

The Influence of Idea Generation by Non-Teaching Staff on Service Delivery in Secondary Schools in Embu County

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Abstract

The engagement of the non-teaching staff in secondary schools is expected to contribute to effective service delivery. However, in Kenyan secondary schools, poor service delivery continues to be reported despite the critical role the non-teaching staff play in school development. The main focus of the study was on the effect of idea generation by the non-teaching staff on service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County. Adopting a cross-sectional survey research design, and grounded on pragmatist philosophy, the study employed a mixed-methods approach. The target population included 1,803 non-teaching staff, 208 principals, and 208 Board of Management (BoM) chairpersons. Stratified and proportionate systematic sampling ensured representative selection across school categories and sub-counties. A sample size of 337 respondents was achieved with 10 principals selected from 5 sub-counties, 10 BoM chairs from 5 sub-counties and 317 non-teaching staff from 140 secondary schools. The study utilized questionnaire tools on the non-teaching staff, an interview guide on principals and focused group discussions for the BoMs. Validity and reliability of the instruments were confirmed through construct, content, and face validity, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), and correlation analysis for quantitative data; and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Results were presented using tables, and themes. The results indicated that idea generation was low with key barriers including fear and intimidation, poor communication channels, lack of confidence and low self-esteem, lack of opportunities and platforms, and resource constraints. However, drivers such as effective communication, inclusive leadership, recognition, collaborative leadership, regular staff development forums and training emerged as essential for fostering innovative work behaviour, trickling down to enhanced service delivery by non-teaching staff. The study concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between idea generation and service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County. The study recommends that school management, led by principals and supported by Boards of Management (BoM), establish structured and inclusive platforms for harnessing idea generation among non-teaching staff in secondary schools.

Keywords: *Idea generation, innovative work behaviour, service delivery, non-teaching staff, secondary schools*

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1.0 Introduction

Globally, effective service delivery is recognized as a critical aspect of progressive organizations. Efficient service delivery in institutions of learning is determined by knowledge management of human resources, less time spent in carrying out a transaction, high level of responsiveness, stakeholder satisfaction, innovative work behaviour, targets realization and supportive organizational structure and culture (Hussein et al., 2022). The non-teaching staff in secondary schools not only play a fundamental role in the student's achievement, but also in ensuring organizational success by facilitating the attainment of goals and objectives.

Service delivery in secondary schools refers to how services from different sections are offered to the clients. The services offered are diverse and provided by various offices and sections. For example, teaching services are offered by the teaching staff, while auxiliary and maintenance services are offered by the non-teaching staff. Service delivery by non-teaching staff comprises complementary roles and responsibilities undertaken to support academic achievement and the smooth running of the secondary school (Kivindu, 2015). Such roles include maintaining facilities, ensuring a safe and secure environment; cooking, counselling services, and pastoral care; providing library services and financial services among other roles. Some of the support staff required in secondary schools includes bursars, security officers, librarians, secretaries, matrons, accountants, cooks, procurement officers, storekeepers, sports coordinators, laboratory technicians, drivers, nurses/ clinical officers, casuals, artisans, cleaners, herders, canteen operators, and messengers among others (Newman, 2014).

The innovativeness of support staff in secondary schools has been described by

Hosseini and Shirazi (2021) as a significant contributor to secondary school education competitiveness, learner improvement in academic achievement, and workers' experiences; and addresses staff turnover antecedents. In fostering innovativeness and creativity among support staff, researchers have noted that idea generation, creativity, innovation and knowledge management contribute significantly to the nature of services rendered in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Australia, Pakistan, India and United States (Martono et al., 2018).

In African countries, Christopher et al. (2022) reported calls for improving service provision by non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Ghana and other African nations. Some of the challenges pointed out were poor welfare and management of support staff, little involvement in decision-making, poor conducive working environment and limited skills and professional competencies.

Locally, service provision by support staff in Kenya is fundamental to achieving quality education, students' learning achievements, addressing workers' turnover antecedents and improving people's quality of life (Onyango et al., 2022). Like other African countries, secondary schools in Kenya have also attempted to improve efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery with no success. The persistent decline in the efficiency of services delivered by non-teaching staff in secondary schools raises concerns about the role of innovative work behaviour (IWB) in service delivery in secondary schools. This backdrop lays an avenue for research.

