Influence of school leadership culture on students' academic performance in mixed public secondary schools in Gucha region Kisii county

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ABSTRACT

A study in social science rekindles a link between organizational culture and its effectiveness. Effective school has also come up with many attributes that were evident in schools that seem to contribute to academic achievement. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of school culture and its influence on students' academic performance at KCSE level. The objectives of this study were; to examine the influence of school leadership on students' academic performance and to assess the influence of school routines on students' academic performance in mixed public secondary schools in Gucha region Kisii County. The study was guided by Edgar Schein's organizational culture theory and Effective schools' theory. Mixed methodology and concurrent triangulation research design guided the study. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected, analyzed and results merged for discussions and conclusions. The target population included 37 principals, 650 teachers and 15,865 students yielding 16, 552 participants. Purposeful sampling raised 17 principals, 150 teachers were randomly selected and 300 students sampled through stratified random sampling. 467 respondents were sampled for study. Questionnaires were given to teachers and students, interview guide was used by the researcher and interview guide was used by the researcher when interviewing the principals. The instruments were piloted on 10% of the sample size. Validity of the instruments was ascertained through expert judgment and reliability was attained through test re-test and calculated using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 24 and Cronbach alpha technique. Internal consistency of 0.7 was obtained. Credibility of the instruments was ascertained through data triangulation to ensure that findings were dependable at every step, well-articulated and detailed. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented in narrative form while quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Linear regression was carried out and findings presented using tables and graphs. The study concluded that influence of school routines on students' academic performance, leading by example had a strong positive correlation of .539**indicating that strengthening school culture help in improving academic performance Gucha region, Kisii County. The study recommended

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that leaders of secondary schools should lead by example and promote a positive performance culture in schools.

Key words: Effectiveness, **culture, school, routine, School, academic performance**

1: INTRODUCTION

Culture and performance seem to go hand in hand whether in organizations or learning institutions. The way things are done to a great extent influence the outcomes of that management. Culture can literally be translated as how something is done and it is purely a concern of the people within that organization, institution or community (Chandran, 2014). These deep patterns of traditions, values and beliefs have taken shape over a period of time in the history of a school. The culture of an organization contributes to the morale of that place (Peterson and Deal, 2000). The emotional content of a relationship and the tone of the school influence the schools' culture. Behavior, school values, routines and traditions may be less obvious like the school curriculum and code of conduct (Wren, 1999). In big industries and businesses especially in America, organizational culture greatly influences organizational performance (Denison, 2014). This is clearly learnt from speeches which indicate the main role is creating a culture where everyone feels significant in helping the organization. This helps in reaping greatly in terms of employees' performance. Some of these individuals include IBM's ,Thomas Watson and Are Durant of General Motors among others (Johnson, & Kardos, 2014). The role of a leader is to build culture and the rest is almost accomplished.

A study conducted in high schools in America indicates that the success of any school is influenced greatly by the school culture. Since the simple things done on a daily basis in a school go a long way to determine whether learning is taking place and goals are not only pre-determined but achieved (Holland, 2017). Sunday (2013) explain that in Nigeria, a principal can greatly influence the teachers' attitude towards school which in return has a direct impact on students' performance. This influence is a product of the principal's behavior or leadership style.

In Kenya as indicators of performance are mainly students' scores in KCSE for secondary schools. Kythe and Bogotch (2015) and Cavanagh and Dellar(2018) observe that the students' outcomes can be improved is through changing school culture.

The rating of a culture as good or bad are be determined by how effective it is in achieving this. The results of KNEC examination performance of schools in Kisii County especially in mixed day schools is still wanting. Cheng'oli (2013) reiterates that, a schools' culture can be viewed as the best tool of improving students' performance. This is a clear indication that serious problems in performance in these schools have remained under cover for many years.

11: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The way of life in a school or other learning institutions has a high influence on the overall performance in that school. Public Mixed public day schools in Gucha, Kisii County have been a concern to many educationist and specialists with a question on the improvement of grades in KCSE examinations for many years. The best

performing day school in the county during 2019 KCSE analysis had a mean score of 6.73 as compared to the best boys boarding at 10.449 and the best girls boarding school at a mean of 10.594. It can be construed that schools have experimented with many programmes before coming up with the best academic environments adaptable to every student who joins this school. However if this culture is not well nurtured by the leaders, teachers and students, the good academic performance would a forgotten story. If schools' continue recording low grades in KCSE, the benefits of mixed day schools are no longer going to be realized. This forced the researcher to undertake a study on influence of school leadership on students' academic performance culture in public mixed day secondary schools and offer substantial contributions to schools leadership on effective cultural changes suitable in Gucha region in Kisii County, Kenya.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study were:
i. To analyze the influence of school leadership on performance culture among students' at KCSE in mixed public day secondary schools in Gucha, Kisii County.
ii. To assess the influence of school routines on students' performance in KCSE in mixed public day secondary schools in Gucha, Kisii County

Research Questions
The research tried to answer the following questions:
i. To what extent does the school leadership influence performance culture among students' in public mixed day secondary schools in Gucha, Kisii County?
ii. To what extent do the school routines influence students' performance in KCSE examination in public mixed day secondary schools in Gucha, Kisii County?

