EFFECTS OF LEADERSHIP STYLE ON STUDENTS' COMPLETION RATES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of leadership style on students' completion rates in secondary schools in Meru Central Sub County, Kenya. The study was guided by the systems and benchmarking theories and adopted the descriptive survey research design. A questionnaire was used to collect relevant data. A sample of 24 principals, 120 teachers and 240 students participated in the study. The study findings revealed that principals' leadership style influenced completion rates among students in secondary schools in the sub county. It was therefore, concluded that the principal's leadership style influences the students' completion rates in secondary schools. The findings are significant as they could assist in redressing challenges of students' completion rates arising from poor leadership as well as administrative skills. The findings could also help the relevant policy makers and bodies to formulate related education policies and establish the legal framework to enhance students' completion rates.

1. Introduction

Students enroll in secondary school in great numbers and drop out along the way leading to low levels of completion rates. Completion rates of students' academic career are used as a measure of internal efficiency and quality output in education. In developed nations, this has been possible through improvement of facilities and resources in educational institutions. Most western countries like the USA, Japan and Europe have achieved their

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economic power by pursuing the careers of students that complete their studies. An education system in any country is established as a result of the determination of the broader aims of education, which are in line with the aspirations of the countries. A school, in economic terms is an industry which transforms a given quality of inputs into required outputs. Okumbe (2001) notes that secondary schools fail to produce quality and quantity output due to numerous factors within the school environment. The issue of student completion rate in secondary schools has been given first priority in various countries across the globe, for instance, in the United States of America, there is variation in students' completion rate across various states, such that, in some parts of the USA, the completion of students in some schools has been quite demanding. This has contributed a lot in the increased research studies in the American education. According to Martin and Halperin (2006), the reports on high school completion and incomplete secondary school education conducted in region across American States have concluded that approximately, two thirds of final year students in the system of education get to complete their studies four years later than the expected period. In Canada, completion of high school education has been able to increase by about 11 percentages in the year 1997 and 2010, respectively. This is because the government of Canada has put completion of students' education as the first priority. Further, the education system has certainly encouraged "stay in school" programs, but broader economic and social factors have been more important than policy in contributing to Canada's impressive performance on completion (Conference Board of Canada, 2013).

In Sub Saharan Africa, completion of secondary education is generally high for males as compared to female. A report prepared by UNICEF (2012) indicated that in the region, 21% of young women and 28% of young men have completed secondary school. Kenya is one of the countries included in this reflection as a country in the education sector. Despite the steady growth in completion rate in both primary and secondary schools in Kenya, there are still a high number of students not completing their education. This is attributed to crises in inputs and processes that affect the output of quality education (Mackatiani, C. I., Ariemba, A. N. and Ngware, J. W. (2020)). The issues responsible for these crises can be socio- economic factors, school based factors and poor administrative leadership. An effective administrative leadership is capable of inspiring and motivating even the most ineffective student to strive towards attaining the academic potentials. Students who do not complete their studies usually end up frustrated and disappointed in life. According to Magondu (2011), the issues of low completion and transition rates in secondary school remain some of the major challenges facing the education sector in Kenya. A study by KIPPRA (2006) shows that the survival rate from Form 1 to Form4 is above 20 per cent, while those who survive from Form1 to university is 1.69 per cent. This is a worrying trend bearing in mind that by 2015, the country was expected to meet the call for Education for All. Students not completing secondary education in Meru Central Sub County has been a major problem. The issue of resources, principals' leadership style and school curriculum have affected the learning progress of students in schools (Meru Education Annual Report, 2019). However, head teachers'

leadership styles influence students' completion rates (Mackatiani, 2017). Particularly, the rate of students' completion rates in public secondary schools is lower compared to private secondary schools and therefore possess an academic concern. Therefore, it was necessary for a study to be conducted focusing on principals' leadership styles influencing students' completion rates in public and private secondary schools.

