

Principals' Transformational Leadership Practices and Quality of Education in Secondary Schools in Kiambu County

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Abstract

Quality education is critical in secondary schools where learners are prepared to transit to the labour market or to pursue higher education. It has been argued that secondary school principals play an important role in the provision of quality education in schools. However, with the deteriorating academic performance standards in secondary schools in Kenya, particularly in the resource endowed counties such as Kiambu County, concerns are rising on whether the principals' leadership practices could be the key to unlocking the provision of quality education, and hence, improved academic performance. The objective of this paper, therefore, was to investigate principals' transformational leadership practices and their effect on the quality of education in secondary schools in the area. Descriptive survey design was used targeting 240 teachers and students who were randomly selected from 120 schools using stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the teachers and students. The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis, as well as inferential statistics. The findings revealed that the principals' leadership practices significantly influenced quality of secondary education in Kiambu County. The study concludes that the principals tend to exhibit transformational leadership styles that was instrumental in the provision of quality education, and also shaping both teachers and students perception on quality education. The study recommends that transformational leadership practices be adopted by the schools' leadership at all levels to increase individualized attention to the learners which translates to improved learning outcomes.

Key Words: *Quality Education, Transformational Leadership, Leadership Practices, Individualized Attention, Learning Outcomes, Secondary Schools, Kiambu County*

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1.0 Introduction

Secondary education equips students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes aligned to both the labor market and advancing to higher levels of education. Therefore, the

provision of quality secondary education highlights important socio-economic benefits and opportunities that can be derived from it, and is considered to be a major factor in the

country's development goals (Onsomu et al., 2006). Therefore, the quality of secondary education needs to be improved. Quality education is education that prepares the child for life and not just for examination and testing. It focuses on the holistic development of the child, that is; the physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or location (Regmi, 2017). Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals recognizes quality of education as essential to achieving sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). The fourth goal, by design seeks to ensure inclusiveness and equitability in education quality and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2019). Achieving quality education, however, still presents a formidable challenge across the globe.



In China, for instance, expansion of education initially led to deterioration of education quality characterized by inappropriate curricular, high enrolment rates, large numbers of qualified teachers, and inadequate teaching materials among

others. This was reflected by high level of drop-out rates and repetition, poor examination scores or attainment levels (Imbahala et al., 2019). In Asia, Latin America and Europe, improvement of quality and reduction of inequalities together with modernization of the functions of secondary schools were challenges that were prioritized. Similar constraints were experienced in countries in southern Africa and South Asian countries such as Indonesia (Pambudi & Harjanto, 2020). These regions also faced problems of high student numbers against the backdrop of limited public funding.

Kenya has also maintained its commitment to the Dakar Framework for education for the past two decades. It is committed to achieving a significant milestone in this program by increasing global access to education, expanding schools and improving school transition rates, through the remarkable launch of Free Day Secondary Education [FDSE] in 2008 (Ohba, 2009) which was an important center for the country's education sector and socio-economic framework. Provision of quality education at all levels requires co-operation and commitment of various stakeholders, including government, parents, students, teachers, the local community and schools. Research has shown a link between quality leadership and quality education. For example, Emerson and Goddard (1993) argue that there is a strong correlation between the quality of a school and its level of leadership.

According to Odhiambo (2008), the problem of inefficiency is largely based on management strategies. Such strategies need

to change if the goals of the education sector are to be met. Klingner et al. (2001) have shown that school heads who focus on teaching show support for learning through administration and provision of opportunities for teachers to develop professionally, so as to produce improved outcomes for students. However, this does not often reflect the situation on the ground, especially in Kenya where high schools continue to post declining

academic performance standards (Wagura, 2016). A suitable example of this phenomenon is Kiambu County, which is endowed with resources and has the highest number of high schools in Kenya's Central Region, yet continues to lag behind other Central Region counties in terms of academic performance in Kenya's Certificate of Secondary Education as indicated on Table 1.

