles and Bondi, 1997) emphasize instructional supervision as a fundamental component of instructional leadership which enhances students' learning. An additional criterion for instructional leaders is that the principal should be a practicing teacher. Weindling (1990) states that principals in the United Kingdom indicated that "the most important thing contributing to instructional leadership was the fact that all continued to teach for an average of about 20% of the week. Harden (1998) stated that "to have credibility, principals need to work closely with students, developing teaching techniques and methods as a means for understanding teachers' perspective and for establishing a base on which to make curricular decisions. Principals strengthen the belief that the sole purpose of the school is to serve the educational needs of the students" (p.67).

Hanny (1987) posits that effective principals are expected to be effective instructional leaders. The principal must be knowledgeable about curriculum development, teacher and instructional effectiveness, clinical supervision, staff development and teacher evaluation. Fullan (1991) supports this and adds that the principal must be active and collaborative with teachers to shape the school as a work place in relation to shared goals and teacher's collaboration. The principal should collaborate with teachers to form leadership teams at the secondary level to help carry out the critical functions of curriculum and instructional coordination and supervision. Hallinger (1989); Copper (1989) adds that schools need to create models of shared leadership which incorporates the talent and energy of principals, teachers, students and parents to improve instructional quality. The principal should create a strong school culture enabling teachers to collaborate with them in redesigning the instructional program, so that all students can learn. Effective principals manage and lead. Further research has to be done on this issue to investigate if instructional leadership can be separated from effective and efficient school management and if gender differences among instructional leaders affect learners' outcomes.

Recommendations

From the foregoing discussion, the principals need the following knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective instructional leadership in schools today.

i. Knowledge base will include - a clear focused mission for the school;- Strong leadership by the principal; - High expectations for students and staff;- Frequent monitoring of student progress ; - A positive learning climate ; - Parents/ community involvement ; - An emphasis upon student's attainment of better results;

ii. Have a vision for the school that is focused upon desired outcomes ensuring academic excellence thus - Communicate the vision to everyone in the school;-Provide /obtain the resource needed to accomplish the mission;-Manage oneself so the above can occur

iii. The instructional leader should therefore be a **resource provider** who marshals personnel and resources to achieve a schools mission and goals and he is knowledgeable about curriculum and instructions

iv. An instructional resource that **sets expectations** for continual improvement of instructions.

v. An **effective communicator** models commitment to school goals, articulates a vision for instructional goals, finds means for integrating the instructional planning and goals attainment and sets and adheres to clear performance standards for instructions and teacher behavior.

vi. A visible presence that visits classrooms, attends departmental meetings, is accessible to discuss matters dealing with instructions and is an active participant in staff development.

vii. Researches on effective teaching : the principals needs knowledge on effective teaching, effective teacher understanding of instructional goals, design instructions according to the goals, communicate the goals to students, create learning situations and use a variety of instructional approaches to promote creative thinkers who reflect and evaluate themselves .

viii) Has awareness of his/her educational philosophy and beliefs -To be an effective instructional supervisor, the principal needs to embrace knowledge of effective school and effective teaching in his / her own educational philosophy. Glickman (1990) proposed the following philosophies as relevant to instructional relation.

Essentialism: - The supervisor holds the knowledge about absolutes or truths in teaching which he imparts to teachers to improve teaching.

Experimentation: - supervisors work democratically with teachers to achieve collective ends helpful to all by encouraging exploratory learning.

Existentialism:-individual teacher freedom and choice is paramount. The supervisors do not import knowledge or guide. They help only when needed, if the supervisor's role is directive his role is to inform, direct, model and assess skills of teaching. In collaborative supervision the principals' role is to guide the problem- solving process, be active in discussing and keeping the teacher focused on the problem. Non directive supervision is premised on learning as an individual experience. The teachers must come up with their own solutions depending on individual experience. The supervisor's role is to listen, be non judgmental, provide self awareness and clarification to teachers (Glickman, 1990).

ix) The principal must be an administrator too; most researchers agree that the principal determines effectiveness of the school (Lane & Walberg, 1987). The degree to which the principal attends to school tasks will determine school success. Edmonds (1979) study indicate that principals of effective schools impact them in the following ways; -Administrative behavior, policies and practices affect school effectiveness ; -Provide balance between management and instructional skills -Develop and implements plans for dealing with students' reading problems. The principal as an instructional leader is a catalyst to school improvement through knowledge and skills for this task must be learned. -The in-services courses that provide ongoing leadership training and support for participating administrators should be invigorated.

x) The principals should be change leaders, as they strive to improve students learning, they must be involved in making changes. As change agent he should be a catalysts process helper, resource linker or solution giver. The six stages of change stated by Haveclock (1973) are

Stage 1: Building a relationship between the change agent and client.

