

Full Length Research Paper

Secondary school headteachers' quality assurance strategies and challenges in Gucha district, Kenya

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Accepted 24 May, 2010

The desire to provide quality education for all Kenyan children was one of the major objectives of the struggle for independence. The government is currently implementing measures to improve the quality of education in secondary schools. The Kenya Education Staff Institute is strengthening capacities of education managers and reviewing staffing norms in order to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers and thus improve on their utilization. The government is also providing in-service education for teachers in various subjects to enhance subject mastery, and rationalizing the curriculum with a view to reduce the workload on both students and teachers. Despite the efforts to provide quality education, the secondary sub-sector continues to face challenges that could compromise the quality of education provided. The current study set out to investigate the strategies employed by headteachers and the challenges headteachers had faced in their attempts to provide quality education. The research design used was descriptive survey method. The study population consisted of 120 public secondary schools. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select five girls', four boys' schools and 37 co-educational schools. Questionnaire, interviews and observations were used to obtain data. Data were analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages. Data from interviews were analyzed qualitatively in an on-going process as the themes and sub-themes emerged from data. The findings of the study showed that headteachers' curriculum supervisory methods were limited to checking of teachers' professional records and gave less emphasis to departmental supervision, self appraisal and class-visits. Financial constraint was revealed as the major challenge which impacted negatively on physical facilities, teaching and learning materials, and teaching methods. Therefore, the study concluded that headteachers employed inadequate methods for the supervision of teachers in the sampled schools, preferring to rely on written records to establish the quality of education and recommended that they should take up their roles as quality assurance officers and ensure that all modern methods were employed in secondary schools. Further, headteachers should devise school income generating projects to improve on financial problems that currently result in student absenteeism, transfers and inadequate facilities.

Key words: Quality education, quality assurance, challenges, strategies, teaching methods, curriculum supervision, teacher appraisal, headteachers.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Previous researchers have suggested that a number of factors contribute to the establishment of quality education in schools. For example, Digolo (2003), and Eshiwani (1993) observed that the maintenance of factors such as curriculum, instructional materials, equipment, school

management, teacher training and resources are some of the indicators of quality education. In addition, Gogo (2002) reported that low performance could be attributed to inadequate finance which resulted to inadequate supply of teaching and learning materials and equipment. Olembo (1992) also suggested that provision of quality education requires that headteachers be involved in translation of education policies and objectives into viable

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Table 1. Nyanza province Kenya certificate of secondary examination performance per district for the period 1997 - 2005.

District	Mean scores in Kenya certificate of secondary examination								
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Kisumu	5.241	5.212	5.293	5.257	5.246	5.300	5.432	5.851	5.824
Homa Bay	5.519	5.384	5.311	5.623	5.580	5.384	5.684	5.894	5.812
Kisii	4.182	4.123	4.119	4.391	4.362	4.208	4.483	4.352	4.498
Siaya	5.665	5.582	5.373	5.874	5.628	5.523	5.776	5.872	5.954
Nyamira	3.996	3.930	3.967	4.315	4.087	4.214	4.501	4.545	4.351
Migori	5.825	5.858	5.621	6.113	5.888	5.471	5.620	5.826	5.855
Suba	4.976	5.671	5.919	6.046	6.014	5.701	5.727	5.791	5.505
Rachuonyo	4.911	4.868	4.973	5.440	5.401	5.001	5.373	5.562	5.958
Gucha	4.958	3.958	3.798	4.160	4.077	3.977	4.277	4.391	4.310
Bondo			5.923	6.112	5.973	6.698	5.935	6.005	6.013
Nyando			5.367	5.846	5.817	5.415	5.626	6.025	6.017

Source: Provincial director of education office Kisumu (2006).

programmes within the school; while Shiundu and Omulando (1992) emphasized that on a daily basis headteachers have the responsibility to ensure that teachers implement the set curriculum and that learning activities take place.

In order to support teaching and learning processes, Doharly (1993) observed that the headteacher should ensure quality curricular supervision and provision of adequate physical resources. Neil and Kitson (1996) further maintained that the headteacher is responsible for selection of subject appearing in the school curriculum. This was necessary to ensure that a well- balanced education is provided to students. On the same point, Bound et al. (1994) suggested that the quality of principals is a relevant indicator of quality schools, and therefore underscored the importance of headteachers in school administration. Given this background, the aim of the current study was to investigate the strategies employed by secondary school headteachers in the supervision of the curriculum and the challenges they faced in their attempts to provide quality education.

