

Influence of Headteachers' Communication Planning Practices on Management performance in Public Primary Schools in Thika West Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Communication is very critical in primary school management by ensuring that there is improved efficiency. However, in many primary schools in Thika West Sub-county encounter challenges which border on school management such as unhealthy staff relations, imprudent use of financial resources, poor maintenance of facilities, imprudent time management and under-utilization of instructional materials are on the rise. Thus, this study sought to assess the influence of headteachers' communication planning practices on management performance in public primary schools in Thika West Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study was guided by the communication theory and school management theory. The study adopted mixed methodology and concurrent triangulation research design. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially using ANOVA Test Analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 23) and presented using tables. The study established that headteachers' communication planning practices influence on management performance in primary schools. The study recommends that headteachers should ensure that they design the content of message to be relayed and also identify the specific recipients of their information to be communicated. Headteachers should adopt layers of communication which are efficient and provide immediate and objective feedback. Headteachers should adopt forms of communication to suit every occasion to avoid interruptions. Headteachers should adopt a feedback mechanism which guarantees efficiency and prudence in school management.

Keywords: Headteachers' communication planning practices, management performance in primary schools

Introduction

Communication is a common activity among people. According to Alvesson (2002), a historical genesis of communication point to the fact that a traditional way to describe communication is as a process including a sender, a message, channels, a receiver and feedback. Before 1980, there was one dominating perspective in organizational communication, that is, the classical perspective, which means a positivistic transmission perspective building on classical organizational theories (Alvesson, 2002). During the last 10 to 15 years, the field has evolved through influences from other research areas. New perspectives such as interpretative, critical, postmodern and feminist perspectives have changed the rhetoric and understanding of organizational communication (Begley, 2001). In other words, there are and have always been conversations about schools and how they should be managed and lead to achieve good results. During the last years, there has been an increased attention on how to measure and understand what activities and actions that lead to certain results.

However, for communication to be effective, headteachers ought to draw a communication plan. A communication plan describes what an organization wants to accomplish with the information it sends out. It lists objectives, the tools used to produce communications and intended recipients. According to De Ridder (2003), a communicant plan describes what information will be shared and how it will be distributed. The plan also identifies the people responsible for building and managing information, when it should be communicated and where records should be stored (De Ridder, 2003). Effective communication planning is crucial to any organization and schools are no different. With a comprehensive communication plan, headteachers are able to promote their schools to parents and the community, connect with current learners, attract future ones and even successfully engage staff members.

To corroborate these assertions, Dolphin (2005) posits that a solid, actionable plan is critical for school communications success, but things are moving pretty fast these days for even the savviest communicators. Dolphin (2005) further asserts that an up-to-date school communication plan helps headteachers to utilize the increasing array of tools available to school communicators. To lend credence to these assertions, Goodman and Dean (2014) conducted a study in San Francisco which revealed that, given the variety of kinds of information and the modern channels for delivering school info, planning and allocating resources has never been more important. Goodman and Dean (2014) indicated that, from crisis communications and urgent, time-sensitive matters to the lunch menu postings, to developing a speaker's bureau for their schools, a communication plan makes the life of a school head a lot easier. These findings point to the fact that how schools handle websites, social medias, emergency notifications, simple school newsletters depends on and should come into play in one comprehensive communications plan. Even such mundane communications such as posting scores to athletics events and keeping school calendar current, can be addressed in a comprehensive school communications plan. Such plans have a well-defined source, recipients, time and the kinds of information to be communicated. Goodman and Dean (2014) further suggested that schools need to use teamwork to plan and gather the right content. In Germany, for example, Jablin and Putnam (2001) report that once the school heads have clarified school objectives and got a full understanding of the different audiences they need to communicate with, it's time to plan the

communications, that is, they need to work out the messages needed to meet their objectives and when and how such messages will be delivered.

