

Leadership Style and Teachers Commitment in Public Primary Schools in Bomet County, Kenya

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Abstract

The objective of this study was twofold. First was to establish the leadership style adopted by head teachers in public primary schools in Bomet County. Second was to investigate the influence of head teachers' leadership style on teachers' commitment. 100 teachers from twenty schools in three sub-counties participated in the survey. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Teachers perceived their head teachers to practice transformational leadership more than transactional leadership approaches. The overall commitment of teachers was moderate. Affective and normative commitment was moderate implying that teachers fairly identified and feel obliged to continue serving with the school or teaching profession. The low mean scores of Affective Commitment imply that teachers have low appreciation and emotional attachment to the schools or teaching profession. The study further revealed positive correlations between a transformational leadership and normative commitment of teachers. There was also a positive correlation between transactional leadership style and affective commitment. The low correlation between variables was attributed to other factors which may be overwhelming such as the poor working environment and lack or limited teaching tools. It is recommended that a combination of both transformational and transactional leadership attributes should be used in order to bring out the best positive influence on teachers commitment. It is further recommended that the working environment in public primary schools be improved by provision of basic facilities and tools. Institutional Leadership will have substantive impact in an environment where basic and minimum facilities are provided.

Keywords: Leadership style, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Laissez-faire leadership, Commitment.

1. Introduction

Leadership has been defined in many ways for different situations (Northouse, 2007). However, generally all the definitions precipitate to influence, direction or persuasion of a person or a group to move in a given direction. School leadership is no exception. It is the process of influencing and guiding the teachers, other staff and pupils toward achieving common educational goal. Head-teachers lead and manage all aspects of the school with an aim of improving the standards and performance of learners. Like all other institutions, the success of any school is dependent on its leadership and commitment of all its stakeholders.

Schools are institutions that provide instruction, training and coaching to learners under the direction of teachers (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). The purpose of a school is to provide an environment where teaching and learning can take place. A school prepares learners to be skilled and more useful to the society either now or in the future. Good basic education relies on good and effective primary or basic schools. It is generally accepted that good education relies on access to quality educational resources such as quality staff, working environment, good equipment and good leadership.

Most jurisdictions have formal education systems, through which learner's progress until they qualify. The stages in education system generally include; Pre-primary (early childhood education), Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels. Primary and Secondary levels generally prepare learners for tertiary education commonly offered by universities or colleges. Kenya inherited a British system of education which has been modified over time to make it responsive to the challenges and aspirations of the people. Accordingly, a system commonly referred to as the 8:4:4 system was introduced in 1985 following a shift in educational policy (Government of Kenya, 1981). It provides for eight years of primary education, four years of secondary education and four years of university

education. The system is a pre-vocational aiming to prepare the learners for self-employment. This system has been criticized for being broad, expensive and burdensome to learners.

Public primary schools are managed under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, while teachers are employed by the government under the Teachers Service Commission. Head teachers are appointed from within the ranks by the Ministry to provide leadership and administration of the schools. The head-teachers are also assisted in the management by the School Management Committees (SMC) or Board of Governors (BOG) consisting of key stakeholders mainly of parents. Teachers are often promoted to headship with minimal/formal preparation on leadership. While teachers gladly take-up duties of headship, many have little or no management and leadership capacity (MoEST, 2005). Teachers find themselves with new responsibilities, commitments and challenges. Despite the challenges, head-teachers are influential and powerful. They are the first line managers and leaders in the educational system in Kenya. The role of head-teachers is therefore critical in ensuring that teachers are committed and satisfied with their jobs (Ling, 2013). It has also been established that head-teachers lack a clear scheme of service for promotion and responsibility remuneration causing discrepancies in their expectations (Cheserek and Mugalavai, 2012).

Like any other institution, the success of a school depends on good leadership. It is therefore important that schools are properly led in order to define the quality of the next generation. As stated earlier, the responsibilities of head-teachers are to manage the school and provide leadership. They must therefore be persons with skills, dedication and good character to mold students. They must also be able to face the challenges of management and leadership. Leaders in educational institutions face the same challenges as leaders in other organizations.