Table 1

2010 KCSE Results Analysis by Counties in the Central Region, Kenya

County	No. of Schools	Mean Grade
Kirinyaga	162	5.29
Murang'a	125	5.10
Nyeri	90	5.16
Nyandarua	105	4.97
Kiambu	303	4.86

Source: Kenya National Examinations Council, 2020

These figures cast doubt on the state of quality education in the Counties, and particularly, the success of the school principals in providing quality education. Evidently, the role of the principal as the school's top leadership and authority is critical to its success, and to the provision of quality education. School principals are among the key determinants of quality and efficiency by acting as custodians of quality education (Putri et al., 2020; Stronge & Xu, 2021). In support of this, Rinderman et al., (2015) asserts that good school performance is comparable to good governance. Samoe (2015) and DiPaola and Wagner (2018) however, recognize that many principals neglect the supervision and support of staff and affect the overall outcome and quality of education.

However, there are still limited studies on core leadership processes, especially transitional leadership, on the provision of quality education in high schools in Kiambu country.

This paper examines the leadership practices of school principals and impact of these practices on quality education in high schools from the perspective of the theory of leadership change. Hamid et al., (2016) point out that revolutionary leaders are seen as capable of raising the performance levels of their organization to higher standards, by awarding prizes for members showing improved performance, and thus achieving the predefined results. They achieve this through individual consideration, motivation and positive influence that motivates their

followers to use all their energies to bring about success (Masungu et al. 2015; Phiri et al., 2020; Faulks et al., 2021). This paper aims to make a significant contribution to the existing discourse on quality education by bringing about a change in leadership at the school level.

2.0 Materials and Methods

Kiambu County has 303 secondary schools, out of which 227 are public sponsored and 76 are private sponsored (<https://kiambu.go.ke/education-and-literacy/>). This study was conducted in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, which is one of the five metropolitan counties of Kenya. Kiambu County borders other metropolitan counties such as Nairobi, Kajiado, Machakos and Nakuru Counties. The County is well endowed with both economic and educational resources, and has good institutional infrastructures supported by good communication network and power connectivity all of which leverage on quality education (Muiruri & Sang, 2018).

More importantly, the county schools are well established and staffed, besides being a host to six national schools (Wagura, 2016). The study employed descriptive survey design using a quantitative approach that involved collecting data using structured questionnaires from a sample of 125 public secondary schools obtained using the Nassiuma (2000) formula. Hence, the unit of

observation were 125 teachers and 125 students that were randomly selected from each school. Only form III and IV students were used as student respondents as they were thought to have adequate knowledge and experience to provide the information needed when compared to other students in lower classes.

The questionnaires which were pretested for validity and reliability were administered to teachers and students. The instruments were pilot tested in two schools randomly selected in Kiambu County. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics specifically mean and standard deviations and inferential statistical methods, such as the chi-squares and factor analysis. This study adopted the guidelines by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) who described a factor loading of 0.45 as being a fair measure of real life data. Therefore, factors with loadings above 0.45 were extracted for the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Reliability Test

Before the main study was carried out, pretesting was conducted as aforementioned with the aim of establishing the dependability of research instruments in collecting reliable data. This study applied Cronbach's Alpha value in determining reliability of constructs of the study. A summary of results on reliability is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Results on Reliability Test

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha based on data from students	Cronbach's Alpha based on data from Teachers
School-based factors (X ₁)	0.822	0.727
Teacher-related factors (X ₂)	0.902	0.781
Social economic factors of parents (X ₃)	0.930	0.752
Principals' leadership practices (X ₄)	0.862	0.817
Quality of education (Y)	0.702	0.730

The Cronbach's coefficient alpha values in Table 1 were more than 0.7, that is ($\alpha \geq 0.700$) which is acceptable in social sciences (Cho & Kim, 2015). This shows that all the items of measure attached to the study variables were reliable for data analysis. The study targeted 250 respondents out of which 204 (82%) responded to the questionnaires and interviews. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), 75% or higher rate of response is both credible and acceptable. The

results in this section are presented in terms of the key respondent responses, which were the students, teachers and principals.