Jablin and Putnam (2001) reported that the first step in defining school head's communication plan is figuring out what kind of communication his or her intended audience need from the project so they can make good decisions. In most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is recognition of the relevance of communication planning in school management. Lewis (2008) asserts that many school heads in Africa note that a communication plan acts as proactive measure to ensure that everyone has the right information in a timely manner. For example, in a study conducted in Nigeria, Adeniyi (2003) established that communication plan describes who produces each type of communication and how frequently it gets updated or distributed. Adeniyi (2003) notes that prioritizing the communication needs helps the schools identify how much time needs to be allotted to these tasks in overall organizational planning. The study further established that communication plan specifies the types of messages and who should receive them. Clear identification of the audience and its needs makes writing the communication much easier (Adeniyi, 2003). For example, school newsletters directed at staff members should contain details about upcoming events, provide recognition for outstanding performance and solicit input on mission statements and other school discussion points. Adeniyi (2003) further noted that communication objectives should signal desired audience outcomes such as increased awareness or a desired individual behaviour. In most primary schools in Kenya and Thika West Sub-county in particular, planning for communication has been identified as critical for school management (Kindiki & Stewart, 2011). In a study conducted in a sample of primary schools in Machakos County, Musyoka and Peterson (2012) underscored the fact that a school's strategic communications plan should have internal and external components. Musyoka and Peterson (2012) noted that an internal communications plan is for everyone who has ever been involved in the planning of your initiative. This includes people such as all of your foundation staff and board members who have been involved conceptualizing and developing the initiative, planning team members, advisory council members, the community members who have ever participated in planning meetings, and other involved stakeholders (Musyoka & Peterson, 2012). Internal communication strategies for those most closely involved in current planning efforts, such as an e-newsletter to keep all the planning team members apprised of what each other is doing, will be very different from strategies to connect with broader stakeholders who don't yet know about your efforts, such as policymakers, media and community members.

In Thika West Sub-county, primary school heads usually communicate with their staff on different ways which require an organized plan. However, Okoth and Anderson (2010) report that many primary school headteachers rarely adopt educational communications system which employ sufficient communications paths and operational capabilities among all participants to facilitate functional school division, school and public communications. Okoth and Anderson (2010) noted that, as modern communications channels expand and evolve, it's important that a school's communications plan keep up with the ever-changing landscape. Factor in keeping up with the technology, staffing, privacy and confidentiality issues, and it can be challenging to put together a relevant, effective plan. For public primary schools that are under increasing scrutiny to be fiscally responsible with public funding, to private schools that need to be marketing savvy in competition for enrollment, all institutions need to make the most of the precious

resources allotted for communications budgets. However, Okoth and Anderson (2010) as did other empirical researchers failed to interrogate the extent to which different components of communication plans adopted by primary school heads influence management performance in primary schools.

Statement of the problem

Communication is essential for understanding roles and assignments; planning and carrying out learning activities; coordinating approaches with learners; providing information to teachers on learner progress and behaviours; and building a positive relationship with learners, teachers and other staff. However, in Thika West Sub-county, many primary schools still encounter challenges which border on school management and decision-making. Public primary schools have received warnings from the Ministry of Education concerning imprudent management of school resources following complaints from stakeholders such as parents and Quality Assurance Officers. Cases of unhealthy human resource relations, imprudent time management and under-utilization of curriculum support materials are on the rise. In Thika West Sub-county, managerial efficiency is still wanting in many primary schools. Despite these observations, many empirical studies have not interrogated how headteachers' communication planning practices influence management performance in public primary schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the communication theory which was proposed by Anderson (1996). This theory postulates that all living beings existing on the planet communicate although the way of communication is different. One of the principles of this theory is that all living beings whether they are plants, animals, human beings communicate through sound, speech, visible changes, body movements, gestures or in the best possible way to make the others aware of their thoughts, feelings, problems, happiness or any other information. Anderson (1996) hold that communication theory provides a clear understanding of how different aspects of discussions about decision-making are important. Different views about this theory each provide clear means of conceptualizing and discussing communication problems and practices. These ways derive from and appeal to certain commonplace beliefs about communication while problematizing other beliefs. Anderson (1996) argues that communication is the process of transferring information from the sender to the recipient where the recipient decodes the information and acts accordingly.

In the context of this study, communication theory fits in that, for headteachers to effectively run school operations, they need to communicate with education stakeholders. This theory underscored the fact that the central social issues have to do with who participates in what ways in the social processes that construct personal identities, the social order and codes of school communication. Although theoretical ideas about communication have been developed in various disciplines with incommensurable intellectual agendas, it is nevertheless a reasonable working assumption that every one of those ideas is potentially relevant to practice of effective school management. For this to be realized, careful planning, proper channels and forms of communication, school bureaucracy and expected feedback should be identified. The study was also guided by the school management theory which was postulated by Kuo (2009). This theory addresses how managers and administrators relate to their organizations in the knowledge of its goals, the

implementation of effective means to get the goals accomplished and how to motivate employees to perform to the highest standard.

