

The Relationship between Strategic Performance Management Practices Employed by Principals and Performance of Students in KCSE in Public Secondary Schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Despite substantial investments in the education sector in Kenya, the overall performance of students in national examinations remains persistently low. Various educational reforms, including the introduction of strategic performance management, have been implemented to address this issue. However, implementation of strategic performance management practices faces challenges, with many school principals struggling to execute the plans effectively. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between strategic performance management practices employed by principals and the performance of students in Kenya Certificate Secondary Education in public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. Descriptive survey and correlational research design was utilized to collect data from an estimated 1,111 subjects. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the 294 respondents sampled in the study. Study instruments included questionnaires for principals and head of departments while an interview schedule was designed for Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards officers. The tools were subjected to reliability and validity tests before use. Face, content, and construct validity were ascertained before administering the instrument. Reliability was computed using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient on the data obtained from a pilot study in Meru County, giving reliability coefficients of 0.863 and 0.785 for principals and head of departments' questionnaires respectively. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Quantitative data was cleaned, coded, and analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 computer software. The Chi Square Test was used to determine the relationship between principals' strategic management practices and the students' performance in KCSE. The study findings established that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between strategic performance management practices and performance of students in KCSE. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education should launch specialized capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing principals' competencies in strategic performance management. By empowering principals with these skills, the effectiveness of strategic plans will be improved, leading to better results.

Key words: strategic performance management, performance of students in KCSE, public secondary schools

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1. Introduction

Strategic performance management (SPM) involves the evaluation, monitoring, and improvement of methodologies applied by an organization to achieve its objectives (Aktar, 2018; Ayieni, 2018). In the literature on school administration, strategic performance management initially surfaced in 2015, according to Layland and Redding (2015). Strategic planning provides a solid foundation for SPM. As a result, without an effective performance management system, a strategic plan is worthless (Layland & Redding, 2019; Bagine, Kubai & Njagi, 2022). A school's strategic plan provides direction and focus for the future by adapting the academic program to the ever-changing needs of the students. Thus, SPM blends performance management and strategic planning. While most research has concentrated on performance management or strategic planning in educational institutions, this study is unique in that it attempts to link these two crucial areas of study, whose mutual influences remain largely undiscovered (Biondi & Russo, 2022).

As a way to enhance student learning outcomes and advance educational efficiency, strategic performance management in the East African education system remains a top goal (Lewis, 2019). In a study conducted by Kwaslema and Onyango (2021) to examine the relationship between academic achievement of students in public secondary schools in Tanzania's Babati District and the effectiveness of strategic planning, it was found that the

implementation of strategic plans improved academic performance and that heads of schools employed a variety of strategies to ensure that strategic plans were carried out. Anguzu (2018) found that strategic planning was a crucial managerial role and that the majority of the government-aided secondary schools in Yumbe district, Uganda, had annual work plans. The study's objective was to investigate the impact of management practices on academic achievement. The current study aimed to close the gap left by the previous studies' failure to analyze functions, structures, and performance, including what was and was not working inside the SPM framework.

Research conducted in Kenya revealed poor and ineffective strategic management plan implementation levels in public schools (Akala, 2021). Programs to carry out the strategies were not well-defined, and there were numerous obstacles in the way of the strategic planning execution (Seje *et al.*, 2021). As a result, numerous educational reforms have been implemented with the goal of improving students' overall academic performance (Akala, 2021). These include the Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) system for educators and leaders of institutions, as well as Performance Contracting (PC) (Kavua, 2020). This is intended to increase capacity building and curriculum implementation effectiveness for better learning outcomes (Inyega *et al.*, 2021). Similar to this, the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) Performance Management (PM) emphasizes the necessity of improving strategic management in schools in order to raise student performance on national exams (Kavua, 2020; Inyega *et al.*, 2021). However, this has not been accomplished in the majority of Kenyan schools (Nkarichia, 2021). Furthermore, most school principals continue to face challenges putting in place efficient performance management methods to assist pupils in raising their KCSE scores (Mburia & Bett, 2020).

In Tharaka Nithi County, as with many other counties in Kenya, students' performance in KCSE has not significantly improved despite the formulation of policies such as performance management directed towards improving students' learning outcomes (Nkarichia, 2021). Table 1 shows students' academic mean score and mean grade in Tharaka Nithi County compared with the national statistics.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of National and Tharaka-Nithi County KCSE performance.