Leadership attracts a lot of interest because of its capacity to influence people and change discourse. Studies on leader-follower relationship have shown impact on performance, organizational commitment, work quality, job satisfaction among others (Aziz, 2013). Headship in a school is about being a leader of educators, learners and the school community at large. The core function of the head-teacher is to provide leadership and management for a school. More specifically the head-teacher; manage the school as an organization, shaping the directions and development of the school, empowering the team and school community, ensuring quality and accountability, and provide instructional leadership where a culture of teaching and learning is valued.

1.1 Leadership Style

Many theories of leadership have been developed with an aim to explain the various leadership styles which have emerged. These theories while different can be classified into four categories, namely; trait, behavioural, and situational/ contingency, and charismatic leadership approaches (Bass, 1999). Transformational leadership was described by Burns (1978) as a process in which “*leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation*” This behaviour is manifested in five aspects.

Idealized Influence or charisma - arises where the head-teacher influences followers by clearly articulating a shared vision to the followers, appealing to their values, interests and dreams and appealing to their emotions. It helps to build trust which in turn results in confidence from the teachers.

Intellectual stimulation arises where the head-teacher increases follower awareness of problems and challenges and get the teachers to view the challenges from a new perspective. The head teacher challenges assumptions, takes risks and welcomes ideas from the teachers without criticism.

Individualized consideration – arises where the head-teacher provides support, encouragement, and development to the teachers. The head models the way, is respectful and creates opportunities to celebrate individual contribution or progress. This enables subordinate teachers to grow continually and achieve higher potentials.

Inspiration motivation – arises where the leader inspires confidence, motivates and communicates an appealing vision. The head-teacher creates team spirit among the teachers.

Transactional leadership approach focuses on accomplishment of the task. Here the followers receive rewards for acting according to the leaders wishes. If the task is not achieved, the leader may punish the followers. Transactional leadership consists of three factors namely; contingent reward, active-management-by-exception, and passive-management-by-exception (Barbuto, 2005).

Laissez-faire leadership style or 'no leadership' is an approach of avoiding to making decisions (Bass, 1985). In a school setting, the head-teacher allows subordinates maximum autonomy in their job. Individual decision making, free exchange of information and minimal leadership controls (Sosik and Jung 2010). Laissez-faire leaders allow employees to help themselves, and are generally present but not felt. It has been described as the least effective style of leadership.

1.2 Commitment

Commitment is basically the loyalty and attachment to the organization (Bello, 2012). In the school context, it is the extent to which the teachers identifies with their institution and desires to continue working or promoting the vision of the school. Organizational commitment has three dimensional construct namely; affective, continuance, and normative commitments (Myer and Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is the emotional feelings, identification, and involvement with the organization. It is the strong belief and acceptance of the goals and values of the organization. Normative commitment is the extent the employee's believed on organization and the willingness to make considerable efforts for the benefit of the organization. Continuance commitment is defined as the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization. It is the willingness to remain in the organization because of the 'non-transferable investment' already committed such as retirement benefits, relationships with other employees, unique benefits from the organization among others.

Commitment has been shown to lead to increased job satisfaction, performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), decreased employee turnover (Cohen, 1991), decreased intention to leave (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996), decreased intention to search for alternative jobs (Cohen, 1991), and decreased absenteeism (Barber et al. 1999)

1.3 Leadership and Commitment

Studies on the influence of leadership style and organization commitment reveal a positive significant relationship (Rehman, et al 2012; Saeed, 2013). The level of impacts varies with the type of leadership style and component of commitment. Studies in the educational sector in Pakistan indicated that both transformational and transactional leadership have a positive influence on commitment (Rehman, *et al*, 2012).

Day et al (2000) proposed six core characteristics of effective school leaders as; *having a clear personal vision of targets, being in the thick of things, working alongside their colleagues, respect teachers' autonomy and protecting them from extraneous demands, long range, anticipate change and prepare the team so that they are surprised or disempowered by changes, pragmatic and able to resonate with realities in society, and informed and communicate clear sets of personal and educational values*. These factors are cross-cutting and would be applicable to any leadership scenario of a school setting. Further analysis of these factors reveals that they fall within the values and characteristics of transformational leadership.

