

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UGENYA SUB-COUNTY

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the influence of employee empowerment on academic performance of secondary schools in Ugenya Sub-County. The study utilized descriptive research design on a population of 434 respondents from 31 secondary schools in Ugenya. Stratified sampling was used to determine the sample size which was expected to be 84 teachers in the 8 selected secondary schools in Ugenya sub-county. This included Principals, Deputies, heads of departments, senior teachers and assistant teachers. The researcher used a questionnaire that comprised of open and closed ended questions. The questionnaire was piloted for validity and reliability. Data analysis and presentation used descriptive and inferential statistics and presentation done using tables, pie charts and figures. The study concluded that employee empowerment is a key determinant to excellence in academic performance. The findings exposed a strong positive relationship between empowered employees (teachers and support staffs) and high academic performance. A unit increase in empowerment resulted into units increase in academic performance. Therefore, empowerment is a key determinant of good academic performance. The study recommended that the government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should put in place measures to enhance TQM practices in the education sector, if quality education is to be realized; particularly in all institutions of learning: Private or Public.

Keywords: Employee Empowerment, Academic Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Management (TQM) is one of the management strategies that began in the 1950s and has steadily grown since early 1980s. TQM is a management philosophy that builds a customer driven, learning organization dedicated to Total customer satisfaction through continuous improvement in effectiveness and efficiency in processes (Corrigan, 2009) TQM is a description of culture, attitude and organization of a company that strives to provide customers with products and services that satisfy their needs (Hashmi, 2012), thereby earning SCA. To Hashmi, it is the sum total of a company's interest on a customer's well being at the end of the chain. This is a long-term customer-focused strategy that embraces all employees in the organization; from top management to the lower cadre employees (Hirsh, 2003). All must be in sync in their pursuit towards quality. All must understand the tenets of TQM and work on it as one unit. Above all, everyone must own it for it to be effective, being a strategy (ASQ, 2016). Strategy is frequently described as a deliberate set of actions that earns an organization competitive advantage. In other words, it is a well thought out intention, on whose execution; the impact is beneficial to the respective organization as far as competition is concerned (Powell, 1983).

TQM consists of organization-wide efforts to install and gain quality production, an above average production. Everyone from the lowest cadre pulls together towards high quality. Quality has varied explanations, but in this context, it is a high standard or level of behavior. Therefore, it can comfortably be argued that TQM is a strategy that aims at gaining freedom from defects; actually achieving zero defects production of goods and in services offered. This benefits both internal and external customers satisfactorily. Hence, responds to questions like, to what extent are workers satisfied and

to what extent are the buyers satisfied? In a school setting, it can be equated to an above average performance in a given exam. Gaining performance away from mediocre grades, benefits both the students and the entire school fraternity and even the local community.

There are fringe benefits to the community from a performing school. For example it will attract more students who will buy from the local shops, hence earning the school good will. Therefore, it is important to campaign strongly and lay strategies for achieving zero defects. When this happens in a school setting or in an institution of learning, then that institution secures a good vantage for posting high performance. The numbers of good grades like “As” and “Bs”, in the national exam (K.C.S.E) is a good indicator. Such a secondary school, that has a good number of its students qualifying for university admission is celebrated. TQM therefore is not only for industry and business enterprises. TQM can and has indeed worked pretty well in schools (Stensaanen, 2010).

Knowledge is power, the team members ought to be trained periodically; this empowers them thereby enabling them to keep pace with the changing trends. This constitutes employee empowerment. Employee empowerment means giving authority to employees to make decisions based on what they feel is right, have control over their work, take risks, learn from mistakes and promote change (Evans & Lindsay, 2008). Employee empowerment is a valuable TQM element that can take various forms like sponsorship to university or colleges, short refresher courses in other institutions, in-house training, job rotation, workshops, seminars, exchange programmes, delegation and educational tours. The organization may decide on what best suits their needs and ability and the choice often varies from one institution to another’.

In secondary schools, workshops like languages’, music and a drama workshops suffices. Be so as it may, the most important thing is that the employees are empowered and given room to work. By the end of the day they will succeed. However, care should be taken not to overemphasize growth at the expense of performance (Kreuter, 2014). The school should not help the staffs grow professionally through training and empowerment at the expense of performance expected from them. Therefore, it must not be forgotten that Employee empowerment means giving people authority to make decisions based on the organization’s immediate needs, on what they feel is right, have control over their work, take risks and learn from mistakes and promote valuable change. (Evans and Lindsay:2008).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the positive result that follows the implementation of TQM in secondary schools in Kenya, there is still limited literature on TQM practices in rural secondary schools like those in Ugenya Sub-county. There has been increasing concern on the decreasing academic performance by these schools despite the emphasis on TQM by the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) in Kenya. See appendix 6 of MOEST (2017). The mean scores of the schools show either very minimal positive index deviation or generally downward trend. This poor performance presents a challenge that needs one to gain an insight into the causes and possible solutions. Therefore, this study seeks to collect qualitative and quantitative data on the same.

While a lot of information is available on the factors that determine quality in secondary schools like gender, age, cultural inclination, faculty, economics status, time, talent, luck, taste and preference, little is known about the specific factors that influence quality in rural secondary schools.

The creation of the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) in Kenya demonstrates the government’s clear commitment to quality education based on the principles of TQM, A strategy that establishes a climate in which an organization continuously improves its ability to deliver high-quality products and services to customers /students (Yaqoob, 2014). It is a more rational process to apply TQM in educational establishments (Dahil, 2013). According to Bradley; it is a valid weapon as a competitive strategy. Schools compete against each other (Bradley:1994) and TQM stands to earn a school SCA. Chileshe (2016) concurs with Sadikoglu (2014) that TQM can play a pivotal role in performance enhancement because TQM is a process whose core focus is satisfaction of customers’ needs. (Patonge, 2014).