Statement of the problem

The operational efficiency in secondary schools depends on how services are delivered to stakeholders. The nature of services offered by the non-teaching staff in secondary schools contributes significantly

to school advancement. Therefore, the services provided by the non-teaching staff are expected to be sustainable and to enhance customer experience continuously. This underpins the indispensable need for service innovation; hence, the need to pursue innovative work behaviour of the non-teaching staff (Newman, 2014). Consistent with the above observations, secondary school principals are expected to be on the frontline in creating conducive and enabling environment for non-teaching staff. The Ministry of Education has also mandated the School Board of Management to recruit, promote, develop, and remunerate supportive staff, and put-up measures that ensure support staff offer efficient services to the learners and other workers. Ideally, these measures are expected to foster efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery in secondary schools. However, poor service delivery by non-teaching staff has continued to be reported in secondary schools (Arungo & Kipkebut, 2021). The inefficiency is largely attributed to poor remuneration, late payments, lack of elaborate scheme of service, limited skills and competencies; unfriendly working conditions, lack of involvement in decision-making, and weak policy for non-teaching staff. This study will attempt to fill this gap by examining the effect of idea generation by non-teaching staff on service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya, through answering the hypothesis: there is no statistically significant relationship between idea generation by non-teaching staff and service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya.

Literature review

Idea generation involves looking for better alternatives for improving the services or products offered through gathering and reorganizing information to solve problems faced in service and product delivery (Bos-

Nehles et al., 2017). This study was informed by the dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation in organizations. The model was first developed in 1988 by Teresa Amabile. Based on the theory, two major external environmental factors were identified as drivers for motivation to innovativeness, are: resources and leadership practices. Thus, the dynamic model of creativity and innovation in organizations can be adopted in the current study to explain idea generation as a component of innovative work behavior.

“The study found that, the generation of ideas among non-teaching staff in secondary schools was generally low”

Globally, Factors such as leadership, organizational culture, employee engagement and organizational climate of the workplace have been found to influence idea generation to a large extent (Jandy & Eugenio, 2020). Similarly, in developing and African countries, Dorner (2012) observed that innovative work behaviour directly affects employees' job performance, directly influencing their service delivery. In Kenya, idea generation at the work level is highly facilitated through the creation of an atmosphere for creativity, problem identification, information seeking and problem-solving (Gichohi, 2014).

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Embu County where service delivery by the non-teaching staff was described as being unsatisfactory

(Arungo and Kipkebut, 2021). The study adopted pragmatism paradigm following its high level of flexibility using numerous dimensions. The approach adopted in this study was a mixed-method research approach. The subjects of the study were drawn from 208 principals, 208 BoM chairs, 1803 non-teaching staff which makes up a total target population of 2226 respondents. In selecting the sampling group from the target population, proportionate simple sampling technique was applied. A sample size of 337 respondents was achieved with 10 principals selected from 5 sub-counties, 10 BoM chairs from 5 sub-counties and 317 non-teaching staff from 140 secondary schools. The study utilized questionnaire on the non-teaching staff, an interview guide on principals, and focused group discussions for the BoMs to obtain data. A pre-testing of the research instruments was done in Tharaka Nithi County which has similar characteristics to those in Embu County. The validity of research instruments was done. The reliability in the study was determined by assessing the instruments that were pretested. The collected data was checked for completeness and keyed into SPSS, where the Cronbach alpha values for the study's independent, dependent and moderating variables were computed and evaluated. A threshold Cronbach alpha value of 0.70 is acceptable and reliable. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively (mean, standard deviation) and inferentially (correlation); while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Results were presented in tables and themes.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The study involved distributing 317 questionnaires to non-teaching staff in secondary schools, out of which 258 were returned and accepted; representing a response rate 81.3%. For qualitative data, the response rate was 100% for both the

principals in the interviews and BoM chairs in focus group discussion. The reliability analysis for the study variables was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient which measures internal consistency or the extent to which items within a scale are correlated, and thus, reliably measure the same construct. The reliability findings indicated a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.837, which indicated that the variable was acceptable and reliable ($\alpha > .70$).

Background Information of Respondents

The background information of the respondents was key to this study. The study was interested on background aspects regarding gender, level of academic qualification, years of experience, job title, and department.

The analysis of the gender distribution of non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County revealed that 52.3% were female, while 47.7% were male. These findings indicate a relatively balanced representation of gender among non-teaching personnel. The distribution of academic qualifications among the non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County indicated that the majority of non-teaching staff in secondary schools hold a Diploma, followed by those with a Form Four Certificate, and those with a Standard Eight Certificate. This data suggests that a majority of the non-teaching workforce possess mid-level academic qualifications, with relatively few attaining higher education credentials.

