

## Relationship between Principal's instructional leadership role and students' subject choice in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Principal's instructional leadership role refers to the actions that a Principal takes such as defining the purpose of schooling, setting school goals, providing the resources required for learning, supervising and evaluating teachers, coordinating staff development programmes and creating collegial relationships with teachers, students and other stake holders. A positive school climate fosters students' learning that makes them to later become productive in the society, due to acquired norms, values and expectations that enable them make the right choices. Subject choice is crucial in the life of a learner because the choice they make determine the career path they shall pursue. The essence of this study was to establish whether there is significant relationship between Principal's instructional leadership role and students' subject choice in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. There were 79 public secondary schools, 316 H.O.Ds and 10,920 Form Three students. Out of this target population, 30 public secondary schools were sampled randomly. All the principals of the 30 sampled schools, 120 Academic H.O.Ds and 390 Form Three students were included in the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling was done to select subject of study from H.O.Ds and Form Three students. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and observation check list. Data collected was coded and computed using version 18 of SPSS. Data analysis was done using Pearson's Chi square test. The study revealed that there was significant relationship between Principals' instructional leadership role and student's subject choice at p-value of 017.

**Keywords:** Principal's instructional leadership role, Public secondary schools, Student's subject choice School climate, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, Heads of academic department

### 1. Introduction

#### Principal's instructional leadership role

A Principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is responsible for all activities occurring in and around the school building. Principal's instructional leadership is defined as the actions that a Principal takes or delegates' to others to promote growth in student learning (DeBevoise, 1984) <sup>[1]</sup>. These actions include tasks such as defining the purpose of schooling, setting school-wider goals, providing the resources needed for learning to occur, supervising and evaluating teachers, coordinating staff development programmes and creating collegial relationships with and among other teachers.

School's climate is the reflection of the Principal's leadership. This means that a Principal with poor leadership will negatively influence school climate while the one with good leadership will positively influence it (Tarter and Hoy, 2006) <sup>[2]</sup>. Studies done reveal that Principal's influence have indirect effect on learning and is mediated by how they interact with others, situational events and the organization and cultural factors of a school (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004) <sup>[3]</sup>. Similarly they can influence the decisions that students make during their school life depending on whether the climate is positive or negative. This study revealed that there is significant relationship between Principals' instructional leadership role and student's subject choice.

The Principal's leadership determines the climate for teaching, level of professionalism, the moral for the teachers and the degree of concern for students. If a school is vibrant, innovative, child-centered, has reputation for excellence in teaching, the Principal's leadership is considered the determinant of such outcome. One way leaders influence organizations is by helping shape the climate of the organization. Principals play a key role in the effort to improve school climate (Thacker and McInerney 1992) <sup>[4]</sup>. Deal and Peterson (1993) <sup>[5]</sup> state that school leaders are models, potters, poets and leaders of shaping school climate. This means that as they carry out their instructional leadership role, they are able to mold the students to become informed decision makers hence can make the right subject choice. The study findings revealed that Principal's instructional leadership role has significant relationship with student's subject choice at p-value of. 017.

#### 1.1 Student's Subject Choice

Every country have set goals of education which meet the needs of the nation as formulated in the set objectives that are referred to for development of a curriculum for every level. Apart from the requirements set, there are various factors that influence student's subject choice. A study done on factors influencing young people in education about STEM subject choices in UK revealed that there were four reasons for taking certain STEM subjects (Math, Sciences, Physics or

Chemistry); usefulness, ability and complimentary between subjects. It further revealed that young people had three main reasons that made them not to choose certain STEM subjects, difficulty of subjects and lack of Interest (Institute of Education UK, 2006) [6].

A study done on student’s subject choice in year 12 in Australian secondary schools revealed that the subjects chosen and studied in the senior secondary years have a major influence upon the educational and career options available to young people when they leave school (Ainley,

1990) [7]. This study reveals that among other factors, the choice of subjects in a student’s life is very important. Students in Kenyan secondary schools are expected to be exposed to a wider curriculum as much as possible in order to create a greater path for career choice. Students are expected to choose a minimum of two sciences, take all the compulsory subjects-Mathematics, English and Kiswahili and two other subjects from the other groups of subjects as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** K.C.S.E. Subject choice

Option A	Subjects	No. of choice
Group 1	English, Kiswahili and Mathematics	Compulsory
Group 2	Biology, physics and chemistry	Two choices
Group 3	History and government, CRE, IRE, HRE	One choice
Group 4	Home Science, Art and Design, Agriculture, Woodwork, Metal Work, Building Construction, Power Mechanics, Electricity, Drawing and Design, Aviation Technology, Computer Studies	One choice
Group 5	French, German, Arabic, Kenya Sign Language, Music and Business Studies	One choice

**1.2 Genesis of Student’s Subject Choice in Secondary Schools in Kenya**

When Kenya attained independence in 1963, the immediate challenge for the education sector was to formulate policies that would guide it in delivering on human resource needs of the new state. The government set up commissions and task forces that were going to address challenges facing education. Kenya Education Commission of 1964 was assigned the task setting objectives and make recommendations for a relevant curriculum for the newly independent state (Republic of Kenya, 1964) [8]. The curriculum developed was geared towards subjects that directly linked to economic activities of the country such as agriculture. This was to boost the agricultural sector and foreign languages for the hospitality industry. It also enhanced capacity building for Kiswahili teachers in order to enhance teaching of Kiswahili in schools (Republic of Kenya, 1972) [9]. However, as the country kept growing, economic, social and political needs kept varying thus educational needs kept changing.

