

The Role of Head Teachers' Interpersonal Skills towards Teachers' Work Performance in Public Primary Schools in Tanzania. A Case of Makambako Town Council

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Abstract: The study investigated the role of head teachers' interpersonal skills towards teachers' work performance in public primary schools in Njombe region, Tanzania. Interpersonal skills include a wide variety of skill, though many are centered around communication skills such as listening, speaking and understanding body language. The study employed the qualitative research approach along with the multiple case study research design. The sample included 5 public primary schools, 5 head teachers and 39 teachers who were purposively selected. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussion and then analyzed thematically. The findings showed that head teachers interacted with their subordinates through various ways using their interpersonal skills. Overall, a considerable number of head teachers were found to possess effective interpersonal skill in various identified aspects while some of them were found to lack the skills. Consequently, effective head teachers' interpersonal skills were reported to increase teachers' confidence, cooperation, job commitment, positive attitudes toward the job, and the feeling of being respected and valued. On the other hand, ineffective head teachers' interpersonal skills were proved to have detrimental impact on the teachers' work performance.

Keywords: Head teachers, interpersonal skills, teachers' work performance, public primary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal skills are the skills people use every day when they communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. People with strong interpersonal skills are often more successful in both their professional and personal lives. Interpersonal skills include a wide variety of skills, though many are centered around communication, such as listening, questioning and understanding body language. They also include the skills and attributes associated with emotional intelligence or being able to understand and manage your own and others' emotions (Ejuiuogu,2019)

According to De Rue and Wellman (2019), people with good interpersonal skills tend to be able to work well in a team or group and with other people. They are able to communicate effectively with others, whether family, friends, colleagues, customers or clients. Interpersonal skills are therefore vital in all areas of life.

The managers' effective interpersonal skills in any institution are very important to facilitate job performances. According to Carpenter and Wiser (2014), effective interpersonal skills facilitate cooperation, participation, satisfaction and amicable interpersonal relationships between the workers and their managers and among the workers themselves. These will in turn improve organizational outcomes (Adeyemi, 2010).

In education, interpersonal skills of the head teachers are crucial in school management since they enable school heads to know how to work with the staff effectively and promote good working relationships between them and teachers (Hallinger

and Chen,2015). All these in turn arouse effective teachers' commitment. Interpersonal skills are also functional in opening avenues for teamwork as subordinates are engaged in decision making and in executing specific managerial activities. This stimulates good working performance as a result of teachers' good attitudes towards their job (Mwita, 2021).

The tasks ahead of any school administrator require a good relationship with members of the staff as well as delegating part of the responsibilities with authorities to the staff members (Francis and Oluwatoyin, 2019). Interpersonal skills are therefore crucial for effective leadership (Daniel *et al*, 2015). It can thus be argued that public primary schools' efficiency, for example, among other things depends on the effective interpersonal skills patterns adopted and possessed by the head teachers' to enhance teachers' job performance (Hallinger and Chen,2015).

In schools, the role of interpersonal skills is seen from the head teachers' abilities to master various forms of skills which include speaking skills, motivation and the use of effective communication. Head teachers in many primary schools in Tanzania have been trying to employ effective interpersonal skills such as harmonious interaction with others, effective communication, listening and involvement of subordinates in decision making (HakiElimu, ,2012). However, problems in teachers' job performance still persist. Most of them still have poor motivation and attitudes towards their job, some do deal with their individual businesses even during working hours, there are also poor relationships among the staff members themselves and the school administration as well as poor school attendance among teachers. All these have eventually been argued to result to poor pupils' academic performance (Kamete,2020). This study therefore assessed the role of head teachers' interpersonal skills towards teachers' work performance in Tanzania public primary schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualization of Terms

2.1.1. The Concept of the Teacher

The teacher is the person who has been vested with the responsibility of both informally and formally imparting knowledge and skills to shaping the youths to the wider scope of knowledge. Teachers' power is paramount as they determine the fate of the society. Since teachers live with the children for a long time they also take the parenting role and hence they are capable of imparting knowledge, skills and values that can be trusted by the whole the society (Nyerere,1966).