1.4 Objectives of Study

The objective of this study is threefold: first was to explore the head teacher's leadership style as perceived by subordinate teachers. Secondly, it was to determine the influence of the perceived leadership style on organizational commitment in the microfinance sector in Kenya. Thirdly, was to make recommendations on the appropriate leadership style for public primary schools in Bomet County.

1.5 Hypothesis

H1 – Head-teachers are more transformational than transactional leaders

H2 – Transformational leadership style influence to organization commitment

H3 – Transactional leadership style influence to organization commitment

2.0 Research Methods

The study took an inferential approach to explore the relationship between the perceived leadership style of supervisors and commitment of subordinate employees. Data was collected using a closed ended questionnaire. To maintain independence, the participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire without discussions with any of their colleagues. This approach was chosen to facilitate asking all participants identical questions which allowed for meaningful comparison of responses. The study was conducted in public primary schools in Bomet County, Kenya. A total of 100 teachers from twenty seven schools in three sub-counties namely, Chebalungu, Konoin and Bomet Central filled the questionnaire in this survey.

Leadership style was measured using a Leadership Questionnaire similar to the one developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). The questionnaire had 32 items designed to measure four subscales of transformational leadership style, and three subscales of transactional leadership style. Each factor had four items on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale range is 0 to 4 including; not at all, once in a while, sometimes, fairly often, and frequently if not always. The reliability test for this study was 0.89 for and 0.73 for transformational and transactional leadership styles respectively.

Organizational commitment was measured using Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The instrument has three factors namely; affective; continuance; and normative. Each factor had four items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4 including; Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The reliability test for this study was 0.69, 0.735, 0.617 respectively for affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 program was used to analyze the descriptive and inferential statistics and determine the relationships between various data sets. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the measuring instruments. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationship between variables.

3.0 Results

3.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 1 outlines the frequency distribution of demographic information of teachers in the area of study. The results show that majority of respondents were male teachers (58%) while 42% were female; 76% were married, and 33% single. Majority were under the age group of 36 – 40 years and below (79%). It therefore means that public primary schools are manned by fairly young teachers. Most of the respondents are graduates of Primary Teachers Training Colleges with certificate (41%), those with diploma certificates were (25%), and those with bachelor's degrees were 15%. Untrained teachers were 14% of the respondents. The respondents had worked for a fairly short period with 34% having done between 1 – 5 years; 24% have served between 6 – 10 years, 14% have served between 11 – 15 years, and 14% served in the range of 16 – 20 years. Out of the 100 head teachers evaluated for leadership, 93 were male and 7 were female. From the foregoing, primary schools are manned by a fairly young vibrant workforce with the necessary training and low experience. It is also evident that while ratio of teachers in primary schools is near 50: 50, the leadership at the level of head teachers is dominated by men.

Table 2 outlines the mean scores and standard deviations of transformational, transactional and leissers faire leadership style and the three facets of commitment. The aggregate mean score of transformational leadership is generally high ($M = 2.295$; $SD = 0.847$), while the aggregate mean for Transactional leadership style is low ($M = 1.90$; $SD = 0.54$). Transformational leadership have higher mean compare to transactional leadership which means that subordinated teachers perceived the head-teachers to display more transformational leadership style than transactional leadership style.

The overall organizational commitment was generally high ($m = 3.15$; $s.d. = 0.6$). Normative commitment had higher mean score ($m = 3.48$; $s.d. = 0.82$) than continuous commitment ($m = 2.97$; $s.d. = 0.82$) and affective commitment ($m = 2.98$; $s.d. = 0.83$) which is considered moderate. The standard deviations were fairly small implying that the data are fairly dispersed and closely distributed around the mean.

This implies that there is a high emotional attachment, belief and willingness to remain in the organization.

The mean score which is moderate high suggests that the respondents are moderately committed to the teaching profession or to the school.