Gachathi Committee was appointed in 1975 to review educational policies and objectives. Releasing its report in 1976, the Gachathi report emphasized on the need to expand access, equity and retention rates at basic education level as a means to improve the quality of education (Republic of Kenya 1976) [10]. At secondary level, the committee proposed adoption of a science oriented curriculum and an end to hiatus that existed between technical and secondary schools, in a bid to emphasize a technologically oriented curriculum. Students were encouraged to pursue science subjects and at the same time have a language subject and humanity. Despite these changes, educational demands kept increasing.

In 1981, the Presidential working party on second university in Kenya (Mackay Report, 1981) [11] was established. It made recommendations that led to the review of the structure of education system thus changing from seven years of learning in primary, four years of learning in secondary, two years of learning in high school and three years of learning in university (7, 4, 2, 3) to eight years of learning in primary, four of learning in secondary and four years of learning in the university (8, 4, 4). This was adopted and implemented in 1984, but since every curriculum formulated must always be assessed, the commission of inquiry into the education

system of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1999) [12] commissioned Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) to conduct a needs assessment on the secondary curriculum. This led to the revision of the curriculum in 2002. The revised curriculum was expected to be manageable, provide the youth with requisite knowledge skills and attitudes, be acceptable to the Kenyan and International communities, promote Nationalism and Patriotism and prepare Kenyans for challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The revision was a landmark policy decision that led to the reduction of subjects from 36 subjects to 26. This included Mathematics, English, Kiswahili, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, History and Government, Geography, Agriculture, Business studies, French, German, Arabic, Home Science, Music, Art and Design, Computer studies, physical Education, CRE, IRE and HRE (KIE, 2004, 2005, 2007) [13].

**1.3 Problem Statement**

Students’ subject choice has been a great problem to administrators of secondary schools because the demand for secondary education has been greater than the available physical facilities and learning resources. In a bid to solve this problem, programmes that control subject choice have been created in many public secondary schools in Kenya. Most public secondary schools are only able to offer 13 to 15 subjects upon which the students do the choice of a minimum of 7 or maximum of 9 as required by KNEC. They do these subjects in Form 3 and 4 until they sit for their final examination.

Secondary education in Kenya is the second level in the formal education system. It caters for the age group of 14-18 years within the school system whose objectives are derived from the national goals of education (M.O.E 2005 – 2010 Support Programme) [14]. Upon admission in Form One, students are ideally supposed to be exposed to a secondary curriculum that has 26 subjects as stipulated by Kenya Institute of curriculum development (KICD, 2011) [15]. However, this has not been the case in most of the public secondary schools. This has been attributed to limitations of physical facilities, teaching and learning resources (KICD, 2011) [15]. Most of the Principals establish rules that limit the students to choosing subjects that can be offered within the

available learning facilities and resources in the school while at the same time observing the guidelines from KNEC. The problem of having lesser exposure to subjects jeopardizes the student’s future career path. A school that does not have a learning environment that exposes students to a wider curriculum causes the students to end up choosing some subjects at the expense of others. For example, some schools are not able to offer all the sciences while others are not able to offer some humanity and creative art subjects due to shortage of resources.

Many studies have been done on factors that influence choice of specific subjects in secondary schools. Apart from facilities and resources, research findings reveal that interest (Oakes 1990), student’s ability (Ainley and Daly 1997), career aspirations, parental advice and job markets are the major factors that make students choose subjects (Ainley, Jones and Navaratnam1990). Despite this, Formal education systems in the world require students to choose subjects that they would pursue at a given level of education. For some students, the passage is smooth, but most of them make inappropriate choices based on inadequate knowledge and distorted perceptions, probably depending on the existing school climate.

Most of the studies done on school climate have been on student’s achievement, interpersonal relationships and connectedness to school (Austin, `et al. 2011, Cohen, `et al. 2010) [16]. However despite the growing body of evidence of the researches that have been done, there has been a study gap on the relationship between Principal’s instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice. This study fills this gap.

**2. Objective of the Study**

The following objective guided the study;

- To establish the relationship between Principal’s instructional leadership role and students subject choice in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

**2.1 Research Hypothesis**

The study sought to find determinations to the following hypothesis;

**H01:** Principal’s instructional leadership role has no significant relationship with student’s subject choice in public secondary schools in Nairobi County.

**3. Methodology**

**3.1 Instrument**

Use of questionnaires is deemed applicable in this study because a questionnaire has the ability to collect a large amount of information in a reasonably quick space of time (Orodho, 2004) [17]. It translates research objectives into precise field questions and there by links the research results by becoming the means of obtaining data (Chandran, 2004) [18]. The researcher used three questionnaires; for the Principals, Teachers and Students. They were open ended and structured and they elicited both quantitative and qualitative data. Most of the questionnaire items were from school climate inventory scale (Haynes et al. 1993) [19].