1.2 Statement of the problem

From the background information, it is evident that students' completion rates in secondary education are crucial worldwide. Despite the Kenya government, through the Ministry of Education embarking on reforms geared towards attaining the education for all (EFA) goal, there are still quite a number of secondary school students' who do not complete secondary education. The increasing number of students' incompletion rates have various implications. These implications have impacted negatively on learning achievement of learners. Leadership styles of head teachers could contribute to students 'completion rate. The leadership styles applied may not motivate learners. They subsequently demotivate learners, leading to low completion rates. The variables contained in leadership styles are crucial in the promotion of students' completion rates This study, therefore, investigated the influence of principals' leadership style on students' completion rates in secondary schools in Meru Central Sub County.

1.3 The study objectives

The objectives of this study were to:
- Determine the types of leadership styles practised by principals in Kenyan Secondary schools.
- Examine the role principal's leadership style play in students' academic process.
- Assess the extent to which principals' supervision influences students' completion rates.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study could be significant to the government of Kenya and the entire Sub-Saharan Africa as education characteristics are similar. The study is expected to be significant to school administrators, especially in understanding school-based factors that influence completion rates among public and private secondary students in Kenya. The results of the study may provide insights to policymakers towards designing and implementing a sound policy framework that may be used as a guide to the process of improving school completion rates in public and private secondary schools in the country. The study may also add to the existing body of knowledge on secondary education management.

Similarly, the study findings are likely to draw the attention of the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) who may use the information while executing their duties. Finally, findings of the study would further add to the growth of knowledge on students' completion rates. These study findings could contribute additional knowledge on principals' leadership style to the existing research findings and

literature. Besides, it might help future researchers while identifying priority areas in which to carry out more research. The results may, therefore, be of interest to researchers in educational policy studies; and comparative and international education since it would provide data on what the Kenyan education sector is doing in promoting students' completion rates in secondary school.

1.5 Theoretical context

The study applied the theoretical constructs on systems and benchmarking theories. Systems theory was advanced by Ludwig von Bertalnffy (1968). He emphasized that systems are open and interact with their environments to acquire qualitatively properties. The systems theory focuses on the arrangement of relations between the parts which connect them into a whole. It focused on interaction between principals, students and environment. However, benchmarking theory, as advanced by Watson (1993) is established upon the performance comparisons and gaps realized in performance process. Benchmarking approach performs the same function as performance gap analysis. In this context, benchmarking determines the performance gaps with respect to generation and utilization within the management system. It ultimately develops methodologies to close the gaps. The existence of a gap between internal and external practices leads to identification of the changes that are crucial for comparison and analysis in research. Subsequently, benchmarking generates comparisons and examines the operation and management skills that contribute to service production. Competitive analysis in benchmarking looks at the characteristics of team players in the environment. Despite this, time constraints competitive and poor management commitment of professional human resources.

This study, therefore, adopted transactional analysis theory and the benchmarking theory in order to analyze factors that contribute to students' completion rates in secondary schools in Kenya.

2. Literature review

The relevant literature was reviewed under the following sub headings.

2.1 Principals' leadership styles and students' academic process

The principal is the administrator of the school who ensures success and great achievement of all the students in the institution by facilitating school development projects and supervising learning that is supported by the school community. Many scholars have defined leadership as the ability of an individual to influence the behavior of a group to achieve organizational goals (Robbins, 2003). Leadership is a fundamental factor in school outcome, as such schools which perform consistently well tend to have sound and efficient leadership (Nyongesa, 2014). These findings concur with the study as principals' leadership style influences student completion rate.

Paisey (2002) conducted a study on school leadership and its influence on secondary school performance in Tanzania. The results showed a negative correlation

between the laissez-faire leadership style and school performance. The study reported that principals who use the laissez-faire leadership style fail to follow up on those they delegated duties to leading to decline in performance. The findings are relevant to this study since principals who adopt laissez-faire leadership style contribute to poor performance hence leading to students' incompletion of their education.