The central focus of this study is that although school managers in different parts of the world could have achieved managerial success without having basic theoretical knowledge in management, those managers, who have adopted this theory in their day-to-day practice, have had better chances of managing their organizations effectively by considering communication to ensure prudent management of schools. Thus, the rationale of using this theory in this study is that to enhance effective school management performance in public primary schools, headteachers ought to understand how to organize school management resources and effectively communicate the same to the teachers, learners and other education stakeholders within and outside the schools.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was conducted in public primary schools in Thika West Sub-county only. The study focused on the influence of headteachers' communication planning practices on management performance in public primary schools. The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Questionnaires were applied to gather quantitative data from teachers whereas interview guide was applied to collect qualitative data from headteachers and support staff.

Research Methodology

The study adopted mixed methodology and concurrent triangulation research design. The target population totaled 960 respondents comprising of 36 headteachers, 744 teachers and 180 support staff from which a sample of 300 respondents was selected using Central Limit Theorem. Stratified sampling was applied to create five strata based on the number of zones in Thika West Sub-county. From each zone, two headteachers and nine (9) school support staff were selected using purposive sampling. However, 49 teachers from each zone were selected using simple random sampling. This procedure enabled the researcher to sample 10 headteachers, 245 teachers and 45 school support. Data analysis began by identifying common themes. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially using ANOVA Test Analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 23) and presented using tables.

Results and Discussions

The study sought to:

- i. Assess the status of management performance in public primary schools in Thika West Sub-county.
- ii. Examine the influence of headteachers communication planning practices on management performance in public primary schools in Thika West Sub-county.

Response Rate

In this study, 245 questionnaires were administered to teachers and, in return, 218 questionnaires were filled by teachers and returned. The researcher also interviewed eight headteachers and 39 school support staff. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1;

Table 1: Response Rates

Respondents	Sampled Respondents	Those Who Participated	Achieved Return Rate (%)
Headteachers	10	8	80.0
Teachers	245	218	89.0
School Support Staff	45	39	86.7
Total	300	265	88.3

Source: Field Data (2020)

Table 1 shows that headteachers, teachers and school support staff registered a response rate of 88.3%. This confirmed the findings of Creswell (2009) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate and of suitable levels to allow for generalization of the outcomes to the target population.

Status of Management Performance in Public Primary Schools

The study sought to assess the status of management performance in public primary schools. Descriptive data were collected and results are shown in Table 2;

Table 2: Views of Teachers on Status of Management Performance in Primary Schools

Indicators of School Management	Very Good	Good	Fair	Below Average
	%	%	%	%
Human resource relations	0.0	44.0	21.1	34.9
Time management	0.0	51.8	22.9	25.3
Utilization of curriculum support materials	0.0	53.2	23.9	22.9

Source: Field Data (2020)

Table 2 shows that 44.0% of the teachers indicated that human resource relations in public primary schools is good, 21.1% indicated fair whereas slightly more than a third (34.9%) indicated that human resource relations in schools are below average. These findings corroborate the findings of Kennedy (2005) that schools with a common sense of purpose and strong communal organization involving healthy and collegial relationships among staff and positive learner relationships are efficient in promoting a range of academic and social outcomes reflecting learners' engagement and commitment. These findings point to the fact that human resources such as teachers, pupils and staff form a major component of school management and thus, the nature of their relations is key to the success of any primary school. On the question of time management, slightly more than half (51.8%) of the teachers indicated that time management in public primary schools is good, 22.9% indicated fair while slightly more than a quarter (25.3%) indicated that time management is below average.

In the same token, slightly more than half (53.2%) of the teachers noted that utilization of curriculum support materials is good, 23.9% indicated fair whereas 22.9% indicated below average. These findings further lend credence to the assertions of Allan (2001) that accounting systems provide a source of information to primary school managers in the measurement of school performance. According to Allan (2001), it is crucial therefore that the management practices of school headteachers supply complete and relevant information needed to improve efficiency in decisions they make, meet deadlines and improve time management. Hence, these findings point to the fact that, despite the challenges with management of different aspects in primary schools, prudent management of school resources is key to the success of such schools. In other words, perceived profitability and success in achieving school objectives are positively associated with planning detail, suggesting that strategic planning is a key component in improving school discipline, managerial efficiency and learners’ performance.

