

Headteachers' Perception of Their Roles in Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Study of Kericho Day Secondary School in Kericho County

Kipng'etich Kirui, DPhil

Lecturer

Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media
School of Education, Moi University
P. O. Box 3900 Eldoret – Kenya.

Ahmed Osman, PhD

Coordinator Northern Kenya Campus

&

Lecturer Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media
School of Education, Moi University
P. O. Box 3900 Eldoret – Kenya.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was an internship programme to assess the perception of the head teachers towards their changing roles in secondary schools. The objective was to “shadow” the principal of Kericho Day Secondary School in order to assess their perceived and actual roles. The study utilised descriptive method of research. The sampling design adopted was mainly purposive sampling. Interview guide, document analysis and observation were the bases of getting information. It was found that the principal's day is simply a reflection of Fullan's (1991) statement that the role of the principal has become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade. This is because their ideal roles are far removed from the actual roles.

Key words: administration, head teacher/principal, leadership, management

Introduction

This study purposely chose to report on the work of the head teacher, herein referred to as principal, of Kericho Day Secondary School in Kericho County. The major purpose was to describe the state of affairs as they exist based on Kerlinger's (1983) assertion. The study was based on observation, document analysis, and interviews. The principal of Kericho Day Secondary School is a middle aged female teacher in her late forties. She is a teacher of Geography and Christian Religious Education. She has a Bachelor of Education Degree and has taught in various schools for the last 17 years. This principal has attended induction and administrative courses offered by KESI (Kenya Education Staff Institute).

Kericho Day is three streamed school in an uptown setting. It is purely a co-educational (mixed) day school as the name suggests. The school is categorized at the DEO's office as a district school, meaning that it purely draws its studentage from the schools in the district, more so, from the peri-urban community in Kericho town. There are 22 teachers in this school, 18 posted by the TSC (Teachers Service Commission), and 4 employed by the school's BOG (Board of Governors). There are 11 members of the support staff in the school.

The current enrolment in the school stands at 558 students. The students are admitted to the school through MOEs (Ministry of Education) district selection. Most students enrolled here are those who scored 250 marks and above in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. The school generally has a low drop-out rate of about 5 students per year. The school has ample facilities for learning, sports (in fact the school's hand ball team – girls - had just returned from a tournament in Italy), and drama.

The role of the school heads has become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade (Fullan, 1991). Certain school heads are effective and Fullan (1991) adds that effective head teachers are a minority. Evidently, there is an apparent gap between what is and what needs to be, notwithstanding the latest directive by the Teachers Service Commission that school principals are expected to teach a certain number of lessons per week based on CBE (Curriculum Based Establishment). Improving the quality of education in schools remains high on the agenda of governments all over the world. In recent years more attention has been given to the need to improve school management and strengthen the role of the head teachers. Much research have demonstrated that the quality of education depends primarily on the way schools are managed, more than on the abundance of available resources and that the capacity of schools to improve teaching and learning is strongly influenced by the quality of the leadership provided by the head teacher (Findle & Findley, 1992). For a long time, there has been a paradox whether *the head teacher is the school or the school is the head teacher*. Others argue that what happens in the school when the head teacher is absent is what the school is.

Diverse roles of the school head

Leadership and management

No institution can possibly function without a figure head. Leadership is an essential factor among all social animals from the insects to man. The nature of leadership is largely determined by the nature of the organization and that of society. There are varied styles of leadership in the market such as: coercive leadership which is commonly labeled as dictatorship. In this style, those who are led have very little or no say at all about the way things ought to be. There are some head teachers and class teachers who still find it fashionable to use this approach in dealing with their teachers and pupils rather than allowing room for freedom of expression. The head teacher and or the staff make all decisions without consulting the staff and or pupils. *Laissez-faire* leadership is a French phrase that literally means *let people do what they want*. Here the leader is just symbolic. The democratic leadership derives its power from the governed. Fullan (1991) says democratic leadership followers build up patterns of response which yield results and give much satisfaction as well.