The length of work experience of the non-teaching staff in secondary school was also ascertained. The data reveals that the largest group of non-teaching staff, 46.1%, have been working in secondary schools for between 1 and 5 years. This shows that the majority of the non-teaching staff have less than 10 years of experience in secondary schools. The department where non-teaching

staff works in secondary schools was also of interest in this study, indicating that the most populated departments among non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County were Catering/Kitchen/Cafeteria (20%), Security (12%), Administration (12%), Farm (10%), Account/Finance (9%), and Library (8%).

Idea Generation by Non-Teaching Staff for Supporting Service Delivery in Secondary Schools

This was the main objective of the study. The first question in this objective used a five-point Likert scale relating to the main variable. It had choices whose rating scale was Strongly Disagree (SD)=1, Disagree (D)=2, Neutral (N)=3, Agree (A)=4, and Strongly Agree (SA)=5. Key findings and interpretations are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Idea generation by non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County

Statements on idea generation (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	Std. Dev
a. I usually spot problems and get concerned about any problem confronting my work	5(1.9%)	7(2.7%)	17(6.6%)	66(25.6%)	118(45.7%)	45(17.4%)	3.63	1.055
b. I considerably spend a lot of time brainstorming solutions to identified problem by thinking loud on several applicable alternatives	3(1.2%)	18(7.0%)	40(15.5%)	90(34.9%)	83(32.2%)	24(9.3%)	3.18	1.098
c. I carry out research, reading and consulting information sources in order to know the best way to solve a problem that I encounter as I dispense my duty	22(8.5%)	36(14.0%)	32(12.4%)	75(29.1%)	69(26.7%)	24(9.3%)	2.79	1.433
d. I love coming up with very many creative ways of solving problems that we face in the school	2(0.8%)	3(1.2%)	45(17.4%)	92(35.7%)	81(31.4%)	35(13.6%)	3.36	1.009
e. I love sharing new ways, procedures, practices, processes, services and solutions for doing my job better with colleagues	1(0.4%)	16(6.2%)	18(7.0%)	71(27.5%)	102(39.5%)	50(19.4%)	3.58	1.093
f. My suggestions on ways for solving	3(1.2%)	7(2.7%)	26(10.1%)	98(38.0%)	90(34.9%)	34(13.2%)	3.42	1.008

work-related problems are somehow new, unique and different from those presented by my colleagues								
g. I possess adequate skills and knowhow for identifying new solutions to problems, experiences, inconsistencies and deficiencies as I carry out my job	5(1.9%)	11(4.3%)	29(11.2%)	88(34.1%)	105(40.7%)	20(7.8%)	3.31	1.042
h. Our secondary school atmosphere and working conditions allow me to freely brainstorm creative ways of solving day to day problems	8(3.1%)	29(11.2%)	51(19.8%)	80(31.0%)	67(26.0%)	23(8.9%)	2.92	1.242
i. Our school has a platform to collect existing ideas from non-teaching staff	38(14.7%)	41(15.9%)	51(19.8%)	51(19.8%)	56(21.7%)	21(8.1%)	2.42	1.542

The data presented in Table 1 indicates the extent of idea generation practices among non-teaching staff in secondary schools, in relation to service delivery. One of the most outstanding findings was the high level of concern and problem identification demonstrated by the non-teaching staff. A majority of the respondents, 163 (63.1%), either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “I usually spot problems and get concerned about any problem confronting my work,” while only 12 (4.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 66 (25.6%) were neutral. This suggests that non-teaching staff are actively engaged in identifying challenges in their work environment, aligning with the findings of Mutheu and Oduor (2023), who noted that frontline staff play a critical role in service problem detection in schools.

Another noteworthy result was on the willingness of staff to share innovative practices, which recorded mean of 3.58 (SD

= 1.09), reinforcing the perception that idea sharing is embedded within the school culture for many respondents. This finding aligns with the study by Githui and Muathe (2021), which found that collaborative sharing of practices significantly improved operational effectiveness in educational institutions.

In contrast, the statement “our school has a platform to collect existing ideas from non-teaching staff” recorded low levels of agreement with a combined agreement of only 77 (29.8%), while 79 (30.6%) disagreed and 51 (19.8%) remained neutral. This indicated limited formal mechanisms for idea collection. These findings point to a missed opportunity for institutional learning and innovation, consistent with the work of Mutheu and Oduor (2023), who argued that structured idea platforms significantly enhance staff motivation and engagement.

Similarly, the statement: “our school management has ways of inspiring the non-teaching staff to think of new ideas to improve service delivery” also recorded low levels of agreement. Here, majority of the respondents disagreed, with only 67 (26.0%) remaining neutral. This suggests inconsistency in managerial efforts across institutions, which may affect creativity and innovation. Literature affirms that leadership support is crucial for fostering an innovative climate (Odhiambo & Wambua, 2021), and its absence can hinder idea development.