Students' Perspectives on Principals' Leadership Practices on Quality Education

The results on students' responses on principals' leadership practices towards the provision of quality education in secondary schools are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Students' Perception of Principals' Leadership Practices on Quality Education

Principals' leadership practices	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Factor Loading
Observation of punctuality of teachers and students	4.22	.875	-1.140	1.332	.634
The school management involves teachers, parents and students when making decisions concerning quality of education	4.14	.890	-.930	.575	.822
The school administration has put up mechanisms for enforcing school rules and policies	4.14	.917	-.922	.524	.755
Decentralization of decisions making is evident in our school	4.13	.873	-.835	.427	.777
The school administration has created an enabling working and learning environment	4.12	.932	-.880	.206	.752
The administration is bothered by students' issues	4.09	.926	-.873	.275	.680

The school administration has outlined clear roles for teachers, supportive staff and students	4.04	.880	-.637	.055	.733
The school administration has put mechanisms for supervising curriculum delivery	4.04	.963	-.872	.396	.775
There is quick communication of issues in the school	4.00	1.016	-.778	-.070	.690
The nature of rewards and recognition used in the school motivates both students and teachers	3.98	.925	-.744	.422	.761
The school believes in honest and open communication	3.91	.879	-.985	1.632	.459
The school administration support and encourage new ideas from teachers and students	3.87	.975	-.460	-.417	.705
The school administration usually punishes any wrong doing from staff and students	3.70	1.057	-.332	-.738	.669
The school administration involves all stakeholders in decision making	2.92	1.228	.037	-.917	.644
The systems and structures in our school promote transparency and accountability	2.81	1.285	.035	-1.116	.593
We often hold student and school administrators <i>barazas</i> to discuss student issues	2.54	1.155	-.108	-1.432	.583
The school administration has strict codes of ethics	1.85	.977	.862	-.389	.671
The school administration has embraced honesty and integrity	1.80	.861	.816	-.143	.628
Administration support teachers professional development	1.74	.886	1.040	.252	.656
Emphasis on quality and standards in the schools	1.63	.966	1.484	1.573	.575
<i>Summated mean</i>	<i>3.40</i>	<i>0.9733</i>			

KMO = .928

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = .000

As shown in Table 2 above, principals' leadership practices recorded a summated mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.9733 on how they are related to the provision of quality education in secondary schools in Kiambu County as student tests show that students generally agree with the statements. Of the 20 procedures mentioned, 9 have a direct rating of 4.00 or more, which suggests strong agreements regarding these 9 statements.

These statements related to involving teachers, parents and students when making decisions about the quality of education. In addition, the analysis showed that all principal leadership processes suggest that

they affect the quality of a well-loaded education when the value of Eigen in each case was more than 0.45. Compliance with these principal leadership processes was further confirmed by a high KMO value of .928, which was more than 0.6 and Bartlett's critical round test, $P = .000$.

However, students do not seem to fit in with the four principal practices of school leadership. These include; school administrators have strong codes of conduct (mean = 1.85), school administrators accept honesty and integrity (mean = 1.80), school administrators support teachers attending seminars, conferences and conferences (mean = 1.74), and that school administrators

emphasize and accept quality and standards in all practice at school (mean = 1.63). These revelations indicated serious gaps in Principals' leadership practices and could derail the achievement of quality education in secondary schools.

These results imply that from students' perspectives, four factors, that is, observation of punctuality of teachers and students, the school administration involves teachers, consultation of students and parents when making decisions concerning quality of education, the school administration has put

up mechanisms for enforcing school rules and policies, and decentralization of decision making is evident in our school were the most influential principal roles in determining the quality of education in the schools in the area.

Teachers' perspectives on Principals' Leadership Practices on Quality Education

The teachers' views on the principals' leadership practices towards the provision of quality education in secondary schools are outlined on Table 3.

Table 3
Teachers' Responses of Principals' Leadership Practices on Quality Education

Principals 'leadership practices (N = 114)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis	Factor Loading
He is friendly and easy to approach and talk to	4.33	.816	-1.283	1.869	.671
Encourage staff to start and create ideas that will benefit the school community	4.20	.914	-1.122	.886	.445
Genuinely share information with staff	4.19	.881	-1.022	.821	.691
Concerned with staff welfare	4.15	1.075	-1.305	1.082	.575
Set and display high values and reinforce them	4.15	.914	-1.009	.650	.585
Consult with other staff towards improving education quality	4.13	1.000	-.917	-.051	.703
Be patient with the progress made by staff in achieving the goal	4.12	.789	-.332	-.994	.657
Initiate and direct employee policies	4.09	.898	-.697	-.334	.681
Express confidence in employees even when they disagree on some issues	4.04	.872	-.313	-1.067	.617
Guides rather than control teachers in their work	3.98	1.022	-1.029	.834	.551
Allow members of staff to air their ideas before making decisions	3.88	1.032	-.832	.388	.648
Open to criticism by members of staff	3.84	.992	-.507	-.510	.470
Motivating	3.62	1.059	-.329	-.746	.565
Suppress new ideas from members of staff	2.92	1.235	.181	-.871	.778
Summated mean	3.97	0.9642			
KMO = .844					
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity =		0.000			