The head teachers' functions are varied within an educational setting. The key functional word that describes well the head teacher is that of a manager and a leader in educational dimensions. Earlier writers on management have struggled with two related but distinct questions: *what is management and what do managers actually do?* Okumbe (1999) separates managerial functions into three areas of planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling. Instructional leadership functions involve all the beliefs, decisions, strategies, and tactics that head teachers use to generate instructional effectiveness in classrooms. Managers focus on 'running a smooth ship', while instructional leaders focus on learning and instruction. Although the role of the principal as instructional leader is very vital in developing an effective school, head teachers can not be effective instructional leaders if they are not good managers.

Fullan (1991) argues that, the head teacher's job is to ensure that essential things get done, not to do it all by themselves. In principle, many head teachers would agree, however, in practice the administration, management or leadership do vary and many head teachers appear to be victims of the moment. They are constantly pulled into every day's events in the school life i.e. answering calls, meeting parents, resolving disputes, attending meetings, while at the same time being implementer or overseer of major educational practices. It is a paradox in headship that one principal recently quipped that, "it should not fall to my lot to be school property surveyor, building inspector, water and electricity meter reader, store stocker, toilet unblocker and general factotum"(personal communication, 2010).

The head teacher therefore, has the overall responsibility for the leadership and management of the school. As the leading professional in the school, the head teacher should ensure the school is well managed and organized, providing leadership and direction. In order to support teachers and other staff, they should ensure there are appropriate policies and procedures in place, and ensure resources are used effectively and efficiently and good relationships are fostered within the whole school community. From the foregoing, it is clear that head teachers are increasingly under pressure to deliver on school performance due to parents being knowledgeable, ever changing government policies, and strong teachers' unions. It is from such justification that it is important to discover how head teachers perform their roles in a secondary school setting. This article is based on a "shadowy" study of the head teacher's actual (real, present, current) work.

Administrative, management and leadership delineation

In this study, the principal in trying to differentiate between administration, management and leadership aspects ended up saying that,

The head teacher does all these work. They are inter-related. There is no boundary and therefore giving a distinction is not possible due to over-lapping.

However, she said that management tends to be reflected on equitable use of both personnel and material resources to achieve optimal benefits. This forms what is called the ideal roles and she added that leadership is a characteristic that emanates from the interpretation of the ideal roles and how one feels it should be done as a person and this forms the actual role of the principal. The principal said that due to the dynamism in schools, a school head must domesticate the ideal roles and make them fit into the situation in their schools.

Management dimension

The principal said that one of the tasks that she is involved in terms of management include budgeting. In Europe, a survey done recently in 12 countries (Portugal, Estonia, Slovenia, the UK [Northern Ireland], Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, the UK [England] and Norway)

(http://www.ncsl.org/leadership_development/strategic_programmes/ldev-strategic-slict-index.cfm as retrieved on 18th April, 2010) showed that the head teacher is responsible for the administration of school budget.

As mentioned earlier, accountability seems to be the agenda of many stakeholders in the education sector. This call seems to emanate from the aspect of corruption that has pervaded every sector of the economy in this country. The government has stipulated some policies governing the finances of a school. These finances are monitored by the Audit Unit of the MOE.

These stringent measures are good as the principal asserted, but she was quick to say that the introduction of free tuition in secondary schools had complicated her budgeting; the reason is that the government has been late in the disbursement of those funds. She said that when the funds were finally available, she had the school budget made under the following sub-headings each with a detailed cost (i) staff i.e. teaching, non-teaching (ii) tuition which include school equipment and stores (iii) local transport and travelling that include internal traveling expenses, teachers' seminars; (iv) electricity, water and conservancy, which cover charges and maintenance of the said items; (v) contingencies concerns expenditure on the school office like stationery, telephone and staff uniforms; (vi) RMI (Repairs, Maintenance, and Improvement) that cover minor repairs and maintenance of buildings, equipment and furniture repair.