3.2 Relationship between leadership style and Commitment

Correlation tests provide an indication of the strength and direction of the relationship between the leadership style and commitment. The Pearson r correlation was computed to examine relationships between the continuous variables of transformational leadership, transactional and commitment. Table 3 provides the results of correlation analysis between transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style and organizational commitment. A significant positive correlation was found between Transformational leadership style and normative commitment ($r = 0.403$; $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, correlation between Transactional leadership style and organizational commitment is low ($r = 0.358$; $p < 0.01$) and also significant. This implies that the perceived transformational leadership style used by head teachers in primary schools impacts directly on normative commitment. Hypothesis 2 is therefore fully supported by these results and hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Table 1: Demographic factors of respondents

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	58	58.0
	Female	42	42.0
Marital Status	Single	24	24.0
	Married	76	76.0
Age of Respondent	25-30	33	33.0
	31-35	27	27.0
	36-40	19	19.0
	41-45	8	8.0
	46-50	8	8.0
	51-55	1	1.0
	>55	3	3.0
Education	Untrained	14	14.0
	TTC Cert (P1)	41	41.0
	S1	4	4.0
	Diploma	25	25.0
	Bachelors	15	15.0
	Masters	1	1.0
Experience	1 - 5 yrs	34	34.0
	6 - 10 yrs	24	24.0
	11 - 15 yrs	14	14.0
	16 - 20 yrs	14	14.0
	21 - 25 yrs	6	6.0
	Over 25 yrs	7	7.0
	Head Teacher	Male	93
Female		7	7.0

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of both Leadership Style and Commitment

Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transformational	100	3.2160	.70510
Transactional	99	1.9781	.56689
Laissez-faire	99	.9268	1.03649
Affective Commitment	100	1.8633	.81628
Continuous Commitment	100	1.8467	.74899
Normative Commitment	100	2.4250	.73755
Overall Commitment	100	2.0450	.58697

Table 3: Correlation between leadership style and organizational commitment

	Affective Commitment	Continuous Commitment	Normative Commitment	Overall Commitment
Transformational	.096	-.006	.375**	.199*
Transactional	.365**	.161	.021	.248*
Laissez-faire	.188	.150	-.165	.082

3.3 Regression Analysis

Table 4 provides the results of regression analysis with leadership style as the independent variable and organizational commitment as the dependent variable. Regression analysis of transformational leadership style and organizational commitment show $R^2 = 0.04$. This means that 4.6% of the variance in teachers' commitment is due to transformational leadership styles.

Table 4: Model Summary or Regression Analysis

Predictor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Transformational	.199 ^a	.040	.030	.57813
Transactional	.248 ^a	.061	.052	.56868
Laissez-faire	.082 ^a	.007	-.003	.58502

Dependent: Variable: Commitment

Regression analysis of transactional leadership style and organizational commitment show $R^2 = 0.061$. This means that 6.1% of variance in organizational commitment of respondents is due to transactional leadership styles. A low value of R means that there is a weak or no linear correlation. This may also mean that there is a random or nonlinear relationship between the two variables. This finding concurs with the results of Hayward *et al* (2004) which showed that there was no correlation between transactional leadership and affective, continuance and normative commitment. However, this is contrary to results other studies which showed linear correlation between components of transactional leadership and commitment (Clinebell, 2013).

Table 5 shows the results of regression coefficients (β) of the two independent variables. Regression coefficient of Transformational leadership is low ($\beta = 0.199$) which indicates that one unit change of transformational leadership will cause 0.199 unit changes in organizational commitment in a positive direction. Similarly regression coefficient of transactional leadership is low ($\beta = 0.248$) and significant. This implies that one unit change in transactional leadership will cause 0.248 unit change in organizational commitment. Regression coefficient for Laissez-faire is very low ($\beta = 0.082$) and not significant, meaning that the impact of this construct is minimal.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Transformational	.166	.082	.199	2.013	.047
Transactional	.255	.101	.248	2.521	.013
Laissez-faire	.046	.057	.082	.814	.418

Dependent Variable: Overall Commitment

4.0 Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived leadership style of head teachers in public primary schools and its influence on commitment of subordinate teachers. The mean scores were higher for transformational followed by transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles (3.2; 1.9; and 0.9 respectively).

