

CONSTRAINTS PRINCIPALS FACE IN ENHANCING DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN KENYAN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT: *In Kenya, democratic school leadership is becoming increasingly important as elsewhere in the world as one way of fostering democracy in the society. The Ministry of Education has come up with policies on how to enhance democracy at the school level but school principals still face major challenges in fostering democracy in the daily running of their schools. This study set out to establish the challenges principals face in enhancing democratic school governance in Kenyan Public Secondary schools. The study utilized cross-sectional descriptive survey strategy that employed mixed methods approach. The target population of the study was all principals and senior teachers, of all the 122 public secondary school in Baringo County, Kenya. The study sample was selected using stratified sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Data was collected by use of questionnaire and interview schedule and were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively.*

KEY WORDS: Democratic School Governance, Principals, Constrains, Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

The need for democratic school leadership is becoming increasingly important in many countries as one way of fostering democracy in the society. Boya (2013) states that there is need to rebrand education management for efficient service delivery in learning institutions and that superior educational management is basic to the satisfactory functioning of democracy. According to Trafford & Backman (2007) the term “school governance” is defined of school leadership, including both instrumental and ideological aspects while “Democratic” indicates that school governance is based on human rights values, empowerment and involvement of students, staff and stakeholders in all important decisions in the school. They state that since so many factors cannot be controlled by executive powers alone, an open and democratic approach is the only way to a successful and sustainable leadership in a modern school. Mncube (2009) further notes that school governance, democratic principles and shared leadership as the pillars of democratic schools.

In Kenya there is growing interest in democratic school governance and its implementation (Sifuna: 2000, Jwang: 2001, Mualako: 2009 et.al, Tikoko et al 2011; Gatabu: 2011; Jwang et al: 2009). The management of public secondary schools in Kenya is vested in the Board of Management (BOM) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTA). This is a form of School Based Management (SBM) initiative in Kenyan secondary schools. The concept of decentralization of school management to the BOM was adopted by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) in an attempt to infuse community participation in the administration of schools. Under the Basic

Education Act 2012, the BOM members are appointed to run individual schools in accordance with section 53 of the Basic Education Act cap 211(2012). The Act also legalizes the PTA in the Third Schedule. Members of the PTA are elected at the school level during Annual General Meetings. School governance system at the school level in Kenya is thus based on collaboration between the community, principals and teachers.

Education stakeholders in Kenya have very high expectations of public secondary school principals because they believe that the success of a school is measured in terms of good performance in national examinations and the person responsible for this is the principal. Amidst the challenging environment of the secondary school education in Kenya, the role of the school principal is to propel the learning institution to successful performance academically. According Wango (2009) schools principals are the executive officers in charge of various operations within the school including serving as accounting officers, interpreting and implementing policy decisions. They are responsible for planning, acquisition and maintenance of physical facilities in the school and are also expected to promote the welfare of all staff and students within the institution (Republic of Kenya, 2002).

Role of the Principal in a Democratic School

Principals play a critical role in creating democratic schools. Bäckman and Trafford (2007) state that without the active support of the principal, democracy is unlikely to take root and grow. Whatever values or principles might be expressed in legislation or policy documents, the principals leadership is what really counts. Botha (2010) points out that in South Africa, the school principal seen as a fundamental agent of transformation in creating space for deliberation and dialogue so that all stakeholders are actively involved in School Governing Bodies. Without the support, attempts and deliberate contributions of principals, schools are unlikely to become democratic institutions. As Beane and Apple (1999) put it; democratic schools do not happen by chance. A school leader today works “in more or less decentralised systems based on complex interplay of many autonomous partners”. Bäckman and Trafford (2007, pg.9).

A study conducted by Kiprop (2012) on student discipline in Kenyan schools underscores the importance of the central role played by the head teacher in management of the school. The study recommended that head teachers must uphold the Ministries’ policies and interpret the same to the members of the BOGs, PTAs, sponsors and other stakeholders. They should also ensure that all Ministry’s policies are implemented, ensure proper delegation of duties , cultivate team spirit among all the stakeholders and make schools better places in the way they treat staff and students . The role of principals in enhancing democracy in public secondary school is heavy laden and thus as Apple and Beane (2007, p. 37) point out, principals must have the “capacity for complexity”.