Qualitative findings were also obtained by interviewing the headteachers and school support staff. During the interviews, unlike teachers, headteachers responded in favour of the view that human resource relations in public primary schools is good. Headteacher, H1, noted;

“In my primary school, there has been healthy relations amongst members of staff and learners. We have had very few cases which border unhealthy interpersonal relationships among staff members and pupils”

These views were also echoed by the school support staff. Just like quantitative findings, these views also corroborate the views expressed by Kennedy (2005) that schools with a common sense of purpose and strong communal organization involving healthy and collegial relationships among staff and positive learner relationships are efficient in promoting a range of academic and social outcomes reflecting learners' engagement and commitment. On the question of headteachers and school support staff also concurred with teachers that time management in public primary schools is fairly good just like utilization of curriculum support materials. These views further lend credence to the viewpoints held by Allan (2001) that it is crucial therefore that the management practices of school headteachers supply complete and relevant information needed to improve efficiency decisions they make, meet deadlines and improve time management. Therefore, as noted earlier, despite the challenges with management of different aspects in primary schools, prudent management of school resources is key to the success of such schools.

Headteachers’ Communication Planning and Management Performance in Primary Schools

The study sought to examine the influence of headteachers’ communication planning on management performance in public primary schools. To achieve this, descriptive data were collected from teachers and the results are shown in Table 3;

Table 3: Views of Teachers on the Influence of Headteachers’ Communication Planning on Management Performance in Public Primary Schools

Summary of Test Items	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
Headteachers sometimes send information to wrong recipients during communication	71.1	12.1	1.3	10.1	5.3

Headteachers rarely organize meetings with prior notice which has not improved school management	66.9	13.2	2.4	12.7	4.8
Staff usually receive information from headteachers without taking into consideration their time schedule	80.5	12.4	1.6	3.3	2.2
In public primary schools, sometimes headteachers send wrong information content to staff and has negatively affected school management	67.4	19.7	3.5	5.3	4.1

Source: Field Data (2020)

Table 3 shows that 71.1% of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that headteachers sometimes send information to wrong recipients during communication. 12.3% agreed. However, only a paltry 1.3% were undecided, 10.1% disagreed whereas 5.3% strongly disagreed. The study also revealed that 66.9% of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that headteachers rarely organize meetings with prior notice which has not improved school management as did 13.2% of the teachers. 2.4% were undecided, 12.7% disagreed whereas 4.8% strongly disagreed. These findings corroborate findings of a study carried out in Germany in which Jablin and Putnam (2001) established that once the school heads have clarified school objectives and got a full understanding of the different audiences they need to communicate with, it's time to plan the communications, that is, they need to work out the messages needed to meet their objectives and when and how such messages will be delivered. This implies that the first step in defining school head's communication plan is figuring out what kind of communication his or her intended audience need from the project so they can make good decisions.

The study also revealed that 80.5% of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that staff usually receive information from headteachers without taking into consideration their time schedule as did 12.4% who agreed. 1.6% were undecided, 3.3% disagreed whereas 2.2% strongly disagreed. These findings lend credence to the assertions of Lewis (2008) that many school heads in Africa note that a communication plan acts as proactive measure to ensure that everyone has the right information in a timely manner. The study also revealed that 67.4% of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that, in public primary schools, sometimes headteachers send wrong information content to staff and has negatively affected school management whereas 19.7% agreed. 3.5% were undecided, 5.3% disagreed whereas 4.1% strongly disagreed.

These findings are inconsistent with the findings of a study conducted in Nigeria in which Adeniyi (2003) established that communication plan describes who produces each type of communication and how frequently it gets updated or distributed. Adeniyi (2003) notes that prioritizing the communication needs helps the schools identify how much time needs to be allotted to these tasks in overall organizational planning. The study further established that communication plan specifies the types of messages and who should receive them. These findings affirm the fact that clear identification of the audience and its needs makes writing the communication much easier. This indicates that communication objectives should signal desired audience outcomes such as increased awareness or a desired individual behaviour.

