

Chapter 15

The Impact of Leadership on Learning Outcomes: A Study on Effective Leadership Style for Principals in Vocational Colleges

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ABSTRACT

Colleges across the world share a common goal of wanting to improve academic performance of students. In this era of culpability, the pressure for principals to improve students' performance has increased. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the best leadership style adopted by principals of vocational colleges in Kenya. Lecturers in selected vocational colleges were issued with a modified Bass's multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) to aid the data collection process. Structural equation model (SEM) approach was used to test a model that measures principals' best leadership style on learning outcomes. The study established that principals practiced more transactional leadership. In addition, transactional leadership style significantly and positively influenced learning outcomes. The findings have a variety of implications to vocational training and future research direction.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The ever increasing global pressure to produce excellent students and future superior workers led many countries to push institutions of higher learning towards improvement in student performance. Kenya has felt this increased pressure as demonstrated through the Education For All (EFA) Goal Number 3 that requires learning needs of all young people and adults to be met through unbiased access to suitable learning and life skills programs (Simiyu, 2009). In addition, accrediting agencies like Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) have been forced to revise the criteria for assessing vocational colleges in order to account for student learning and development (Ferej, Kitainge, & Ooko,

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2012). The Ministry of Education has also not been left behind in that it has introduced several measures to improve quality of student learning in vocational colleges: performance contract, quality management systems and staff appraisal on termly basis (Malechwanz, Shen, & Mbeke, 2016).

These changes have made the role of principals to become more complex and challenging especially with the emergence of 21st century learners. For this reason, researchers in education have continued to search for better leadership styles that can be adopted by school principals in a bid to improve student learning. After all, what is in the public domain is that principals can make a difference to what students gain at school. I guess this sentiment is true because when schools perform poorly, principals find themselves in hot soup. Whether such opinions hold waters or not is the task of this study to justify by evidence. However, researchers have identified an effective educational leader as one who has the ability to develop the capacity of a school through staff and students motivation to promote learning (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2011). Leaders of this calibre are determined by their followers not themselves (Smith, Bhindi, Hansen, Riley & Rall, 2008).

Research on school leadership has demonstrated the link between principal's leadership types and student learning outcomes (Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). While studies on effective school leadership and school outcomes appear to be relatively simple and open in theory, in practice it is difficult and inconsistent (Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, 2013). The reason being that the field of leadership is full of mainly descriptive studies about effective leadership that are rarely tracked with sufficient rigor to find out their impact on school achievement (Storey, 2004). Research on principal's leadership provides insight into what constitutes a great leader and if it does then education could modify the leadership training for principals in schools. This study therefore seeks to examine the best leadership style practiced by principals of vocational colleges in Kenya and relate the identified leadership style with learning outcomes.

Rationale of the Study

The question of how leadership influence learning outcomes has come to be of international interest. In consequence, at least six educational researches have focussed their attention on the relation between school leadership styles and learning outcomes (Al-Safran, Brown, & Wiseman, 2014; Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Isaac, 2011; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Witziers et al., 2003; Yildirim, Acar, Buli, & Seville, 2008). However, these studies limitedly addressed the question: which leadership style predict the best practice for school outcomes? In addition, the bulk of literature was conducted at basic education level with only a few done on vocational education level. Apparently, research on best school leadership styles that predict learning outcomes is inadequate except in a few such as Al-Safran et al. (2014) who recently studied the effects of principal's leadership styles on school environment and outcome. Their study was restricted to 8th grade students using secondary data from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 1995 on Kuwait and USA.

The findings of Al-Safran et al., (2014) were quite interesting to note and therefore formed the basis of the present study. Starting with USA schools, integrative principal leadership style was found to create cooperative school environment for better school outcomes than authoritative. While in Kuwait schools, authoritative principal leadership style was found to create cooperative school environment for better school outcomes than integrative. These findings reveals the controversies surrounding many researches on best leadership styles that greatly impact on learning outcomes. In fact, Al-Safran et al. (2014) concluded that there was no universal or appropriate leadership styles for all cultures.

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