Principals generally experience difficulties. By its very nature democracy challenges old hierarchies and authorities, and the conflicts that may emerge can be hurtful and wearing for administrators (Bäckman & Trafford 2007). Further, there are situations, emergencies for instance, where the leader needs to take quick decisions. Under such circumstances, democratic processes are flouted, as Jones (2005) contended, in crises there is no time to hold meetings. This can be perceived wrongly by other stakeholders. Another disadvantage of democratic governance has to

do with situations where staff lacks competence, crucial information to make decisions. In such cases, the leader has to monitor and provide constant guidance to staff. Stakeholder's apathy also hinders democratic participation. For instance a study by Renuka (2012) cited lack of time to attend meetings; transport and communication issues are factors affecting parents' participation. Relationships between learners and some teachers could also hinder democratic school practices. Democratic schools move away from traditional power relations towards shared governance and this comes with challenges thus school principals should work on minimizing them. Therefore, this study attempts to add to the existing and growing body of knowledge by investigating the constraints principals face in enhancing democratic school governance in secondary school in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Developing and maintaining standards of education at the school level still remains a major challenge in Kenya. These challenges have been rampant in areas such as students' unrest, lack of financial transparency, poor results at KCSE and teacher absenteeism in most public secondary schools (Wanderi, 2008). A study by Kiprop (2004) on the challenges faced by teachers and head teachers in maintaining student discipline in the post-caning era in Kenya revealed that teachers and head teachers experienced problems in the implementation of alternative approaches to discipline. These could be the reason for the rise in cases of students unrest in Kenya. School principal's leadership skills and experience, among other factors are also cited as the major causes of these challenges (MOEST 2000, 2001, 2008). These consequently compromises the delivery of high quality education hence hinder the realization of educational objectives envisaged in Kenya's Vision 2030.

Previous Studies on democratic school governance in public secondary schools in Kenya have centred their research on student participation in school governance, the significance of teacher participation in school decision making and parental involvement in school governance. However few empirical studies have been undertaken exclusively with regard to constraints principals' face in enhancing democratic school governance, hence the need for this study. (Botha 2006) points out that principals exercise significant influence on the extent to which their schools are democratic. It is hoped that through this study, principals will be informed on alternative ways of improving democratic practices and processes in their institutions. Parents and teachers will also be informed on how to participate effectively in school governance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized descriptive cross-sectional survey strategy that adopts mixed methods approach of inquiry and it was based in Baringo County, Kenya. The target population of the study was all principals and senior teachers of all the 122 public secondary school in Baringo County, Kenya. From the 122 public secondary schools in Baringo County, 92 schools were selected on the basis of the Krejcie and Morgan table for determining sample size. The 92 schools were then stratified into 6 sub counties. Simple random sampling was then used select the schools within each strata. The principal and one senior teacher were purposively sampled from each school. The total sample was 184 respondents.

The researcher also chose two schools as sample sites where their principals were interviewed. The two schools were selected because of their characteristics relevant to the study; they had some established democratic structures and processes based on the findings from the questionnaire. The two schools were given fictitious names; Fanaka and Pendo secondary schools for confidentiality of the research.

The research instruments used in the study were questionnaires and interview schedule. The analysis of the data employed the use of descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analysed using themes and similarities emerging from the respondents responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main objective of the study was to establish constraints principals face in enhancing democratic school governance in public secondary schools in Kenya. To establish this objective, the respondents to indicated their levels of agreement or disagreement on a three Likert scale questions in the questionnaire. The results are as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Principal and Teachers Responses on Constrains that Hinder Democratic School Governance

| ITEM | Respondent s | NO. & % | Strongly agree/Agree | Uncertain | Disagree/ Strongly disagree | TOTAL |
|--|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Lack of interest among parents | Principal | NO. % | 54 59.1% | 14 15.2% | 24 25.7% | 92 100% |
| | Teacher | NO. % | 36 39.2% | 32 34.8% | 24 26% | 92 100% |
| School has open forums for students | Principal | NO. % | 38 41.1% | 20 21.1% | 34 37.8% | 92 100% |
| | Teacher | NO. % | 52 56.6% | 16 17.4% | 24 26.1% | 92 100% |
| Communication barriers | Principal | NO. % | 58 63.1% | 10 10.9% | 24 26% | 92 100% |
| | Teacher | NO. % | 53 57.6% | 17 18.5% | 22 23.9% | 92 100% |

| Lack of support from BOM | Principal | NO. % | 36 39.1% | 33 35.9% | 23 25% | 92 100% |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| | Teacher | NO. % | 49 53.2% | 13 14.2% | 30 32.6% | 92 100% |

Study findings from the table above reveal that most of the principals 59.1% agreed and strongly agreed that lack of interest among parents hinders Democratic School Governance (DSG). On communication barriers majority of the principals 63.1% agreed and strongly agreed that communication barrier hinders effective democratization of schools. Communication was also highlighted as a barrier by the teachers as a factor which hinders effective DSG as majority of the respondents 57.6% strongly agreed and agreed. It was also established from the teachers that lack of awareness among parents hindered DSG as majority of the respondents 56.6% strongly agreed and agreed. The teacher findings also show that lack of support from the Board of Management (BOM) hinders DSG as of the respondents 53.2% strongly agreed and agreed respectively while 39.1% strongly agreed and agreed. It can therefore be revealed from the above findings that lack of interest among parents, awareness and communication are barriers to democratic school governance in Public secondary schools in Baringo County. According to (Meier, 2003) democratic school culture is characterized by a lot of human intervention. Jamali et al., (2006) are in agreement that good teamwork is motivated in school by good leadership and effective communication. Responses from the interviews carried out on two principals of Pendo and Fanaka secondary school on constraints that hinder DSG were categorized into the following themes:

Lack of Support from Parents

The principal of Fanaka secondary schools complained that most parents do not show up for important meetings despite being notified through text messages and other means of communication. The principal further stated that parents have not taken ownership of their schools as they should; Parent, teacher meetings for example he says gives parents a chance to see what happens in the classrooms but unfortunately most parents do not use the opportunity.