Rationale of the Study
The basis of this study was the pressure on students' in adapting to the school culture and achievement of high grades at KCSE. This pressure created a need that has motivated researchers and practitioners in education to focus on finding out the influence of school culture and performance during the final examination after four years of study.

111: LITERATURE REVIEW
School culture is taken to be represented by the school leadership, interpersonal relationships, internal monitoring systems and school routines. In this study these variables are used as indicators of a school's culture and the students' KCSE performance is viewed as being influenced by these aspects. Every school has a culture whether positive or negative, strong or weak. The culture of a school is always at work either enhancing or inhibiting students' performance. A school culture can be the secret behind a schools' success through its influence on learning or it can be its biggest set back by hindering learning. School culture has been seen as a critical component that can facilitate schools to achieve, maintain, and improve students'

performance. Research has shown that students achieve higher scores when the school learning environment is healthy, (Wagner, 2017).

Elmore, (2014) emphasizes that there is need for every member and leader of a school to understand the influence of culture on a school by trying to find the connection between the elements of culture and students' learning. Leithwood (2019) explain that change in an organization can only be achieved through change in its culture. Culture is both dynamic and complex, and therefore teachers' values should be compatible with the school culture. When there is a clear understanding of the purpose and an interrogation of the existence in a school on the members comes up with a way of doing things and running the institution smoothly. On the other hand, if there is no understanding members' beliefs and attitudes run contrary to the school purpose. This may lead to misunderstandings and the resultant culture fails to work.

Student achievement is directly related to school culture so much to which the school culture determines the level of the students' performance (Sergiovanni, 2014). The beliefs, attitudes and behaviors forms a normative glue that holds a school together, the relationship between the principal and teachers correlates to academic excellence. The inter-relational connections between the adults in the school shape the school culture. Peterson (2000) explains that the culture of a school plays a very significant role in the success of the school. Changes and improvements can only happen if its cultural elements are geared towards facilitating learning and achieving set goals.

School Leadership and Students' Performance

Studies have shown that school leadership does not have a direct influence on students' performance but instead affects achievement indirectly through the school culture (Sergiovannial, 2015). Sergiovannial points that several variables influence students' performance but when one is considered on its own, its influence on students' outcomes is only to a small extent. However, a greater impact is realized when these variables are brought together in a conducive environment and complement each other. This is workable by a cultural systems developed by the school leadership. To this extent of its influence leadership has the greatest effect on students' outcomes although classroom instruction comes first to Leithwood (2018).

The general performance of some schools is quite often brought down by the achieving the gap between students where a few students achieve very highly while others score very poorly. An effective principal knows that this gap must be closed and this can only be achieved through creating a high expectation for all students and ensuring that everyone is committed to these standards (Pink, 2011). The effective principal has to ensure that every department is guided by the school vision by following through on the school's strategic plan and the main focus should be on how to improvement student's achievement. According to these scholars there is nothing students can't do if they are really to be supported.

Through its focus the leadership ensures that student acquisition of basic skills takes precedence over all other school activities. Marzano (2021) point that effective schools have strong leadership without which the elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together. This may sometimes require that when necessary school energy and resources be diverted from other businesses in furtherance of these

fundamental objectives. The principal's knowledge in curriculum management should be applied to ensure that resources are allocated in the correct way to support instruction in the school (Marzano, 2021).

Apart from visionary focused, the school leadership should also be inclusive. Principals' should build capacity for leadership among teachers and staff. It can be realized that when the leadership is distributed fairly there are high chances of students doing well in exams (Wahlstrom, 2011 & Leithwood *et al*, 2019). There is a widespread belief that distributed leadership has superior benefits as opposed to having all the leadership responsibilities centered on one person or only a small group of people. According to scholars in school leadership, the reality on the ground is that every mature person within the school house is a leader as reflected in the division of duties on a daily basis ranging from supervision of students by teachers and student leaders, class teacher's roles, conduction of classroom instruction by all teachers and many others. When everyone is involved in diverse ways there is more access to information and any decisions made are based on data collected from the many sources.