As presented in Table 3, principals' leadership practices recorded a summated mean of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 0.9642 on how they were related to the provision of quality education in secondary schools in Kiambu County, when evaluated by teachers. This was higher than the student figures (Summated mean = 3.40; SD = 0.9733) and which indicated that more teachers than students tended to agree with the proposition that the principals' leadership practices were instrumental in the provision of quality education in their schools.

Also, the factor analysis indicated that all aspects of principals' leadership practices loaded very well where Eigen value in each case was above the extraction value of 0.45. The relevance of these aspects on principals' leadership practices was also confirmed through a high KMO value of .844, which was more than 0.6 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity, $P = .000$. Generally, these results underscore the essence of leadership

and governance practices of the principals (from the teachers' perspective) in pursuit of quality education in secondary schools. Working, aligning, configuring and coordinating the efforts of all stakeholders towards achieving quality education in secondary schools is paramount.

Quality of education in secondary schools in Kiambu County

In order to assess the overall effects of principal's leadership practices on quality of education in secondary schools in Kiambu County, a multivariate ordinal logistic analysis was conducted. Having met the foregoing two conditions (a valid goodness of fit model and Pearson Chi-square) of ordinal logistic regression, it was okay to go beyond log odds (logit) regression coefficients values and calculate odds ratios of the independent variable on the outcome variable being investigated. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Parameter Estimates and Odds Ratios on Combined Selected Metrics on Quality of Education in Secondary Schools in Kiambu County

Result	Std.					Lower	Upper	ExpB	95% Confidence Interval	
	Estimate	Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Bound	Bound		Lower	Upper
Students' data	1.18	0.334	12.451	1	0	0.524	1.835	3.253	1.689	6.263
Teachers' data	1.637	0.33	24.548	1	0	0.989	2.284	5.139	2.689	9.819

Link
function:logit

Based on data from both students and teachers shown in Table 4, the independent variable X4 [principals' leadership practices) was a statistically significant predictor of quality of education when all selected metrics were combined. Consequently, the following conclusive logistical statements were made based on students and teachers' opinions:

- i. An increase in principals' leadership practices of parents was associated with an increase in the odds of quality of education, with an odds ratio of .297 (95% CI, .109 to .811), Wald χ^2 (1) = 5.616, $p < .005$.
- ii. An increase in principals' leadership practices of parents was associated with an increase in the odds of quality of education, with an odds ratio of 3.382 (95% CI, 1.306 to 8.759), Wald χ^2 (1) = 6.298, $p < .005$.

The results showed that although school-based factors had significant effect on quality of education, when other predictors were held constant (based on data from students and teachers), its magnitude ceased to be significant when all predictors (selected metrics) were combined in one model.

These results imply that the principals' leadership-related factors had statistically significant relationship with the quality of education in Kiambu County.

Testing of the hypothesis

The hypothesis that *there is no significant relationship between the leadership-related factors and quality of education in secondary schools in Kiambu County* was tested using both the students and the teachers' reactions and presented in in Tables 5.

Table 5

Principals' Leadership Practices and Quality Education

	Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.	Pseudo R-Square (Nagelkerke)
Students' responses	Intercept					
	Only	995.517				0.29
	Final	918.881	76.637	1	0.000	
Teachers' responses	Intercept					
	Only	516.258				0.093
	Final	505.157	11.1	1	0.001	

Link function: Logit.

Results in Table 5 shows that the Chi-Square values for the students' perception ($\chi^2 = 76.637$, $p = 0.000$) and teachers' perceptions ($\chi^2 = 11.1$, $p = .001$) both were significant ($p \leq 0.05$); therefore, the null hypothesis was not accepted. This has shown that the model has

the ability to predict mathematically which can explain the diversity of education quality based on core leadership processes. In addition, the model shows that core leadership processes predicted 29.0% and 9.3% (student and teacher responses

respectively) for educational quality variation as indicated by the Nagelkerke R square. However, as the results were primarily based on a single independent variable, leadership processes, the inclusion of other predictions may result in a higher Nagelkerke R square value.