2.1.2. The Concept of Primary School Teachers

In Tanzania, students who do not qualify to join the Advanced Level Secondary Education (Senior Secondary Education) can be admitted into teachers' colleges where they pursue a two-year teacher certificate course (Dersheimer, 2012). Having completed the course, they qualify to teach in primary schools and such teachers become Grade IIIA teachers. According to MOEC (1995), "the minimum qualifications for primary school teacher shall be the possession of a valid Grade, A" Teacher Education Certificate".

There are two basic teacher grades in primary schools. Grade IIIB/C teachers were first recruited during the UPE campaign in the mid-1970s. Initially, nearly all of them were primary school leavers, but during the 1980s, some were recruited after completing Form II secondary education. They attended teacher-training colleges for one year and completed a second year of training based in schools (MOEC,1995: HakiElimu, 2012).

2.1.3. Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills is one of a number of broadly similar terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. Other such terms include interactive skills, people skills, face-to-face skills, social skills and social competence. Argyle (2014) defines socially competent people as those who possess the skills necessary to produce desired effects on other people in social situations. These desired effects may include persuading somebody to work harder, make a purchase, make a concession in a negotiation, be impressed by one's expertise or support one in a crisis. Honey (2018) offers a similar definition. He refers to interactive skills as the skills people use in face-to-face encounters to arrange their behaviours so that they are in step with their objectives. A common theme in these definitions is the ability to behave in ways that increase the probability of achieving desired outcomes. It therefore seems appropriate to define interpersonal skills as goal-directed behaviours used in face-to-face interactions in order to bring about the desired state of affairs.

2.2. A Range of Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are generally considered to include a wide range of skills, such as:

Interpersonal communication skills: Interpersonal communication skills are the set of abilities needed in the interpersonal exchange of information; a two-way exchange requiring skills in both expressing and assimilating information. Interpersonal communication skills include specific traits such as: active listening, oral communication, written communication, assertive communication, nonverbal communication, informing as well as information gathering (Klein *et al.*, 2006).

Relationship Building skills: Relationship building skills are the set of abilities needed to develop and maintain bonds with others, relate to and support others, foster ongoing relationships, and build strong beneficial alliances (Bowden *et al.*, 2003; Carpenter & Wisecarver, (2014). These skills are imperative for team performance. Relationship building skills also involve the management and resolution of conflicts, and getting to get what you want from others (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011). A range of specific traits under relationship building skills include: team cooperation and coordination, Courtesy, Amicability, trust, dependability, intercultural/Interpersonal sensitivity (empathy), service orientation, Negotiation and conflict Resolution.

Peer Leadership Skills: Peer leaderships skills are the set of abilities necessary to lead the group and be part of it. The skills set includes the propensity to coach, teach, counsel, motivate, and empower group members; to readily interact with one's team, earning trust and respect; to actively contribute to problem solving and decision making; and to be sought out by peers for expertise and counsel (Green, 2010). A set of specific skills under peer leadership skill include: acting as a role model, helping others, task leadership, energizing others, rewarding others, controlling, formal staffing together with informal staffing.

Social/Behavioral Agility Skills: Social and behavioral agility skills are the set of interrelated abilities needed in order to monitor and interpret both one's own and other's behaviors and flexibly adapt presentation of self to others during social interactions for the purpose of social influence and control over the interaction (Bowden *et al.*, 2013; Carpenter & Womack, 2018;). Specific traits under the social/behavioral skills are: Social perceptiveness, self-presentation, social influence as well as adaptability/flexibility.

2.3. Interpersonal Skills and the Head Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities in Tanzania

According to the directives and guidelines given by the Ministry of Education, and Vocational Training (2019) and the Education and Training Policy in Tanzania (1995,2014), primary school head teachers are vested with a number of responsibilities that have a direct bearing with possessing effective interpersonal skills. Indeed, decentralization has extended the leadership and management roles of head teachers, intensifying their workload. Head teachers now have a greater responsibility for managing the schools including effective mobilization of human resources especially teachers. Effective head teachers need to establish strong collegial relationships between the teaching staff by making sure they bring the staff together so that there is a sense of solidarity when it comes to executing their responsibilities (Simons, 2010).