The principals, as heads of the institutions play a central role in student's completion rate; this is due to the fact that principals set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of their student's performance. Studies on democratic leadership have indicated that there is no clear definition of democratic leadership (Weibler, 2011). However, from a political perspective, democratic leadership can be defined as a political relationship among leaders and followers for achieving democracy through sacrifice, courage, symbolism, participation and vision (Choi, 2007). A democratic leader is a leader who shares his/her authority of decision making with his/her subordinates (Kavanaugh & Ninemeier, 2001). On the other hand, studies in the leadership literature define an autocratic leader as a leader who retains most of the authority for himself/herself (DuBrin, 2009). According to Kavanaugh and Ninemeier (2001), an autocratic style is embedded in leaders who have full organizational power and authority for decision making without sharing it with their subordinates. The Kenyan education system, being examination oriented, tends to be autocractic form of management. In light of this, Mackatiani (2017) revealed that examinations oriented model cause psychological torture to pupils, leading to learners dropping out of school.

According to Leithwood's (1999), a total of 1,762 teachers and 9,941 students in a large Canadian School district, not only found no impact of teacher leadership on raising student achievement, but also hypothesized that by trying to combine leadership with teaching, teaching is devalued. Barriers such as little time during the work day for reflection, rigid school schedules, inappropriate instructional tasks, and lack of support from peer teachers and administrators and overemphasis on state mandated high-stakes testing, hinder the effectiveness of many teachers who, while teaching, step beyond their classrooms to lead the students.

2.2 Principals' leadership style on the teaching and learning process

Leadership has been considered as being fundamental to the success of any institution. As such leadership style in the classroom cannot be overemphasized in the teaching and learning process. It goes a long way in determining performance of both the teachers and the student or learner. It is the classroom teacher who is the boss, director, manager, administrator and organizer. He/she enjoys relatively higher degree of privacy and autonomy (Amadikwe, 1991). A teacher's life is spent in building peoples' knowledge, influencing the feelings and behaviours of students toward achievement of stipulated goals. The teacher's choice of career, professional training will definitely affect his/her skills, abilities and attitudes. Teacher and the student interaction is one of the most important aspects of educational process, but the most neglected. Educational research reveals it through direct observation of teacher and students inside the classroom.

Privacy and autonomy enable each teacher to manage and organize his own classroom the way he prefers to handle it. Head teachers' behaviours impart a clear message that the schools are learning communities in which students continually expand their capacity to create desired results.

Effective principals create an environment that fosters academic and social success for students with disabilities (CEC, 2001). In-light of this, Mackatiani (2017) notes that good leadership will provide respective resources like school physical infrastructure for quality education. In addition, Imbova et al. (2018) have emphasized that teaching and learning resources are crucial for achieving high completion rates in secondary schools. According to Michubu (2005), data from Meru Central Sub-County education offices indicated cases of non-enrolment of students in Form one and non-completion in Form four. This translates into some degree of education inefficiency in the county. The study further suggested the roles that can be played by principals in promoting enrolment and completion rates, including: sensitizing the community on the need for education, designing a market strategy to popularize their schools through effective implementation of curriculum, provision of teaching and learning resources.

2.3 Influence of principals' supervision on students' completion rates

According to Ongiri and Abdi (2004), the principal is the leader in a school, the pivot round which many aspects of the school revolve, and the person in charge of every detail of the running of the school, be it academic or administration. Thus, he is seen as the head teacher, leader, instructional supervisor, adviser, public relation officer, curriculum director, chief education officer, policy maker, etc. These titles reflect the place and role of the secondary principal in the educational processes (Field, Healy, Goldstein & Guthertz, 2010). It, therefore, behooves the principal to be a good team player as it is common for the performance of the school to be appraised against the person who leads it. He takes care of the final arrangements for the education of students in a school. His role as a facilitator of all school activities cannot be taken for granted if he is expected to give the right kind of education to student.

Different researchers have demonstrated the role of the principals in bringing about academic achievement. Musungu and Nasongo (2008) carried out a research in Vihiga district of western Kenya. The finding showed that 80% of the principals in high performing schools checked lesson books, schemes of work, register of class attendance, school enrolment and clock in and clock out records. The high performing level of supervision of professional records by the high performing schools' principals was reflected in performance of their schools. Every administration needs an inbuilt supervisory system to provide the cohesion and direction necessary to achieve the purpose of the organization. According to Olembo, Wanga and Karagu (2004), supervision concerns the tactic of efficient and proper management of personnel and their aspects of administration that are in line with the goal of the administration. Clinical supervision is the rationale and practice.