In other words, despite not being a common practice among headteachers of public primary schools, different components of communication plans influence prudent management performance in primary

schools. To verify the possibility of difference between headteachers' communication planning practices and management performance in public primary schools, data were collected on how often headteacher draw communication plans (very often = 5, often = 4, sometimes = 3, rarely = 2 and never = 1) and number of staff cases, instructional time, frequency of using instructional materials in public primary schools. The results are shown in Table 9:

Table 4: Results of Frequency of Communication Planning, Status of Staff Relations, Time Management and Use of Instructional Materials in Primary Schools

Frequency of Communication Planning	Status of Staff Relations	Time Management	Use of Instructional Materials
1	1	1	1
1	1	1	3
1	1	1	3
2	1	2	3
2	2	2	3
3	2	2	4
4	3	3	4
5	4	4	4

Source: Field Data (2020)

Table 4 indicates that in public primary schools where headteachers draw communication plans very often or frequently, management of such primary schools is efficient and prudent. That it, primary schools where communication planning is very frequent, status of staff relations, time management and use of instructional materials are good. These findings further corroborate the assertions of Adeniyi (2003) that prioritizing the communication needs helps the schools identify how much time needs to be allotted to these tasks in overall organizational planning. In other words, communication planning objectives should signal desired audience outcomes such as increased awareness or a desired individual behaviour to enhance efficient and prudent management performance in primary schools. These results were subjected to ANOVA Analysis and results are shown in Table 5:

Table 5: ANOVA Analysis Showing the Difference Between Frequency of Communication Planning, Status of Staff Relations, Time Management and Use of Instructional Materials

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Frequency of Communication Planning	39.667	7	5.667		
Status of Staff Relations	9.667	5	1.933	8.120	.000
Time Management	8.333	35	.238		
Use of Instructional Materials					
Total	18.000	40	.450		
Total	57.667	47	1.227		

Grand Mean = 2.4167

Source: SPSS Generated (2020)

From the ANOVA Statistics in Table 5, the processed data generated a significance level of 0.000 which shows that the data is ideal for making a conclusion on the population's parameter as the value of significance (p-value of 0.000) is less than 5%, that is, $p\text{-value}=0.000<0.05$. It also indicates that the results were statistically significant and that there is a significant difference between means of the frequency of communication planning, status of staff relations, time management and use of instructional materials. These results further point to the fact that prioritizing the communication needs helps the schools identify how much time needs to be allotted to these tasks in overall organizational planning. Thus, communication planning objectives should signal desired audience outcomes such as increased awareness or a desired individual behaviour to enhance efficient and prudent management performance in primary schools. The researcher also interviewed headteachers and school support staff. During the interview, headteachers refuted the claims that they rarely identify source and recipients of information during communication. Headteacher, H2, noted:

“In my primary school, I usually identify who the information is meant for, send information to the right recipients and set time for the expected feedback. There are messages meant for every staff and those meant for individual staff member. So, I must identify the recipient of my information to avoid confusion”

However, the school support staff contradicted the views of the headteachers. School support staff, SSS1, indicated:

“In my school, the headteacher sometimes sends information to wrong recipients and organizes meetings without prior notice”

Just like in quantitative findings, these views indicate that the first step in defining school head's communication plan is figuring out what kind of communication his or her intended audience need from the project so they can make good decisions.

On the issue of content to be communicated, headteachers disagreed with the teachers that they rarely set content to be relayed or communicated to any staff member. Headteacher, H3, noted:

“In my primary school, I have to design what is to be communicated to any staff member for which the information is intended”

Similar views were expressed by school support staff who also stated that setting of content to be communicated is often set by the headteacher before relaying the information to concerned party or parties. Despite these contradictions, these views also indicate that setting or designing content or message to be relayed to any recipient is critical in any communication planning process. Hence, the audience and its needs make writing the communication much easier. In summary, these findings are indicative of the fact that communication objectives should signal desired audience outcomes such as increased awareness or a desired individual behaviour. However, despite not being a common practice among headteachers of public primary schools, different components of communication plans influence prudent management performance in primary schools.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the study findings, it is evident that headteachers' communication planning practices and practices such as identification of sources and recipients of information during communication and setting of content to be communicated, though refuted by headteachers, are rarely practiced. Communication objectives should signal desired audience outcomes such as increased awareness or a desired individual behaviour. Thus, different components of communication plans influence prudent management performance in primary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that primary school heads should ensure that they clearly and objectively design the content of message to be relayed and also identify the specific recipients of their information to be communicated. This may help avoid confusion and unnecessary conflicts among staff and school management. The Ministry of Education and policy-makers should put in place policies which require headteachers to adopt bottom-up kind of communication where students are considered in school decision-making in order to reduce to cases of students' unrest and to improve staff relations.

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