On the contrary, studies done by Bunce and Baid (2017) in England and Dearing (1987) posits that over-emphasis on customer focus (students interests) tends to lower academic performance, yet customer focus is the backbone of TQM. A lot of literature covers TQM practices in the developed world like the study carried out by Bunce and Baid (2017) and Dearing, 1987 in England. Those done in developing countries like Kenya focus on urban or Peri- urban setups, Indeed, past research in these countries or regions has confirmed positive links between TQM and good academic performance though, there exists cultural, methodological and environmental variations in addition to mixed findings that make it necessary to carry out this study.

Notably, most of the studies tend to focus more on businesses/firms that offer real products to real customers while ignoring learning institutions/schools that offer services only. In addition, the management of these learning institutions fails to realize that the buck starts and stops with them. When students fail academically, the blame is shifted to the students. This contravenes the principle of Customer orientation expected to be observed by the management. Success with TQM starts from the top management, (Patange, 2014). The top management must design or rather formulate and implement a practical or rather a working strategy, once implemented, they must own it as they advocate and encourage other employees to embrace the new strategy. In other words, the top management must own the strategy and make haste to influence those they oversee up to the lowest levels through trust, work ethics, teamwork recognition, integrity, training, leadership and communication (Yaqoob, 2014). Blames do not add value but only leads to students' flight to other schools where there are promises of good performance. Therefore, this study intends to fill the above mentioned gaps in the previous studies namely; justify the creation of DQAS through effects of TQM, provide literature on TQM practices in rural secondary schools, bridge in contextual, cultural, environmental and methodological differences in previous research as far as rural secondary schools are concerned and address stakeholders concern on the aforementioned academic performance in rural secondary schools by finding out if at all efforts are being put in place to improve academic standards.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chebet (2013) carried out a study in Bomet County in all the 12 private schools found there using structured questionnaire. It was noted that there was a strong positive relationship between employee empowerment and academic performance. Empowerment is the act of giving an employee (a teacher) a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility for decision making regarding their tasks (Hassan, et al; 1980). This includes training, knowledge enhances organizational performance (Kariuki, 2015). While the observation is true for empowerment, the circumstances in Bomet differ from those in Ugenya sub-county. Secondly, Chebet focused on private schools while this study targets public schools too. This makes it necessary to carry it out and come up with other findings. Moreso, Chebet encourages such an endeavor since her's was not conclusive.

Opiyo (2008) study was carried out in Nairobi City County. It had initially targeted 1000 teachers, but a sample of 91 teachers was studied using stratified sampling. Questionnaires were administered to get data from the respondents. It was found out that teacher empowerment has a significant positive effect on teacher performance and attitude, hence students' academic performance. Whereas Opiyo's findings are true, the set-up in Nairobi is not the same as that in Ugenya, Secondly Opiyo focused on private schools only and left out public schools, unlike this study intended. Thirdly, Opiyo was keener on the level of teacher commitment than performance of teachers and students particularly. Fourthly, the researcher himself acknowledges that there is need for another study to be done since his wasn't conclusive. This qualifies the need to carry on with this study.

Ocham and Okoth's (2018) study was carried out a study whose purpose was to determine the effects of Head teacher motivational practices on teacher performance in public secondary schools. They used descriptive survey on a population of 186 teachers and 32 Head teachers (Principals) in Koibatek district. The data was gathered using questionnaire, interviews and analysed using descriptive statistics. In their findings, they noted that employee empowerment enhances teachers' performance, hence academic performance. They advised school boards to recognize teacher's efforts, approve more funding for teachers motivation and professional development. The Principals were encouraged to embrace shared leadership. Despite these impressive findings, there exists environmental and cultural differences between Koibatek and Ugenya districts, Secondly, the researcher was mostly interested in effects of Principal's motivational activities on teachers and not students. Thirdly, motivation is also intrinsic. Finally, the researchers also noted that their study wasn't conclusive and recommended another related study to be carried out, hence the essence of this study

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study will be based on descriptive research. The target population in this study consisted of 434 people made up of Principals, Deputy Principals, Directors of Studies, Head of Departments and Assistant teachers in the 31 secondary schools in Ugenya Sub-county. Stratified sampling technique was used. This study used questionnaires. The data obtained was analyzed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics will include correlation and regression analysis.

5. FINDINGS

The findings of the influence of employee empowerment on academic performance are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Employee Empowerment

Statement		Very small extent	Small extent	Neutral	Large extent	Very large extent	Total	Mean
In-house training	f	3	7	4	20	34	68	6.8
	%	4	10	6	30	50	100	
workshops	f	3	5	3	50	7	68	6.8
	%	4	7	4	75	10	100	
Seminars	f	2	5	3	51	7	68	6.8
	%	3	8	5	75	10	100	
Staff-rotation	f	2	7	2	30	27	68	6.8
	%	3	10	3	44	40	100	
Delegation	f	1	3	3	55	6	68	6.8
	%	2	5	4	81	8	100	

75% indicated that to a large extent workshops influenced academics. A similar percentage of 75% cited seminars as enhancing good performance. 44% indicated that staff rotation played a big role in performance enhancement. Finally, 81% indicated that delegation of duties enhanced academic performance greatly. Therefore, the findings indicate that Employee / teacher empowerment is an integral part of high academic performance.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded safely that employee empowerment is a key determinant to excellence in academic performance. The findings exposed a strong positive relationship between empowered employees (teachers and support staffs) and high academic performance.

A unit increase in empowerment resulted into units increase in academic performance. Therefore, empowerment is a key determinant of good academic performance. The government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should put in place measures to enhance TQM practices in the education sector, if quality education is to be realized; particularly in all institutions of learning: Private or Public.

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