The following are some of the responsibilities of the head teachers given by the Ministry of education and Vocational training which obviously require them to have effective interpersonal skills: The motivation, management and discipline of staff ; creating and maintaining a positive, organized, and rewarding system for teaching and learning environment; listening to staff and students about issues in the school and reacting accordingly ; resolving major behavioral issues among teachers, students and among teachers and the school leadership; making sure that teachers, students, parents and the community in general are informed about school matters and development plans as well as making sure that teachers have access to important educational resources.

In order to effectively execute the said responsibilities, head teachers' effective interpersonal skills enable them to develop a culture of teamwork with other teachers and workers that are helpful for school management. This helps to create stimulating learning environment and holding teachers accountable for their work. Siegell and Worth (2011) add that when people work together in identifying and solving problems, they develop greater trust in the administration. This yields more positive work outcomes among staff members. In high trust groups, the socially generated uncertainty is minimal and problem-solving is more effective.

2.4. The Contributions of Head Teachers' Interpersonal Skills on Teachers' Working Performance

Mwita (2021) conducted a research on the human skills by heads of school toward effective school management the findings revealed that interpersonal skills develop the attribute of effective communication which is essential for executing administrative plans as well as for handling day-to-day accomplishments through people. It is among the indicators of

human skills by heads of schools once they provide the required information and feedback to their subordinates. Slater (2020) argues that effective communication is all about conveying one's messages to other people clearly and unambiguously. It is also about receiving information that others are sending with as little distortion as possible. Therefore, the leader of the school needs to exercise communication skills that open ways to deliver information and at the same time receive information from subordinates. In organizational contexts, messages typically have a definite objective: to motivate, to inform, to teach, to persuade, to entertain, or to inspire. Effective communication in organizations centres on well-defined objectives that support the organization's goals and mission.

Heads of schools need to better understand the target of an organization and how the subordinates listen, how they learn and how they respond (Lazenby, 2015). Communication as among the interpersonal skills helps heads of schools to provide effective interaction which helps to pursue school activities. While there are various ways of classifying communication types, the most common ones are verbal and nonverbal communication which both the leaders and the subordinates use in day-to-day life knowingly or unknowingly. The two types are explained further below:

Verbal communication, according to Simona (2018), refers to the form of communication in which a message is transmitted verbally; communication is done by the word of mouth or in writing. Verbal communication in the school management setting is done through staff meetings, parents' meeting, face-to-face meetings with individuals as well as student meetings. Narayana (2019) argues that verbal communication is easy and quick.

Nonverbal communication is all sorts of communication that is not spoken or written (Henry, 2021). Nonverbal communication has a great impact and influence on the receiver's decoding or interpretation. According to Sanina (2017), most of the communication is done by using body movements or facial expressions. Using the right gestures while speaking makes the message more effective.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Njombe region, in the southern highlands zone of Tanzania. This area was chosen randomly from the regions of the Southern Highlands Zone which comprises Iringa, Njombe, Songwe, Ruvuma, and Mbeya regions.

The current study utilized the qualitative approach in its inquiry. The approach was apparently suitable to provide an answer to the question 'how' and 'why' from the respondents' natural settings in relation to the head teachers' interpersonal skills towards teachers' work performance in public primary schools in Tanzania. Along the qualitative research approach, a multiple case study was employed design by using head teachers and teachers from different public primary schools to give information on the question under study.

Then, 5 public primary schools from Makambako Town Council were sampled to represent all public primary schools for qualitative information. Again, 5 head teachers and 39 teachers were involved in data collection. The number of the respondents relied on the point of saturation of the information. Purposive sampling techniques were used .