Apart from the above vote-heads, the school also charges other levies on the students. The school head said the levies had been approved by the MOE. From available records the levies included the following: PTA Fund, Caution Money, Project Money (the school has a new bus and it is still paying for it), Computer Charges, and School ID Charges. At the time of this interview, the principal hinted that her students had qualified to play at the district level ball games and the school was short of finances to spend on the team and she had to carry out what the ministry calls virement of funds (transferring monies from one vote head to another). When asked why she did virement without the express approval from the ministry of education's permanent secretary, she quipped, "but at times there are urgent situations that cannot wait for the ministry to respond to virement like the school team outside that is headed for a competition". The operating budget of this school was done using two methods. The school accounts' clerk said they used the past records. These were used to make estimates and in this school it was done around September of every year. The principal said that from the estimates of the previous year they could project the year's budget estimates. The other method was the use of school enrolment or student population. Here, the school did budget based on the unit cost per student. The principal said that at times there were more students admitted compared to the previous year and that made the school to adopt that system.

Accountability and transparency

Apart from the school bursar being expected to issue a receipt immediately for any monies received, and prepare payment vouchers which the head counter checks before signing, the head said the bursar was also suppose to prepare a trial balance and bank reconciliation books which helped her maintain a watchful eye on the frivolities of expenditure and payments.

The head talked of accountability passionately in an equivalence of Socrates who was accountable unto death for his teaching and the sophists who were accountable to their students, for here lay their means of livelihood. Today the head teacher is legally accountable to the school boards and morally accountable to self, profession, community and nation. As this principal talked good of being accountable, the researchers sought to find her views on the issue of performance contracting that the government is serious on introducing in all sectors in the country. The principal referred this researcher to the sentiments made by the KSSHA (Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association) in a memorandum presented to the MOE in their recent annual meeting. The researchers have since learnt that the KSSHA has refused in no uncertain terms that they would not sign any performance contract in the ruse that no schools in the country have similar characteristics. Well in the course of the day in this school, the bursar and occasionally, the principal herself did a lot of transactions involving school cash and cheques. She also did the signing of payment vouchers and in some instances did not bother to check or authenticate some of the payments she was committing herself to; she even signed one on her way out for lunch.

Educational dimension

One of the priorities of heads of school is to monitor the teaching learning process in their schools. Monitoring involves actions envisaged by the head to ensure that things are going according to the goals and objectives set at the school and national levels at different points in time and also to see to it that things are revolving according to plan and in line with the targets set. The purpose of monitoring is, as such, to increase efficiency and improve effectiveness of the systems in place in school since heads are input variables in a school. The principal spent most of her time in dealing with managerial issues. Although the educational dimensions of the school heads are being emphasized, it is hardly practiced; hence, basically the principal's role is that of a manager. Stronge (1988) calculated that elementary school principals spent 62.2% of their time on managerial issues and 11% on instructional leadership issues, even after undergoing training in in-service for the role of instructional leader.

There is a common parlance in educational circles that the effectiveness of a head teacher is known by what goes on in the school when he/she is not around. The MOE has given guidelines governing the educational aspects in a school and defines staff duties of the school head, deputy, heads of departments, class teachers and even staff meetings, school administration and records. In the later, the documents that she had delegated to other members of the staff were: admission register for all students enrolled in the school, attendance registers marked by the class teachers and not by class monitors, log book detailing all happenings in the school, visitors book, and punishment book (on this day two students were doing a punishment for telling off one of the kitchen staff during lunch time the previous day).

The principal said that her work is to ensure that the policies and objectives of the school are clearly stipulated and well known to both students and the staff. This principal said she ensures that the goals of education are made feasible through the objectives of the school. The principal also procures through the procurement committee chaired by the deputy head teacher the resources necessary for the achievement of the objectives. She equally ensures that when these resources have been identified, they must be procured in good time for the successful achievement of the objectives. Yet again, this principal organizes and coordinates the activities in school with the prime function of achieving the objectives of the school optimally. She said that it was incumbent for any head teacher to understand the varied potential of human resources at their disposal so that division of labour is done in the most appropriate way to ensure that the objectives are achieved. In coordinating, the principal has done allocation to individual staff in written as attested by letters posted in the filing system in the school. She added that this was done to ensure that all the concerned staff expended all their energies towards a common goal. On influencing and stimulating the human resources available, this principal provided enabling environment which gave staff and students the assurance that the human factor was recognized in the school for successful achievement of the objectives.