Teachers perceived their head teachers to practice transformational leadership more than transactional leadership approaches. This suggests that subordinate teachers perceived their head-teachers to display transformational leadership approaches more than transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles in running their schools. These results conform with the findings of other studies across various sectors which also found that the organization leaders used transformational leadership more often than transactional leadership (Nguni et al, 2006; Yahaya et al, 2013; Trottier et al, 2008). Although the three constructs of leadership were analysed separately, a combination of both transformational and transactional leadership attributes may bring out a positive influence on both job satisfaction and commitment among teachers in public primary schools.

In terms of commitment, the results revealed that in general, teachers were moderately committed. Affective and normative commitment was moderate which implies that teachers identify with the schools and teaching and feeling obliged to continue serving. The low scores on affective commitment imply that teachers have very low appreciation and emotional attachment to the teaching profession or to the school (Allen and Meyer, 1991). It also suggests that teachers are not proud of being associated with teaching profession or teaching in public primary schools. These results infer that the teachers' emotional attachment (affective) and identification with the schools and/or teaching is moderate. The scenario could be associated with poor working environment and failure to address emerging challenges. Moderate levels of normative commitment imply that teachers are fairly loyal to the school and teaching profession. Teachers may not be satisfied with what they are doing but they hold on due to lack of other opportunities. Given an opportunity, teachers would move on or change career (Jonathan et al, 2013). This scenario is attributed to neglect or failure to address teachers concerns and dissatisfaction as also suggested by Sharif et al (2010). On the other hand, it has been argued that the moral obligation arises either through the process of socialization within the society or the institution (Meyer and Allen, 1991). This might be the case in the current context, where most respondents teach in schools within their home community. Accordingly, the teachers may feel morally obligated to reciprocate and give back to the community for being a member and connecting in other social fabrics.

The correlation results revealed both weak and significant relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles and commitment in the public primary schools (table 3). It was concluded that the head teachers' who practice transformational leadership cause more commitment of subordinate teachers than those practicing either transactional leadership approaches. These findings tally with results reported elsewhere (Baloch, 2010; Saeed, 2013; Clinebell, 2013; Omidifar, 2013) and also with the assertion that subordinates want leaders who are honest, competent, forward-looking and inspiring (Kouzes and Posner, 1988). These results imply that when the head teachers practice transformational and transactional leadership approaches such as listening, motivating, encouraging, working with the team, reward, among others, the level of commitment of teachers is enhanced (Omidifar, 2013).

5.0 Conclusion

Transformational leadership is central for successful management of public primary schools. Head teachers should therefore be encouraged to cultivate qualities of both transformational and transactional leadership such

as motivation, stimulation, consideration, charismatic skills and social exchange. This will encourage and motivate teachers and possibly improve the performance of the school.

Schools that are well led generally have a happy community of students and teachers. Their performance could be attributed to a leadership of its managers which is responsive to the needs of the subordinates. On the contrary, schools which do not performed well could be attributed to poor leadership leading to lack of commitment of teachers. However, before such a conclusion is drawn, it would be important to assess whether the schools have basic systems and facilities for a functional institution. It is not uncommon to find schools in rural remote areas with little or no basic facilities. While this could be true, the owners are on the head-teachers and school management to create or establish structures of a functional organization, by providing leadership.

Leadership is one of most important contributors to the success of any educational establishment. Good leadership will drive change in a positive direction by setting the vision, rallying the entire institution in a focused direction, motivate and inspire all, and setting the pace by being good role models. While leadership and management are fused together as the responsibilities of a head-teacher, there is a clear separation of roles and requirements. The head-teacher must balance the demands of management as seen in the administrative workload and the need to provide leadership to the team using different approaches of leadership in order to improve school performance in all aspects. This is the challenge the head-teachers are facing today in most public schools.

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