The data collection methods included Interview to head teachers through asking oral questions that were tailored to the achievement of the objectives of the study. The interviews gave the advantage of soliciting additional information through supplementary questions especially on points which were unclear and where the information provided was inadequate (Patton,2012). Apart from that, Focus Group Discussion **was also employed** to get new and additional general ideas and opinions from the group participants. The groups consisted of 6-8 participants. The discussions were also recorded for further analysis upon the consents of the participants. Data was analysed thematically by providing summaries and direct quotations from the respondents focusing on the objectives of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Head Teachers' Interaction with Teachers to Ensure their Good Working performance

In the first place, the study aimed to identify the ways in which head teachers interacted with the teachers in schools to enhance their working performance. Teachers were therefore required to explain how their head teachers interacted with them. On this, some teachers explained that their heads of schools were autocratic. One of the teachers from school A, for example, said the following:

“...My head teacher is very autocratic. He does not like to share some issues with teachers. He seems to believe that he is the superior and senior and no one can do better than him. Therefore, we don't get the chance to speak out and contribute our ideas, for example, to discuss challenges that face us in the whole process of teaching and learning. Eventually, we find ourselves performing poorly due to lack of motivation and cooperation from our head teacher...”

Another teacher from school B highlighted the situation of mutual respect between the head teachers and the teachers in which some head teachers were complained to disrespect teachers. On this, the teacher said the following:

“... Most of the head teachers including the one from my own school disrespect and disregard the subordinates because of their leadership positions. They behave as if they are the implementers of everything happening in the school. Even when teachers face difficulties and request the staffroom meetings for discussing the prevailing challenges, our head teacher always like to dominate the discussion such that other teachers don't get opportunities to give their ideas. This situation discourages teachers very much and makes them feel disrespected which decreases their work efficiency”

With respect to the above quotations the two teachers from school A and B showed that they were not satisfied with the treatment they got from their head teachers. The head teacher as a leader is supposed to make appropriate decisions that lead to the good management of learning in the school and carry out school administrative duties efficiently through involving his/her subordinates in school decision making structures. The head teachers should also appreciate the teachers' dedication for hard work. Receiving recognition from the school administration reassures teachers that they are skilled at their job, and that leadership recognizes their contribution (HakiElimu, 2012).

In addition, another teacher from school E explained the lack of social interaction for some head teachers. That some head teachers were quite isolative that they hardly interacted with other teachers. The following was said by the teacher in relation to this:

“ My school head teacher does not like to interact with the teachers. When she is at school she likes to stay in her office. She always use to speak to her deputy head teacher the issues she intends to communicate to teachers. We sometimes feel that she does this because she feels too superior to mingle and interacting with her subordinates thinking that by doing so she lowers her status....”

In relation to the findings above and the views of the teachers, some other scholars have quite an opposite view in relation to the isolating behaviours by attribution them to the feelings of inferiority complex (Bennell,2004). The behaviours that accompany it can lead to conflicts and strained relationships, isolation, depression, and anxiety. It is therefore very important for head teachers to socially interact with their subordinates for their own social and emotional wellbeing.

The issue of favouritism among head teachers was also raised during the focus group discussion sessions with teachers. Explaining this, the following was quoted from one of the teachers:

“...The head teacher of this school is full of favouritism. There are other teachers who are well treated and favoured to an extent that all the opportunities which involve payments like seminars are given to such teachers who are very close to the head teacher. This makes some other teachers feel demoralized, useless and that we are unwanted in this school....”

The above explanations indicate that some head teachers' treatment to their subordinates are not fair due to favouritism basing on their own personal interests to the subordinates. It has indeed been argued that the most common source of favouritism in schools is the head teachers themselves (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003). Favouritism does not just negatively affect those who do not receive attention but even those who are targeted (Daniel & Metcalf, 2015). The implication of this result is that favouritism may cause unflavoured teachers to angry and develop some behavioural problems such as loneliness, increased levels of depression, lack of self-esteem, or a refusal to interact with others. All these may have negative impact when it comes to the teachers' work performance (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003).

Another issues of concern that was raised in relation to head teachers' interaction with their subordinates was the modes and manners in which they used to communicate with the teachers. Most of the head teachers agreed to use face-to-face communication and a few of them reported to even use staff meetings depending on the issue of concern.

“ ...I usually use different methods of communication. If it is a confidential matter, I call the teacher and talk with him or her in my office but if the matter is not personal I communicate with them through staff meetings. This helps much in the implementation of school issues. Although I am the head teacher, I am also a human being that I cannot be perfect in everything. I may sometimes overlook things and make mistakes. Therefore, I need some inputs and ideas from my teachers...”