It was also clear that that principal was alive to the fact that schools are set to achieve certain educational goals and objectives. The principal said that top on her priority in this school was to ensure that the curriculum is implemented properly as stipulated by the MOE. She ensures that teaching and learning went on in her school. This is what Okumbe (1999) and Stronge (1988) believe is being an instructional leader. They say that to be an effective instructional leader, one must have a vision for the organization that is clearly focused upon desired outcome like ensuring academic excellence.

Secondly, one must communicate that vision to everyone connected with the organization to obtain support for it and also, one must provide and/or obtain the resources needed to accomplish the vision, and finally, manage oneself so that the above can occur. It therefore appears that instructionally effective schools have principals who are viewed by their teachers as the primary instructional leader in the school. To influence the loaded tasks above, this principal said there are records that teachers are expected to write and up-date regularly. These are the records of work, scheme of work, progress records, among other records. She said that these records are supposed to be done professionally by all teachers, and the documents are forwarded to her office every Friday through the heads of departments for signing. The principal also asserted that they held regular meetings with the section heads and class teachers to chart the way forward and see how the syllabus has been covered. Indeed, available minutes in the principal's office attested to such regular meetings. As far as teaching was concerned, the principal said,

I have authority to assess/supervise a class instruction of my teachers. I can also pick some exercise books at random from class and compare with the records in my office.

Leadership on a daily basis

The leadership of a school places a lot of responsibilities on the principal's shoulders and demands from her great knowledge of office administration, personnel management, and educational practice, accounting and even building maintenance. There are quite a number of manuals and policy documents from the MOE which describe in detail such matters as staff management, discipline, finance, curriculum and examination that the principal will be familiar with. However, changing times and circumstances will mean that there is some room for flexibility and originality at the school. This principal saw leadership as

willingness to work with others and to be able to listen. It is the ability to see beyond today. It involves being able to work towards tomorrow and having the skills to bring along the participants that need to be involved.

She further articulates that, "if something stops in a school because the leader has been transferred or retired from service, then he/she didn't have really true leadership". This principal actually saw herself as a kind of a coordinator, because the key in leadership is to listen, support, and empower. She said that an effective leader was one who could adapt to the needs of the situation, one who was had a preferred style of leadership, but the style of leadership he/she need to use in some situations may not be the same. On the bad side of leadership, the principal said, "at the end of the day you have dealt with all the ills within and outside the school, everybody has dumped you and one knows not what to do except to just go outside and look at the sky". This in essence echoes what Fullan (1996:9) wrote,

Someone will always be dissatisfied with the leader's performance, relaxation, physical fitness, recalling a higher purpose, teaming up with supportive peer, separating self from role and ignoring the temptation to get even are some of the remedies...

Fullan (1996:20) expressed that one strong characteristic of effective leaders is that they "extend as well as express what they value". This principal believes in what she calls "management by walking around" to every corner of the school like the kitchen, class, school farm, the toilet among others, "this gives you a clear picture of the school" she concludes.

As part of the school leadership, there were endless demands of her attention right from the parents, teachers, students, support staff and other education stakeholders. This endless dealing with "people" was punctuated by signing of documents, opening and replying to mail, briefings from the school accounts clerk, the deputy principal, and the prefects on duty. This principal before the end of the day had to personally see how far some student culprits had gone doing some punishment in the school farm. It was interesting to find out how the school was dealing with truancies given the banning of corporal punishment in schools in this country. The principal said there were various behaviour patterns necessary for maximum performance by members of the school to achieve their objectives. Some students and staff do not follow the set standards of their school. Seeing discipline as put across by Douglas McGregor's theory X and Y assumptions about people is not enough. Head teachers who merely look at discipline as punishment are applying theory X assumptions about people (autocratic) and head teachers who look at discipline as a process of encouraging school community to move uniformly towards meeting the objectives of education are applying theory Y assumptions(head teacher providing intelligent skills).