Stage 2: diagnosing the problem

Stage 3: acquiring relevant resources

Stage 4: choosing the solution

Stage 5: gaining acceptance

Stage 6 stabilizing the innovation and generating self renewal

This promotes collaborative problem solving with the teaching staff to bring about the determined change.

xi) Principals need knowledge of curriculum development. Decisions about a good school, appropriate curriculum and needs of students should be made by those closest to the students. The Instructional leader tasks include supervising the curriculum, staff development, curriculum development, group development, action research, and positive school climate and community partnership. Glickman (1990) proposed a model of clinical supervision in which he presents a cycle sequence of events that should, be ideally implemented at least twice a year. This type of supervision should be studied by principals and adopted by schools in Kenya during their internal inspection. This includes a) Teacher's pre conferencing to determine the method, focus and duration of the observation. b) Classroom observation c) Interpretation of observation d) Post conferencing e) Critiquing. Teachers often turn to fellow teachers for assistance. Peer supervision helps improve instruction. Principals can create a collegial school climate to enable teachers set goals for this program. The teachers should be in – serviced on steps of clinical supervision to do school self evaluation and improve learner outcomes. Clinical supervision and peer coaching provide direct assistance to teachers as it continuously focuses on improvement of classroom instruction.

xii. Staff development is a task that the instructional leader must undertake so that learning is a lifelong pursuit to improve the quality of education. Staff development provides continuous professional development through in-service days, workshops, university class, staff meetings, school visitations conferences and travel or professional reading. Glickman (1990) sums up elements of effective in-service as; a) Concrete, continual , relevant and hands -on activities b) Follow up assistance c) Peer observation d) School leader participation at in service e) Post observation analysis and conferencing focused on skill introduced in the workshop f) Classroom experimentation and modification of implemented skills g) Reflection time for teachers h) Individualized activities i) Teacher planned in-service

xiii. The principal needs to understand curriculum implementation strategies. They need to know the objectives, content, teaching methods and evaluating procedures. S/He also needs skills of working with groups to solve instructional problems. These leadership skills will entail knowledge of effective groups, group leadership styles, dealing with dysfunctional members and resolving conflicts.

xiv. An effective instructional leader should encourage action research. Glickman (1990) outlines , the procedure for action research as identifying goals (timelines), activities , resources needed and data must be collected, evaluating (collecting assessing and interpreting data) and revising or modifying original goals.

xv. The principal is the key figure in promoting an environment within the school that is conducive to student learning. Good teacher morale and high student achievements go hand in hand. This does not just happen. It takes a combined effort of both the principal and staff to identify factors that create or inhibit the development of a positive climate.

xvi. Skills needed by the instructional leader are both interpersonal and leadership skills which include communication, working effectively with people of interpersonal relations and effective supervisory skills and of group decision making. Technical skills include those of goal, settings, assessing, and planning, observing research and evolution. The principals need to be an effective listener and a communicator he also needs skills of interrelating with people at all levels. She/he must have trust motivation empowerment and collegiate. Trust builds relationships. Principals must motivate workers by sharing issues. They need to empower people so that the staff is committed, significant and competent. Collegiality also promotes idea sharing; protects cooperation and assistance in profession growth all of which benefits students. This can be done by the principal providing opportunities for the staff about teaching and learning, encouraging teachers to observe each other teaching, involving staff cooperatively in planning, designing and evaluating curriculum and modeling good practices and behaviors. Principals should encourage group decision making.

Conclusion

In order to meet the rapidly changing needs of students, teachers must be given the authority to make appropriate instructional decisions. They are the instructional experts. Therefore, the basis for school leadership must include teachers and parents as well as the principal, in the role of problem finding and problem identification.

Through transformational leadership, the principal as a leader of leaders should work with others to improve instructional quality. School problems should be identified by teachers and parents. There should be a greater emphasis on problem finding and goal setting by the staff and the community. Problems solving should be a collaborative activity. Collegiality, experimentation, teacher reflection and school based staff development must be impressed by effective institutional leaders / supervisors. Rather than being the source of all knowledge, the principal role should be to tap the expertise and leadership of teachers. The idea that one model of school leadership or one model of classroom instruction is appropriate for all schools is incompatible with this form of school- based restructuring and improvement. It becomes apparent that school leaders will require a greater tolerance for ambiguity than ever before. There are three major areas where learning is required if a principal is to become an instructional leader, acknowledge base, task understanding and appropriate skills .If the principal posses this background he/she will become an effective leaders of leaders .

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