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Average
National mean score	4.536	4.299	3.683	4.361	4.450	4.302
National mean grade	C-	D+	D+	D+	D+	D+
Tharaka Nithi mean score	4.233	4.461	4.719	3.727	4.409	4.409
Tharaka Nithi mean grade	D+	D+	C-	D+	D+	D+

Source: Tharaka-Nithi County Director of Education Office Reports, (2023)

The comparative analysis presented in Table 1, highlighting KCSE performance by comparing national average mean scores with Tharaka-Nithi County mean scores across specific years, underscores the critical importance of examining the strategic performance management practices of school principals in public secondary schools within the county. The study findings established that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between strategic performance management practices and performance of students in KCSE. However, these strategic performance management practices were employed by principals in schools to a moderate extent. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education should launch specialized capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing principals' competencies in strategic performance management. By empowering principals with these skills, the effectiveness of strategic plans will be improved, leading to better results.

2. Strategic Performance Management Practices in Secondary Schools

Strategic performance management (SPM) is the process of ensuring that a set of activities and outputs meets the goals of an institution in an effective and efficient manner (De Waal, 2017). In a school set up, SPM supports and improves the work of teachers. In addition, it set out a framework for teachers and their team leader to agree and review priorities and objectives within the development plan of the school. This focuses the attention school managers on more effective leadership and teaching aspects to benefit learners, teachers and the school (Gerrish, 2016). In the view of Mone and London (2018) SPM practices consists of four basic elements; strategy formulation, implementation, evaluation and control. Therefore, it involves the critical dimensions of strategic planning, making strategic choices, setting the directions of the school and specifying the strategic plans, stakeholder involvement in development, implementation, evaluation and control of the strategic plans (Yaakob, Musa, Habibi & Othman, 2019). According to Manduku *et al.*, (2019), the SPM used by principals have a significant impact on academic performance of students. However, the relationship between SPM and academic attainment is one area that hasn't received enough attention. In order to address this information gap, the current

study examined how much principals in public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County utilized strategic performance management techniques to promote students' academic achievement.

3. Study Area

The study was conducted in Tharaka Nithi County, one of the 47 counties in Kenya (Appendix I). Tharaka Nithi which comprises Five (5) sub-counties is located in the Eastern Region part of Kenya. Eastern Region comprises seven other Counties: Kitui County, Makeni County, Marsabit County, Meru County, Tharaka Nithi County, Embu County, and Isiolo County.