On the same issue, another teacher added as following:

“... Our head teacher normally uses face to face communication, whether the issue is personal or involves all teachers. We normally have a staff meeting where we discuss different issues brought by our head teacher during tea time. Sometimes he sends messages through staff what sap group, but if it is personal, our head teacher may call you and discuss it with you privately in his office....”

In relation to the above quotations, face to face communication is normally applied by head teachers in one to one communication or even through staff meetings depending on the issue at hand (Hannaway and Hunt, 2010). Face to face communication gives room for teachers to air views and opinions on the tabled issue, also gives room for clarifications on different issues during discussion process. Involving teachers in discussion makes them feel involved and honoured by their head teachers (John, 2015).

Another aspect that drew the attention of this study in relation to the head teachers' interaction with their subordinates was on the manners and extent they motivated their teachers in their work. In this aspect, around half of the teachers agreed to have been given different forms of motivation from their head teachers. Then, all head teachers also said that they employed certain strategies to motivate their teachers in their work performance. In responding to this, one head teacher was quoted saying the following:

“...I normally motivate my teachers during the standard seven National Examination Results. If the results are good, we normally prepare a ceremony to congratulate all the staff members. A word of thanks is given to teachers whose subjects have good performance and a word of encouragement to teachers whose subjects have performed poorly. Also, teachers whose subjects performed well are given chances to tell others how they managed to perform well”

Another teacher through focus group discussion on the same issue added that;

“... our head teacher provides letters of appreciation for the teachers whose subjects have good results in the standard seven National Examination results. The head teacher also uses such an opportunity to invite members of the school committee to give the word of thanks to teachers and also to tell the teachers what is expected from them as caregivers of the pupils...”

The above findings show that teachers were motivated by their head teachers through various ways. Other ways mentioned included giving a certain amount of money to teachers whose subjects have been performed well in the national examinations as well as having breakfasts and lunch at schools. The provision of breakfast to teachers for example, helped teachers to go to class on time after break time. Such motivation strategies help to make teachers put more efforts in their work performance to make the learners do well in their subjects and in the national examinations (HakiElimu,2012).

4.2. The Contribution of Head Teachers' Interpersonal Skills on Teachers' Working Performance

In relation to this aspects, some teachers complained that the threats provided by some head teachers only discouraged them in their work performance. During the focus group discussions, one of the teachers had the following to share in relation to this:

“...The head teacher of this school does not work well with the subordinates because he normally use threats to teachers such as threatening to report them to the top district or regional educational authorities, writing warning letters to them and writing negative recommendations on their personal appraisal forms. In my view, this makes teachers to always work on fear and therefore reduce their effectiveness in their working performance. (Interviewed T5 B FGD, 27/04/2023).

Regarding the above quotation, some head teachers seemed to use threats to teachers which implies the possession of poor interpersonal skills. Hannaway & Hunt (2010) comments that threatening teachers can end up creating a wide social distance between the head teachers and their subordinates which can ultimately have negative consequences on the teachers' effectiveness in their working performance thus negatively affecting pupils' academic performance.

In addition to that, some head teachers' failure to understand the personalities and behaviours of individual teachers caused them to misunderstand and misinterpret the teachers. Contributing on this issue, one of the teachers had the following to say:

“...some of the head teachers do not well understand the subordinates they are leading. For instance, sometimes they fail to interpret what such teachers or do and therefore end up giving them wrong responses and treatment. Some teachers for example have queer temperaments, therefore if they verbally respond to the head teacher' directions they should not be interpreted as being stubborn....”

Understanding the people that you lead is very important for effective and harmonious interaction. Therefore, for the head teachers to effectively manage the schools and make sure that everything is running smoothly on a day-to-day basis, they should strive to as much as possible to understand the personalities and behaviours of individual teachers and figure out how to accommodate them for the improvement of their performance (Hallinger & Chen, J. (2015).

Then, the teachers also pointed that some head teachers failed to control their emotions when it came to leading the teachers in their school. Some of them were reported to easily and quickly become angry and frustrated. This was evidenced by the comments of one of the teachers who had the following to say

“...Sometimes our head teacher becomes very frustrated, nervous and angry when what he says is not done as he expected. When this happens he uses to come to the staffroom shouting and using harsh language to teachers. This makes the teachers unhappy and feel that they are disrespected. To my view this may negatively influence the teachers’ performance in their work. This failure to handle personal emotions only leads to destructive results....”