Tailor and Areiams (2013) explain that there is need for every school leader to ensure that there are deliberate efforts to create a long lasting and strong school culture by following through the set culture goals consistently. This creates a stronger learning environment which eventually leads to better achievement among the learners. The school leadership and members are responsible for building and nurturing a strong functional culture. For a culture to be functional it must be nourished, nurtured and supported through cultural development (Elmore, 2014). School leaders can achieve this by motivating the staff and students. Through the actions of the school leaders especially the school principal a schools' staff can either be motivated to work hard in improving their craft or they can be very demoralized. School leadership should ensure that every member of the school feels appreciated and the role they play is of significant support to the total achievement of the school. Forums should be created through team building, motivation and personal challenge. This should ensure that individual members have a sense of belonging in the team and the team spirit prevails.

A strong administrator sets policies that enhance time for teaching and learning by improving the appropriateness and intensity of instruction for low achievers and maintains a supportive school climate. A school that maximizes time for instruction commits resources to basic skills and shapes a climate that underscores the importance of instruction (Sergiovanni, 2014). This is achievable even with low cadre of teachers in a school. The leadership role of the school principal is to set policies, exert pressure and improve the staff through training. The principal administratively implement programs of supervision and training to nurture teachers' skills and expectations transferable to the training process in the classrooms. Wargner (2017) observe that the most effective school improvement strategies are good teacher skills, high teacher expectations for low achievers and maximize time available for instruction. These goals are best achieved through staff development and in-service training. Leaders should be focused on increasing the efficient use of the instructional time.

The study is guided by two theories vide the organization culture theory and effective schools theory. Edgar (2014) explains culture is a way of doing things by a group of people working together over what they have invented or discovered or intentionally designed and enables them either deal with problems that are external or facilitates internal integration. This pattern is adopted as the way of doing things where people have tested

it and they have realized that one works well for them especially in their environment viewed both externally and internally. This theory was useful during collecting and analyzing data from teachers and students on whether school culture influence performance in national examinations.

The second theory was Ronald Edmond's Effective schools theory, also called the five factor theory (Miller, 2019). Edmonds studies were interested in finding out school factors that influence students' performance positively and which once available in a school enable students to do well. These factors form the effective school theory which is also known as the five-factor theory. This theory was helpful in when interviewing the principals as a leader on to what extent does school leadership culture influence performance in their schools.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework was used to present variables common in the study. The independent variable of the study was school leadership management and the dependent variable was student performance in KCSE. The two variables were expected to work very well within the student's behavior in and out of school environment and similarly the two key variables to produce high school performance without the interruptions of examination leakages KNEC.
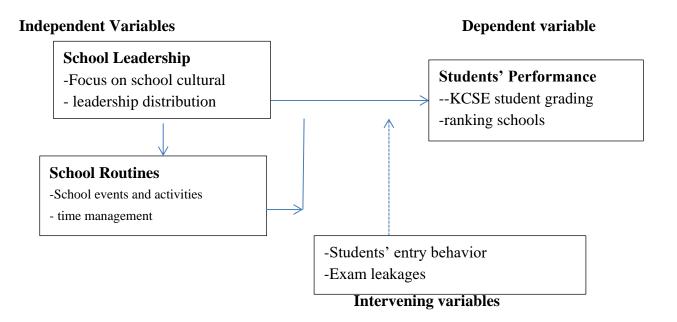
Independent Variables   **Dependent variable**

Figure 1:   Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher 2020

Research Gaps

Emphasis was made on the ignoring aspects of many school leaders and style adopted by heads of institution on the organizational structure. Secondly, the various positions of delegated positions which may have had direct impact on student outcomes (Sunday, 2013).

This study also focused on the role of the school leaders in the vision and mission of their institutions and being able to lead the others through the schools' vision and mission but concentrated its studies on the distributive leadership of various stake holders.

V: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed mixed methodology which utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methodology (Kothari, 2017).   This mixed methodology is useful when data from both methods need to be collaborated. Chandran (2014) observes that the choice of a research design is governed by the objectives of the research that in turn require certain categories of data to achieve the objectives. The qualitative data was used to enrich the quantitative data hence allowing for the opportunity to compensate for the inherent weaknesses of either method and offset any biases of both methods.

Concurrent triangulation research design was employed in this study since it facilitated the attainment of differing yet corresponding data on the research problem (Creswell, 2003). The design was intended to bring collectively the strengths and non -overlapping weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative method on the sample size which was used in generalizing the in-depth understanding of the research problem.

Study Locale

This study was conducted in Gucha Sub-County in Kisii County. This location was selected because the schools in this sub–county were mostly mixed day schools and most of these schools have performance issues. These schools have never attained a mean score above 7 on a rating of 1 to10 making the locale suitable for study.

Population, Sample and sample size

The target population constituted 16,552 respondents in Gucha sub-county where 37 are principals, 650 teachers and 15,865 students. Mugenda (2003) observe that population is an entire group of individuals, events or objects with characteristic that are similar and observable. This population distribution is presented on table 3.