Fulmer (1999) notes that the principal is both an administrator as well as a supervisor. When he/she is planning school work, allocating teachers duties, formulating rules and regulations for the school, he is doing administrative work. When the head teacher is supervising the work of teachers, checking records of work disciplining staff and pupils and effecting adequate instruction he/she is doing supervisory work. There is agreement among scholars that principals' instructional supervision practices influence students' academic performance. Kimosop (2002) concurred with Kamindo (1998) in a study aimed at finding out the role of the head teachers as instructional supervision in Kabarnet and Salawa Divisions of Baringo district. The same findings are supported by Kimeu (2010). Ayako (2009) observed that effective school principals establish clearly defined goals for academic achievements by concentrating their available resources and their operation on attaining them. They provide adequate timetable for teaching routine, check lesson notes and subject diaries, observation of classroom instruction and continuously monitor students' programme to determine whether their instructional goals are being met. They provide feedback on students' performance and provide instructional facilities to enhance quality teaching and learning processes. For successful achievement of academic performance in schools there is need for principals to provide effective instructional supervision.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the mixed method approach. The approach incorporated qualitative analysis of data. The study targeted head teachers, teachers, and students in secondary schools in Meru Central Sub County, Kenya. The target population was used to access respondents who had experience and information about students' completion rates in secondary schools. From the target population, a sample of 384 respondents (24 head teachers, 120 teachers and 240 students) was drawn to conform to the confidence interval of 0.05, confidence level of 1.96 and standard deviation of 0.5. The study objectives led to the collection of partly quantitative and qualitative data. In this case, quantitative and qualitative data of respondents were analyzed. The derived data led to the classification and coding of collected information. The coded data were entered into the computer, and the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 20) software was used to analyze the data. Qualitative data were classified according to variables of the study (class size, attitudes, and competencies). The Cronbach's alpha test of the variable reliability of the relevance coefficient at 0.67(Virginia University, 2016) was used on all standardized items. Descriptive statistics gathered included means, frequencies and standard deviations. Findings were presented using tables and graphs.

4. Results and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of principals' leadership style on students' completion rates in secondary schools in Kenya. Primary data was collected

from head teachers, teachers, and students from secondary schools in Meru Central Sub County. The study sought to find out from the principals' responses on their leadership styles. The findings are represented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Principal's leadership styles

Responses	Public		Private	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Democratic	7	66.7	3	33.3
Autocratic	5	33.3	6	66.7
Laissez-faire	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	15	100.0	9	100.0

From the findings in Table 4.1, 7 respondents representing 66.7% of the sample of 15 principals from public schools show that democratic leadership style contributes to students' completion rate. Another, 33.3% stated that autocratic leaders influence students completion of their education.However,3 respondents representing 33.3% of the sample of 9 principals from private schools indicated that democratic leadership influenced completion rate, while 66.7% showed that autocratic leaders contributed to students' completion rate. Further findings from Table 4.1 showed that none of the principals from public and private schools indicated that laissez-faire leadership style influenced students' completion rate in secondary schools.

This agrees with Fred (2001) who stated that in a democratic system students are involved in any efforts aimed at finding solution to the problems and planning the classroom of the organization. The leader in this style makes for easy flow of information to dispel rumors and also provide avenue of steady feedback mechanism.

The study further sought information from head teachers, teachers, and students on influence of leadership styles on provision of teaching and learning resources. Their responses were presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Principals', teachers' and students' views
on the role head teacher's style play in provision of learning resources

Attendance	Public secondary schools						Private secondary schools					
	Principals		Teachers		Students		Principal		Teachers		students	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Great role	15	100	75	100		100	9	100	45	100	90	100
Least role	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No role	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**15**	**100**	**75**	**100**	**15**	**100**	**9**	**100**	**45**	**100**	**90**	**100**

In regard to data contained in Table 4.2, 100% of the head teachers, teachers and students in public secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style plays a great role in influencing students' completion rates. Besides 100% of the head teachers, teachers and students in private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style plays a great role in influencing students' completion rates. Further findings from Table 4.2

revealed that none of head teachers, teachers and students in both public and private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style had no role in influencing students' completion rates.