**3.2 Observation Checklist**

To verify the responses of the respondents, the researcher had a formulated observation check list which had items that

included learning facilities and resources. Every observed facility and resource was ticked against the list that contained the items. The list had two columns of maintained and unmaintained learning facilities and resources. Data collected was compared with respondent’s responses and computed using SPSS version 18 to get frequencies, percentages and means.

**3.3 Instrument Reliability**

The Principals questionnaire had Cronbach’s Alpha of .775, Teachers Questionnaire had Cronbach’s Alpha of .773 and the Student’s Questionnaire had Cronbach’s Alpha of .711. This implied that there was a high degree of reliability of the instruments. Reliability between 0.70 and 1.0 indicate that the instrument is reliable (Carmines & Zeller, 1979) [20].

**Table 2:** Reliability Statistics for the Questionnaires

Questionnaire	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
Principals	30	.775	.391
Teachers	120	.814	.839
Students	390	.713	.673

**3.4 Data Analysis**

Collected data was sorted by inspecting the data from the questionnaire items in order to identify items wrongly responded to and any blank spaces left unfilled by the respondents. Data was categorized according to Principals, teachers and students responses to the items on the questionnaires. Data analysis was done following the four phases normally used in research; data clean up, reduction, differentiation and explanation. Data clean up involved editing, coding and tabulation in order to detect any anomalies in the responses and assign specific numerical values to the responses for further analysis.

The study generated both quantitative and qualitative data from Principals, Teachers and students. Data coding was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software version 18. After this process the data was counter-checked for possible erroneous entries. Frequencies, percentages and means obtained were used to interpret the findings. Pearson Chi square was done to establish whether there was significant relationship between Principal’s instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice.

The information collected using observation check list was also edited and analyzed as qualitative data. The information collected that was qualitative was edited and “cleaned up” in the process of organization. Such a procedure is said to be good for qualitative analysis. (Marshall & Rossman 2011) [21]. both qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 18.

**4. Results and Discussions**

**H01:** Principal’s Instructional Leadership Role Has No Significant Relationship with Student’s Subject Choice in Public Secondary Schools in Nairobi County

Pearson chi-square test was done to examine whether there was significant relationship between Principals’ instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice. The results revealed that x<sup>2</sup> value was 30.153 at Degree of freedom (df) of 16 at p-value. 017 (Table 3). This p value was less than p≤ 0.05 level of significance. These findings revealed that there

was significant relationship between Principals’ instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice. Null hypothesis (H0) which stated that there was no significant relationship between Principals’ instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice was rejected and the alternative (HA) which states that there is significant relationship between Principals’ instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice was accepted. These findings mean that as the Principals carry out their instructional leadership role, they influence student’s subject choice either positively or negatively.

**Table 3:** Pearson chi-square test on principal’s instructional leadership role and student’s subject choice

	X <sup>2</sup> value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	30.153 <sup>a</sup>	16	.017
Likelihood Ratio	35.874	16	.003
Linear-by-Linear association	.141	1	.707
N of varied cases	120		

These findings agree with studies that have been done on examination of relationship between instructional leadership of school Principals and self-Efficacy of teachers and collective teacher efficacy which revealed that instructional leaders carry out a lot of duties at school (Hallinger, 2011) [22] and they affect learning and teaching directly and indirectly (Daresh and Ching-Jen 1985) [23]. An efficient instructional leader provides an effective teaching and learning environment which increases the quality of education at school (Marks and Printy, 2003) [24]. This is said to move the schools towards the ideal position and increase student achievement (Ozdemir and Sezgin, 2002) [25]. From these findings, one can assert that an effective instructional leader creates the right school climate that enhances student’s all round development in academic achievement and in making informed decisions such as subject choice thus excelling in life. The opposite would happen where instructional leaders are not effective.

Throughout the changes that have taken place in Kenya’s educational system, KICD has always been mandated to establish a curriculum that would provide the youth with requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that would be acceptable to Kenyan and international community (Republic of Kenya, 1999) [12]. This when applied to the study at hand would imply that Principals as instructional leaders play a crucial role in enhancing a positive school climate that would encourage the students to develop life skills such as decision making and be able to choose subjects wisely in order to compete favorably in local and international job markets upon accomplishment of their educational ladder. When Principals fail in their instructional leadership role, it implies that students may fail to pursue subjects that would otherwise have created more career opportunities for them in future.

**5. Conclusions of the Study**

The following conclusions were drawn from the study findings:

1. Principals’ instructional leadership role has significant influence on students’ subject choice. They determine outsourcing and maintenance of learning facilities and resource which enhances student’s subject choice.
2. Principals as instructional leaders manage all the

stakeholders and ensure communication is effective by holding meetings and involving each party to participate so that positive school climate is enhanced and learning is effectively taking place. This influences student’s decision on subject choice depending on the effectiveness of the role played by the Principal as an instructional leader.

3. Principals’ ability to involve teachers in decision making created an enabling environment where decisions on student’s subject choice can be made by all the stakeholders.

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