Research confirms the natural phenomenon that when children know they are being held responsible for their learning, they will be encouraged to learn and, therefore, the interest to learn and motivation to stay in school longer will, moreover, assist in their achievement levels (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). The school principal of Pendo secondary school also concurred with his colleague. She stated that parents are very important stakeholders and if they do not have their support, it impacts democracy in the school. She also noted that there are many cases when some students do not want to be part of students' council because their parents deny them.

On the other hand the principal Pendo secondary school came up a pertinent issue on parents' socio economic status which is a challenge to democratization of schools. She said that majority

of parents are from low socio economic backgrounds and some do not attend school meetings because they cannot afford travel expenses; and for the few who attend, most are passive participants. Parental participation should be encouraged despite the varied socio economic backgrounds of the parents'. Mncube (2008) in a study on parental involvement in school governance in South Africa came up with similar findings that lack of participation is related to a level of education of parents in general, lack of education on parental involvement in school activities, and difficulty in attending meetings. He however suggests that schools leaders should look for ways of encouraging parental involvement in school activities and that existing educators should be given the necessary in-service training on parental involvement. They would then be in a position to encourage parents to deliberate and engage in dialogue about school activities. In this way there would be a great potential for the voice of parents to be heard and they would feel a sense of belonging and hence engage fruitfully in dialogue and debates pertaining to school governance, where they would feel included in decision making processes.

Time

Principals cited time as constrain to democratic school governance. They both principals stated that the process of consultation is time consuming especially when handling issues with varied opinions or matters which require urgency. Principal of school Fanaka secondary school revealed that in some instances he makes unilateral decisions. He stated that delays could impact negatively on the functioning of the school. Woods and Gronn (2009) in support assert that decisions may be delayed substantially and the direction of the organization can be rendered unclear by prolonged debates.

Curriculum

The school curriculum as stated by principal one has no room for democracy to thrive for the learners. They argued that curriculum does not emphasize on student centred learning and schedules are very tight and thus timetabling for extra time for student peer learning and personal study remains a challenge.

Principal Fanaka secondary stated that huge workload and wide syllabus makes student centered teaching hard to practice. She said that it would have been the ideal in some cases but exams dictate. He reiterated that exams demand so much from the students and this reduces the teacher to "chalk and talk". A similar argument is put forth by Frank and Huddleston (2009) who posit that the existing curriculum in many schools in Europe over-emphasized learner assessment placing practical restrictions on democratic practices.

The principal school Pendo secondary also suggested that apart from academic learning, there should be integration of democratic education in the syllabus. This fact is supported by Schweisfurth (2002) who states that formal schooling have immense potential to develop democratic culture and build democratic citizenship, the requisite democratic skills, values and knowledge need to be developed within the teaching force before these can be inculcated in the young.

Training in Democratic Participation

The school principals cited lack of training among stakeholders on their role as active participants of school management. The principal of Fanaka secondary stated that some of the members of the

school board did not have an idea of the Basic education Act. Tsotetsi et-al (2008) argues that training should be done based on needs of their members for effective decentralized and cooperative school governance.

The principal of school Pendo secondary school also stressed on the training for students for meaningful involvement to make the students understand their roles and responsibilities in a democratic school. She said that students take the issue for democracy as freedom to challenge school rules. Thus, training is very important as students are informed on what is expected from them as member of the student council. All the roles players should have skills such as problem solving skills, conflict resolution, time management, change management and financial planning (VarWyk, 2004). Collinson and Cook (2007) further state that time needs to be set aside for learners and teachers to discuss democracy in their schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings teachers and principals identified communication, parent's apathy and lack of awareness, lack of support from BOM, time, curriculum and lack of training among stakeholders as barriers to DSG in public secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education should develop to policy on education for democracy where school administrators would be trained in order to impact to knowledge, skills and values democracy in their institution. It should also review their curriculum and integrate democratic principles which emphasizes on participatory interactive teaching and learning methods.

It is also recommended that teachers should also be trained on advancing democratic attitudes and skills with regard to the students. It also is need for training of the BOM and Parents Teacher Association members to facilitate the process of implementation democratic school practices in schools. School principals should strive to ingeniously engender parental participation in school governance.

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