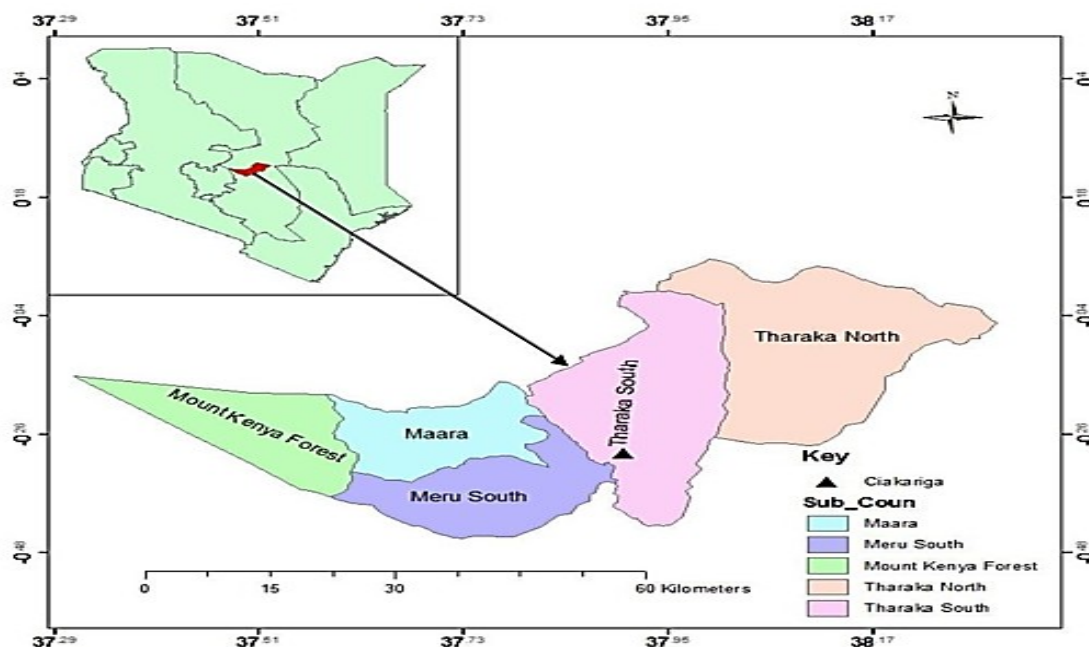


Figure 1: Map showing the study area source Google Map (2023)

3.1 Sample Size Determination, Target Population and Sampling Method

The research was confined to public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. There are 158 public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. The schools involved in the study from each category were selected using stratified sampling technique. The public secondary schools were stratified into national, extra-county, county and sub-county schools. The schools were further stratified into boys, girls and mixed schools. Borg and Gall (2003) noted that, at least 30% of the total population is representative sample size for a scientific study. A total of forty-seven (47) public secondary schools were selected for this study which constitutes 30% of the total number (158) of public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. Proportionate and simple random sampling was used to obtain schools from each stratum. Forty-seven (47) principals from the selected schools were purposively selected. The researcher employed simple random sampling to obtain 5 or 6 heads of department from each selected school in order to obtain a sample of 252 heads of department. Sample size distribution among the seven sub counties was as given in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of the Sample

Sub County	Number of Principals	of Sample	Head departments	of Sample	SCQASO
Maara	56	17	336	90	1
Meru South	39	12	234	62	1
Igambang'ombe	21	6	126	34	1
Tharaka North	14	4	84	22	1
Tharaka South	28	8	168	44	1
Total	158	47	948	252	5

3.2 Data Collection

Data and information was collected from 47 principals and 252 heads of department who were randomly selected by use of questionnaires. In addition, interview schedules were used to obtain data from the 5 SCQASO.

3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Quantitative data was cleaned, coded, and analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 computer software. The Chi Square test was used to determine the relationship between principals' strategic management practices and the students' performance in KCSE.

4. The relationship between Strategic Performance Management Practices Employed by Principals and performance of Students in KCSE in Public Secondary Schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

The study findings established that there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between strategic performance management practices and performance of students in KCSE. The chi-square test, $\chi^2(304, 44) = 328.411$, $p=0.000$ was obtained for the principals' data (Table 3).

Table 3: Chi Square Test for Principals

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	328.411 ^a	304	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	155.120	304	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.996	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	44		

Since the p-value was less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis that there was no statistical significant relationship between strategic performance management practices on performance of students in KCSE in Tharaka Nithi County was rejected and alternative hypothesis that there was statistically significant relationship between strategic performance management practices on performance of students in KCSE in Tharaka Nithi County adopted.

The chi-square test for heads of department was also computed and the results were as in Table 4.

Table 4: Chi Square Test for Heads of Departments

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	1098.058 ^a	750	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	562.503	750	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	58.634	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	247		

The finding in Table 4 shows that, $\chi^2(750, 247) = 1098.058$, $p=0.000$ indicating that there was a statistically significant relationship between strategic performance management practices employed by principals and performance of students in KCSE. Based on the chi square test results from the HODs, the null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant relationship between strategic performance management practices and performance of students in KCSE in Tharaka Nithi County was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. The findings of this study are in line with the results of a study by Sun, & Van Ryzin (2014) who investigated the relationship between performance management practices by school leaders and educational outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores in New York City public schools. The study established that schools which did a better job at performance management indeed had better outcomes in terms of both the level and improved students' performance in examinations even when controlling for student, staffing, and school characteristics.

5. Conclusion

The study findings showed that there was a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between strategic performance management practices utilized by principals and performance of students in KCSE in public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. Principals who effectively implemented SPM reported improved school mean score in KCSE while those who had no SPM or implemented it to a lesser extent experienced poor results in national examinations. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education should roll out specialized capacity-building programmes to enhance principals' competencies in strategic performance management to achieve better results in KCSE.

7. Acknowledgement

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8. Conflict of Interest

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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