Another moderately high score was recorded on the statement, “I love coming up with very

many creative ways of solving problems that we face in the school,” which recorded a mean of 3.36 (SD = 1.01). This high standard deviation indicates general agreement with a low standard deviation, suggesting consistent attitudes among respondents. This reflects a positive individual disposition toward creativity, even in the absence of structured support systems.

The researcher also asked respondents to state the ways used by their school management to solicit ideas from the non-teaching staff. Their responses were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Ways used by the school management to solicit ideas from the non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County

Ways used by school management to solicit ideas from non-teaching staff (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean
a. Face to face brainstorm meetings	10(3.9%)	36(14.0%)	94(36.4%)	82(31.8%)	36(14.0%)	2.38	1.015
b. On-line live brainstorm meetings	208(80.6%)	13(5.0%)	14(5.4%)	10(3.9%)	13(5.0%)	.48	1.095
c. Through online web portal	220(85.3%)	11(4.3%)	11(4.3%)	9(3.5%)	7(2.7%)	.34	.921
d. One-one consultation	20(7.8%)	22(8.5%)	118(45.7%)	61(23.6%)	37(14.3%)	2.28	1.063
e. Through suggestion box	185(71.7%)	13(5.0%)	21(8.1%)	22(8.5%)	17(6.6%)	.73	1.291
f. Regular staff meetings	13(5.0%)	33(12.8%)	87(33.7%)	78(30.2%)	45(17.4%)	2.45	1.098

The results in Table 2 highlight various methods employed by school management to solicit ideas from non-teaching staff in secondary schools (N = 258). Among the methods explored, regular staff meetings emerged as the most frequently used avenue for gathering input from non-teaching staff with a mean score of 2.45 (SD = 1.10), suggesting that staff meetings are a moderately common strategy for collecting

ideas. The relatively low standard deviation implies consistency in responses across schools. These results are supported by Mwangi and Kosgei (2022), who found that regular face-to-face forums enhance participation and foster a culture of openness among school personnel.

Face-to-face brainstorming meetings, which indicated a mean of 2.38 (SD = 1.02) also

received a relatively high endorsement, but was slightly lower than that of regular staff meetings. The low standard deviation here points to minimal dispersion, indicating that this method is fairly consistently used across schools.

On the other hand, digital methods for idea solicitation were found to be significantly underutilized. Notably, online live brainstorming meetings, the use of a suggestion box, one-on-one consultations with non-teaching staff, showed extremely low usage. Similarly, the use of an online web portal for idea submission “never happened.” These results are indicative of a substantial digital divide in the use of ICT platforms for participatory management in secondary schools, echoing findings by Odhiambo and Makori (2022), who observed that most Kenyan public schools lack the infrastructure

and digital culture required to mainstream ICT-based engagement.

The qualitative data was gathered from open-ended questions, interviews and focused group discussion where the respondents were asked to state what hinders idea generation in secondary schools. The challenges noted included, fear and intimidation, poor communication channels, lack of confidence and low self-esteem, lack of opportunities and platforms; and resource constraints.

Service Delivery by Non-Teaching Staff in Secondary Schools in Embu County

The first question in this objective used a five-point Likert scale relating to the main variable. It had choices whose rating scale was Strongly Disagree (SD)=1, Disagree (D)=2, Neutral (N)=3, Agree (A)=4, and Strongly Agree (SA)=5. Key findings and interpretations are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Service Delivery by Non-Teaching Staff in Secondary Schools in Embu County

Statements on service delivery in secondary schools (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	Std. Dev
a. The working environment at our school is conducive for non-teaching staff to perform better	6(2.3%)	39(15.1%)	75(29.1%)	88(34.1%)	41(15.9%)	9(3.5%)	2.57	1.104
b. The set mechanisms, structures and systems encourages effective service delivery in our school	11(4.3%)	52(20.2%)	74(28.7%)	69(26.7%)	45(17.4%)	7(2.7%)	2.41	1.191
c. Employee empowerment has improved service performance in our school	18(7.0%)	58(22.5%)	55(21.3%)	82(31.8%)	31(12.0%)	14(5.4%)	2.36	1.292