Overall, over 100% of head teachers, teachers and students in both public and private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership styles had a great role in influencing students' completion rates in secondary schools. These findings concur with Nyongesa (2014), who argues that leadership is a fundamental factor in school outcome, as such schools which perform consistently well tend to have sound and efficient leadership.

The study also sought to find out the extent to which principals' supervision influence students' completion rates. Head teachers, teachers and students. Their responses were as presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Principals', teachers' and students' responses
on the extent to which principals' leadership style influence curriculum

Responses	Public secondary schools						Private secondary schools					
	Principals		Teachers		Students		Head teachers		Teachers		students	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
To a great extent	15	100	75	100	150	100	9	100	45	100	90	100
Not at all	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**15**	**100**	**75**	**100**	**15**	**100**	**9**	**100**	**45**	**100**	**90**	**100**

Data contained in Table 4.3 revealed that 100% of the head teachers, teachers and students in public secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style in their schools influenced curriculum supervision to a great extent. Besides, 100% of head teachers, teachers and students in private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style influenced curriculum supervision to a great extent. Further findings from Table 4.3 revealed that none of the head teachers, teachers and students in both public and private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style in their schools never influenced curriculum supervision at all.

Overall, over 100% of principals, teachers and students in both public and private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style influenced students' curriculum supervision in secondary schools to a great extent.

The study further sought information from head teachers, teachers, and students on the extent to which principals' leadership style influence completion rates in public and private secondary schools. Head teachers, teachers and students. Their responses were as presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Principals', teachers' and Students' responses on the extent
to which principals' leadership style influence completion rates

Responses	Public secondary schools						Private secondary schools					
	Principals		Teachers		Students		Head teachers		Teachers		students	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
To a great extent	15	100	75	100	150	100	9	100	45	100	90	100
Not at all	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**15**	**100**	**75**	**100**	**150**	**100**	**9**	**100**	**45**	**100**	**90**	**100**

In regard to data contained in Table 4.4, 100% of the head teachers in public secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style in their schools influenced students' completion rates to a great extent. Another 100% of teachers in public secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style influence students' completion rates to a great extent. Besides, 100% of the students in public secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style influenced students' completion rates to a great extent. In addition, 100% of the head teachers in private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style in their schools influenced students' completion rates to a great extent. Another 100% of teachers in private secondary schools indicated that principal leadership style influence students' completion rates to a great extent. Besides, 100% of the students in private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style influenced students' completion rates to a great extent. Further findings from Table 4.4 revealed that none of head teachers, teachers and students in both public private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style in their schools did not influence students' completion rates at all.

Overall, over 100% of principals, teachers and students in both public and private secondary schools indicated that principals' leadership style influenced students' completion rates in secondary schools to a great extent.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, it was revealed that:
- Principals' leadership style influenced students' completion rates in secondary schools.
- Principals' leadership styles had a great role in influencing students' completion rates in secondary schools.
- Principals' leadership style influenced students' curriculum supervision in secondary schools to a great extent.
- Principals' leadership style influenced students' completion rates in secondary schools to a great extent

From the findings therefore, it was evident that principals' leadership style is crucial for achieving high completion rates in secondary schools in Kenya. Poor leadership skills among the secondary schools' principals impede learning achievement. As a result, students are frustrated and demotivated. Subsequently, students drop out of

school due to lack of motivation by head teachers. Generally, it was, therefore, concluded from the findings that principals' leadership style contributes to a great extent the students' completion rates in secondary schools in Kenya.

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that:

- The government of Kenya should develop appropriate policies to enhance students' completion rates in secondary schools.
- Principals need to pursue in service courses to enhance their leadership styles

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