This principal looked at the removal of the cane positively and said she had learnt to live without the cane. She employed the use of suspension from school, withdrawal of some privileges, and use of manual work within the compound as seen on that day when some students were contributing to the kitchen budget by weeding the *sukumawiki* (kales) growing in the school farm. She concluded by saying that when students dialogue with the school leadership, and with strengthened guidance and counseling, discipline is enhanced.

Before finally ending the day, the principal received a call from the area District Education Officer asking her to collect some registration forms for students from the Kenya National Examination Council.

Conclusions

The principal's day therefore is simply a reflection of Fullan's (1991) statement that the role of the principal has become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade. But to a large extent their work remains that of management. The principal despite mentioning shortage of staff members in some curriculum area does not teach any lesson. She did not make any efforts to attend any lesson in the course of the day. It even looked the more very impossible because by eleven in the morning there was evidently a long queue in her office - of parents, teachers and even students seeking her audience. These researchers were unable to get a clear response on what had become of the Teachers Service Commission's directive requiring the school principals to allocate themselves lessons in their schools.

This research on the basis of the observation concludes that effective heads constantly work at helping monitor staff, constantly work at enhancing good relationships in the school and between the school and community. In this respect we agree with Fullan (1999) that school heads lead the charge in focusing on instruction, school-wide mobilisation of resources and effort with respect to the long-term emphasis on instruction. If the school heads are to perform effectively their actual roles, a lot of attention has to be paid to making them more effective and this will go a long way in seeing the majority of our schools do well.

References

- Baker, M, 2000, High expectations and standards for all, no matter what, London, Department of Education and Employment (now Department of Education and Skills)
- Bamburg, J. D., & Andrews, R.L. (1990). Instructional leadership, school goals, and student achievement: Exploring the relationship between means and ends. Boston, MA.:Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319783).
- Creswell, J. (2003). Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed methods Approaches. London:SAGE publications.
- Koul, L., (1992). Methodology of Educational Research. Delhi: Wiley Eastern Ltd.
- Krashen, S. (1985). The Input Hypothesis. New York: White Plains.
- Krejcie, R. & Morgan, D. (1970). Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. Educational and Psychological Measurement. Pp 607-610.
- Kumar, R. (2005) Methodology. A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners. (2nd ed). Australia: Addison Wesley Longman Pty Ltd.
- Findle, B., and Findley, B. (1992). Effective schools: the role of the principal. *Contemporary Education*, 63(2), 102-104.
- Fullan, M. (1999). *Change Forces: the Sequel*, London, Falmer Press; Bristol, PA, Falmer Press
- Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, B. (1986). *Raising school quality in developing countries: What investments boots learning*. Washington Dc World Bank. Discussion Paper.
- http://www.ncsl.org.uk/leadership_development/strategic_programmes/ldev-strategic-slict-index.cfm
- <http://www.scribd.com/doc/5044015/Role-of-Head-Teacher-in-Schools>
- Kerlinger, F. N. (1983). Foundation of Behavioural Research. Delhi: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Kirui, J. (2010). Principal Kericho Day Secondary School. Own communication.
- Leithwood, K, Jantzi, D & Steinbeck, R. (1999). *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Newmann, F, King, B. & Young, P. (2000). Professional development that addresses school capacity: lessons from urban elementary schools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.
- Okumbe, J. A. (1999). *Educational management: Theory and practice*. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press.
- Sebring, P. & Bryk, A. (2000). School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago, Kappan, February, pp 440-43.
- Stronge, J. H. (1993). Defining Principalship: Instructional leader of middle manager. *NASSP Bulletin*, 647(8), 40-45.
- Stronge, J. H. (1988). A position in transition? *Principal*. 67(5), 32-33.