Basing on the findings in the above quotations, it can be said that failure to handle emotions among the head teachers is one of the ineffective interpersonal skill that have detrimental impact on the teachers’ work performance. In relation to this, John (2015) advises that self-management and control of personal emotions is an imperative and inevitable part of school leadership. It equips head teachers with ways to tackle difficult situations and therefore achieve the school goals and objectives.

The role of head teachers’ appreciation to teachers work performance was also mentioned as one of the very important interpersonal skills. Unfortunately, some head teachers were reported to lack appreciation as leaders for the job that teachers performed. One of the teachers complained as follows in relation to this

“...some head teachers do not appreciate others’ expertise and work. I think that this is because such head teachers do not want some other teachers to excel and shine in the job....”

The above evidence implies that there are head teachers who fail to show appreciation to other teachers regarding their good work performances. However, Ejiogu (2019) asserts that giving people some acknowledgement for their efforts, deeds and achievements can encourage them to be more understanding, agreeable and even better behaved. Therefore, head teachers must include this interpersonal skill in their daily practices so as to improve teachers’ work performance.

Another teacher raised the importance of head teachers listening to their subordinates. The comments given underlined the importance of this type of interpersonal skill to head teachers and what was the real practice in his school in relation to this. The following was quoted:

“...One of the simplest and most effective ways to show genuine interest in your team members is to listen actively to what they have to say. This means paying attention, asking open-ended questions, reflecting back what you hear and avoiding interruptions or distractions. However, my head is not a good listener to her subordinates’ claim and grievances and her attitudes towards her subordinates are always negative...”

The above explanations indicate that there are some head teachers who never show interest in listening and paying attention to their subordinates. As Bennell (2014) comments, this may have detrimental effects because leaders who don’t listen to their subordinates may never be able to understand the subordinates and their concerns such as needs and problem. For example, there may be grievances and misunderstanding taking place among the staff members which may be difficult to be understood by the head teacher who doesn’t have time and interest to listen to his/her subordinates. This may end up to poor work performance among teachers especially if there is no harmonious relationship among the teachers themselves of between the teachers and the head teacher

Other interpersonal skills that teachers mentioned as wishing their head teachers to possess include a sense of respect to all the subordinates and empathy. It was explained that if teachers are well respected they feel valued and they are in turn more likely to respect and willingly implement what the head teachers expects from them in relation to effective performance of their job. On the other hand, a sense of empathy shown by head teachers is argued to increase a sense of commitment and positive attitudes towards the job among teachers. To this end, Adeyemi (2010) posits that teachers increase a sense of ownership of the school and its activities because if they are shown empathy by their heads, they develop feelings that the school and the job in general are part and parcel of their professional and social lives.

5. CONCLUSION

Basing on the findings of the study, it is concluded that effective leadership interpersonal skills a fundamental element to enhance the performance of schools in different aspects. More important is that such skills have the great likelihood of enhancing teachers' job performance and hence improved students' academic performance. On such bases, head teachers as educational administrators must be equipped with effective interpersonal skill such as respect for subordinates, effective listening, understanding the personalities of the subordinates, empathy, cooperation, the use of respectful language and abilities to solve disputes, just to mention a few. This will help the head teachers run the schools smoothly which will in turn improve teachers' work performance and students' academic achievement

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations given in relation to the finding of the study: The government through its relevant organs should establish policies and guidelines to make clear of what is expects from head teachers in terms of how they need to interact with their subordinates; There is a need to establish a system in which all head teachers will have to go through a certain form of training regarding school leadership issues before or soon after their appointments; The head teachers themselves should know that their interpersonal skills can either positively or negatively influence teachers working performance. By considering this, it is recommended that they should try to suppress their negative personalities and focus on the positive interpersonal practices that will positively influence teachers working performance; Then to all teachers, they should understand that the task of leading the school is not solely for head teachers. Therefore, they should be open and wiling to advice the head teachers in matters related to interpersonal skills and effective school leadership.

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