d. The principal usually challenge non-teaching staff to come up with ideas for improving services delivery at our school	21(8.1%)	52(20.2%)	72(27.9%)	68(26.4%)	28(10.9%)	17(6.6%)	2.31	1.314
e. There is no sluggishness in the way services are offered by the non-teaching staff at our school	19(7.4%)	31(12.0%)	54(20.9%)	69(26.7%)	62(24.0%)	23(8.9%)	2.75	1.376
f. Stakeholders have not been complaining of dissatisfaction with the services offered by the non-teaching staff at our school	13(5.0%)	35(13.6%)	58(22.5%)	61(23.6%)	43(16.7%)	48(18.6%)	2.89	1.459
g. The school management usually allocated sufficient financial resources to support service delivery in the school	15(5.8%)	52(20.2%)	61(23.6%)	60(23.3%)	49(19.0%)	21(8.1%)	2.54	1.370
h. The school management avails infrastructure, equipment and facilities required to improve the delivery of services	10(3.9%)	60(23.3%)	57(22.1%)	88(34.1%)	25(9.7%)	18(7.0%)	2.43	1.250
i. The school management takes customer complaints very serious	4(1.6%)	18(7.0%)	43(16.7%)	67(26.0%)	89(34.5%)	37(14.3%)	3.28	1.196
j. The school management avails resources required to improve the delivery of services	9(3.5%)	23(8.9%)	69(26.7%)	90(34.9%)	52(20.2%)	15(5.8%)	2.77	1.150
k. The school management emphasizes on prompt	6(2.3%)	27(10.5%)	67(26.0%)	84(32.6%)	58(22.5%)	16(6.2%)	2.81	1.153

responsiveness to
issues identified

1. News ideas embraced and implemented have helped non-teaching staff to improve service in our school	16(6.2%)	27(10.5%)	47(18.2%)	94(36.4%)	55(21.3%)	19(7.4%)	2.78	1.275
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The findings in Table 3 provides descriptive statistics on the perceptions of non-teaching staff regarding service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County. One of the most positive findings is that school management appears responsive to customer complaints. This item recorded the highest mean of $M = 3.28$ ($SD = 1.20$), indicating generally favourable perceptions with relatively low variations. Similarly, the results indicated there was no sluggishness in the way services were offered by non-teaching staff. Efficient service delivery is essential for the smooth running of schools, and the findings align with Njoroge and Gikonyo (2023), who note that workforce agility is a key determinant of school effectiveness.

However, the study revealed notable areas of concern. Leadership culture recorded the lowest scores among all items at $M = 2.27$ ($SD = 1.22$), reflecting a weak leadership culture in motivating innovation. This suggests a gap in transformational leadership practices, as highlighted by Ochieng and Kiragu (2020), who found that inspirational

leadership is critical in fostering innovation and service excellence. Another weak area was the perception of the presence of supportive systems and structures for service delivery. Similarly, the results indicated that availability of infrastructure and facilities in service delivery was wanting. This could significantly hamper the productivity of non-teaching staff.

Qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions, interviews and focused group discussion were provided. All respondents were required to state the barriers to effective service delivery by non-teaching staff in secondary schools. The responses indicated major challenges; including resources and financial constraints, poor staff motivation and recognition, insufficient training; and poor communication.

The study tested the null hypothesis (H_{01}), that there is no statistically significant relationship between idea generation by non-teaching staff and service delivery. The correlation results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlations analysis between idea generation and service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County

		Y	X1
Y	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	258	
X1	Pearson Correlation	.189**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	258	258

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the results presented in Table 4, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between idea generation (X₁) and service delivery (Y). The results showed a statistically significant positive correlation, $r = .189$, $p = .002$, $n = 258$. This indicates a weak but positive linear relationship between the two variables. Since the p-value (.002) is less than the significance threshold of .01, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant relationship between idea generation by non-teaching staff and service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County.

4.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that although the generation of ideas among non-teaching staff in secondary schools is significantly influenced by inclusive communication practices, leadership support, and institutional culture were generally low. The statistically significant positive relationship between idea generation by non-teaching staff and service delivery indicates that inclusive management practices have a measurable impact on institutional performance. The act of generating idea

among non-teaching staff is curtailed by fear and intimidation, poor communication channels, lack of confidence and low self-esteem, lack of opportunities and platforms; and resource constraints. The study identified drivers for idea generation that need to be embraced. These included effective communication, inclusive leadership, recognition, collaborative leadership, regular staff development forums, and training.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that school management, led by the principal and supported by Board of Management (BoM), should establish structured and inclusive platforms for idea generation among non-teaching staff. This includes regular face-to-face brainstorming sessions, anonymous suggestion systems, and dedicated time during staff meetings to solicit contributions from non-teaching personnel. Additionally, the Ministry of Education and school leadership should invest in continuous professional development, motivational incentives, and team-building initiatives to enhance confidence, creativity, and engagement among non-teaching staff.

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