Discussion

The foregoing results from the students' reactions generally underscore the essence of leadership and governance practices in pursuit of quality of education in secondary schools. Working, coordinating, setting up and coordinating the efforts of all stakeholders in achieving quality education in high schools is very important. These findings reflect a positive attitude towards principal leadership processes. These processes have impacted on the working environment created in schools (Rawahi, Hassan, & Ismail, 2018) by giving teachers time to express their views. Still, the principal is the superintendent and director, teaching leader, curriculum trainer and the chief-implementer of policies in the school. Research conducted by Alarm (2017) has found that due to participation in decision-making, teachers appear to be organized and this renewed their enthusiasm in their work.

However, some revelations have highlighted huge gaps in the Principal leadership processes and could hamper the success of quality education in high schools. In this study, it was also interesting to note that principals in many high schools reported little emphasis on accepting quality and standards throughout their performance. This type of termination and deviation has

significantly impacted the provision of quality education in high schools. These results were in line with Abreha (2014) study which found out that principals were not at the required level in their performance as they lack integrity in providing honest feedback on teacher performance disrupted their efforts to improve.

According to Abreha, quality education requires full compliance and commitment to standardized performance, otherwise deviations and non-compliance will prevail. From the perspective of educators, the results agree with Cisler and Bruce (2013) regarding the role and responsibilities of principals in staff management which includes providing strategic guidelines; guidelines that lead to achievement of desired objectives and goals. The results also support those of Tusianah et al., (2019), King'oina et al (2017); and Barrella et al (2019) who found out that curriculum revision, development, continuous system review and implementation, lead to improved quality of education. This may be because principals who use program development and allocate appropriate resources, improve the performance of staff and students by motivating and mentoring them, which helps to achieve the goals of the school, hence, realizing better levels of education.

Theoretically, the findings agree with Hamid et al., (2016) who explain that transformational leaders are seen as improving the performance abilities of their members up to the predefined levels, through the provision of acceptable performance rewards which produce the results defined by

a leader. They achieve this through individual thought, mental motivation, inspiring motivation and positive influence that motivates their members to commit all their energies to bring about success (Masungu et al. 2015; Phiri et al., 2020; Faulks et al., 2021). As such, it can be adduced on the basis of evidence presented in this paper that the principals in secondary schools in Kiambu County practiced transformational leadership in the provision of quality education.

4.0 Conclusions

Students are the main beneficiaries of quality of education. If attributes of quality are compromised, students suffer to a very great extent. If standards of providing quality are upheld in secondary schools, students enjoy the process and systems which are meant to ensure a holistic citizen is moulded, well-grounded and prepared to contribute to nation building. On the other hand, teachers usually spend a lot of time with students in secondary schools; hence, quality of the environment, resources, facilities and equipment matter to a great extent. They are also important components in driving quality in some aspects. Teachers too depend on quality of facilities in the school in order to deliver their expectations.

From the findings of this paper, it was established that more teachers than students tended to agree with the proposition that the principals' leadership practices were instrumental in the provision of quality education in their schools. It was also evident

that while there had been substantial agreement on the principals' leadership practices on the provision of quality education, there were serious gaps which could derail the achievement of quality education in secondary schools. Generally, the study concludes that principals tended to exhibit transformational leadership styles that were instrumental in the provision of quality education, and also in shaping both teachers' and students' perceptions on the school leadership and quality education.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that transformational leadership practices be adopted by the schools' leadership at all levels so as to increase individualized attention to the learners which can then translate to improved learning outcomes in the schools. The principal and members of the school management should emphasize and adopt quality and standards in all operations in the school. As quality education directly affects the students, there is need for frequent engagement with students on forums within the school on issues affecting them through open dialogue. Therefore, the school principals should endeavour to promote a culture of open communication and transparency and accountability so as to enable members of the school community to engage meaningfully on matters of education quality affecting their schools. The school systems and structures also need to be strengthened to promote accountability.

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