Table 1: Sampling Grid

Categories	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Principals	37	17	Purposeful sampling
Teachers	650	150	Simple Random
Students	15865	300	Stratified random
Total	16,552	467	

Source: Researcher (2020)

V1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first objective of the study was to analyze the influence of school leadership on students' academic performance in public mixed day secondary schools in Gucha region Kisii County. The study findings obtained were presented in the sub-sections

Table 2: Principals' Encouragements and Performance Gap

		F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Undecided	90	26.6	26.6	26.6
	Agree	119	35.2	35.2	61.8
	Strongly Agree	129	38.2	38.2	100.0
	Total	338	100.0	100.0	

Source: The researcher, 2020

Table 4 shows that 26.6% of the respondents were undecided on whether our principal always encourages the students to work hard to reduce the gap between high performers and low performers. 76.4% of the respondents agreed that the principal always encourage students to work hard to reduce the gap between high performers and low performers. These findings are in agreement with Pink (2011) that the general performance of some schools is quite often brought down by the achievement gap between students where few students achieved very highly while the others scored very poorly. An effective principal knows that this gap can be closed through creating a high expectation for all students and ensuring that everyone was committed to these standards.

Qualitative responses from interviews

The following are some of the responses of principals during the interview,

> "*Motivation and encouragement are two things that the school leadership must never negate on. Guidance and counseling sessions must be a norm, teachers and the school principal must always show positivity during the times they interact with the students. Principals should be mature enough to realize that though, the buck eventually stops with them, they cannot do everything on their own and must distribute various roles of leadership to ensure that all goals and targets are achieved collectively. .*"(**Principal No.1**)

The second principal responded on performance in mixed day school in Gucha Sub-County. The findings were that:

> *Though, mixed day secondary schools may be labeled as institutions for extremely low performers, they should receive equal treatment as other schools because if they could perform at per with boarding schools, they would receive equals treatment. It is important to ensure that they also cultivate a culture that is workable and shows progressive growth in their way of conduct and academic excellence.*"(**Principal No.2**)

Majority of the respondents agreed that their principal made an effort to bridge the performance gap. This is vital because the scores are more or less average and if very low performers did well, this would have challenged the middle group to score higher thus making those better performers. This would increase the performance of the whole school in general.

Delegating entails assigning responsibilities to staff/teachers/students that have the capability of enforcing more than the principal could. This allowed the principal to focus of more pressing matters they could only handle whereas the delegates spearheaded the other factions that made the school whole. The realization of this factor is very important where one assigns leadership positions to people who had capability to do it or possibly lead by example to people who are less experienced. Though, the gap between respondents who agreed and disagreed, it was evident that there was no formal culture that guided the school in the way of doing things in mixed secondary schools in Gucha sub-county.

Qualitative Responses from Interviews on School Routine

Principals were interrogated on activities in the school and routine adopted when managing the school. Principal No. 3 reported that:

> "*It is important for training to be conducted when new activities and students become part of the school society. New enrollees must be oriented on how to conduct themselves, they should know the routines, and with time they are adapt to the new environment and become part of the school culture. It was vital to note that school management must spearhead how activities are conducted in the learning institution, must lead by example and have regulations that govern the culture of the school and its development*"
> **PRINCIPAL NO. 3**

School routines are a sequence of events that take place on specific days in a controlled environment. Without routines, nothing would be accomplished especially in the education and learning sector. For a routine to work, it should factor in the basic needs that a human being needs as part of the activities that are programmed in a routine.

V11 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on the influence of school leadership on students' academic performance in public mixed day secondary schools in Gucha sub-county and found that, over 70% of the respondents agreed that their principal made an effort to bridge the performance gap. This was vital because the scores were more or less average and if the very low performers did well, this would have challenged the middle group to score higher thus making them better performers and increase the performers of the whole school in general.

Secondly, delegation entailed on assigning responsibilities to staff/teachers/students that had the capability of enforcing what the principal could. This allowed the principal to focus of more pressing matters other than factions that made the school whole.

Though, the gap between respondents who agreed and disagreed, it was evident that there was no formal culture that guided the school in the way of doing things in mixed secondary schools in Gucha sub-county

School routines formed sequence of events that take place on specific days in a controlled environment. Without routines, nothing would be accomplished especially in the education and learning sector. For a routine to work, it should factor in the basic needs that a human being needs as part of the activities that are programmed in a routine. Lack of orientation programs would make them scared to move around or even ask due to the feel of intimated. Similarly, students should be trained when new activities and programs are introduced.

Recommendations

1. The leadership offered by the principal should focus on relationships, monitoring systems and routines in the working environment with an aim to improve academic performance while strengthening the school culture

2. The ministry of education should spearhead programs that show concern across all levels of education without discrimination.

Recommendation for further Research

The study recommended that further studies to be conducted on fair allocation of resources in mixed day secondary schools in Kenya to tap more needy students.

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