Statement of the problem

One indicator of quality education is evidenced by the performance of schools in the national examination outcomes (Coombs, 1968). In Gucha district found in Kenya, examination performance has long remained poor especially when compared to Nyamira and Kisii central. The expected maximum mean score is 12 the equivalent of grade A, while the minimum score is 1 the equivalent of grade E. The performance of Gucha district in national examinations in 1997 -2005 was averagely a mean score of 4 the equivalent of D+ which is considered a failure because the graduates of this grade cannot be admitted in most careers for further education and training (Table 1). From the literature that was reviewed, no research on

quality education has been conducted in this district to find out why the quality of education has remained low. With the persistent poor academic performance in the district, there is a need to identify strategies which can be laid down by headteachers as in their role as Quality Assurance agents in order to bring about improved performance in national examinations. This study, therefore aimed at investigating the challenges and opportunities, and possible strategies that could be put in place to provide quality education in Gucha District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study explored the strategies employed by headteachers and the challenges they faced in their attempts to provide quality education in Gucha district. Descriptive survey research design was used. This design was found to be ideal as it enabled an in-depth study of the relevant variables to be made in order to establish existing conditions in the schools. Studies that are concerned with what people think and what they do, and different types of educational fact finding, can utilize this research design (Babbie, 1979; Frankel and Wallen, 1993).

Area of study

This study was conducted in Gucha District in Nyanza Province in western Kenya. According to the 1999 national census, the district had a total population of 438,123 persons and a population density of about 1000 persons per km². The number of poor individuals in the district was estimated to be 269,252. This makes 61% of the population to be living below the poverty line. Poverty Index Range per division is between 51 - 69% (Republic of Kenya, 2003). The economic activities practiced in Gucha are crop farming, dairy farming, soapstone carvings, brick making and small scale businesses. There are few tea processing factories which offer employment to the people. The inhabitants of the area attach great importance to better quality education for their children but this has not been achieved.

Sample and sampling techniques

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the schools and the category of respondents to be included in the sample. In this study the population strata included boys, girls, and mixed schools. From single sex schools, four boys schools and five girls schools were selected through saturated sampling technique and 37 mixed schools were selected randomly. The 37 mixed schools together with four boys and five girls schools formed a sample of 46 public schools from a total of 120 public schools. This accounted for 38.3% of the total public schools in Gucha District.

Instruments of data collection

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and observation checklist. Questionnaire was preferred for its suitability to this study. It was suitable as a method of data collection because it allowed the researcher to reach a large sample within limited time and ensured confidentiality of the information given by the respondents. We designed two questionnaires; one for headteachers, and the other for the curriculum masters and mistresses. The two questionnaires sought to identify the strategies employed by headteachers in their supervision of the curriculum, and also the challenges which had affected their efforts to provide quality education. These include such factors as teachers, the distribution of physical facilities, adequacy, availability and utilization of teaching and learning materials, regularity of external school inspection, financial constraints, student transfers and student discipline, in-service programmes and community interference.

Interview schedule

Interviews were administered to 42 headteachers of the sampled schools with an aim of getting more information on the challenges they faced in their attempts to provide quality education. Responses from interviews were recorded under headings emerging from interviews with interviewees.

Observation checklist

Information was also gathered through observation of physical facilities and other visible school equipment. This observation helped to verify the responses to questionnaires and interviews. The researchers prepared observation checklist which contained observable school factors related to quality education in secondary schools. The checklist was completed by the researchers during the period when each school in the sample was visited.

Validity and reliability of research instruments

To ascertain the validity of the research instruments, the researchers presented questionnaires, interview schedule guide and observation checklist to three lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Foundations at Maseno University who are authorities in the area for scrutiny, advice and verification. Validity and reliability were ascertained through piloting instruments of data collection. Researchers conducted a pilot study in nine schools. Questionnaires were administered after intervals of two weeks and information obtained were used to remove or clarify any vague and ambiguous questions in the instrument.

METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected by questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Data collected through in-depth interviews were transcribed, organized into themes and sub themes as they emerged in an on going process. The researcher then used statistics to indicate percentages. This helped to capture the challenges and opportunities for headteachers in their attempts to provide quality education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to identify the supervisory strategies employed by secondary school headteachers in the provision of quality education. We also sought to investigate challenges that hampered headteachers efforts to provide quality education.

Supervisory methods employed in public secondary schools

Data indicated that over 80% of public secondary schools headteachers preferred the use of written records (records of work covered, schemes of work, progress records and class attendance register) in the supervision of the curriculum, however, data also indicated that less emphasis was given to departmental supervision, self-appraisal and less than 50% undertook class visits and observation.

Teaching and learning methods in public secondary schools

Headteachers were asked to identify teaching and learning methods which were frequently employed by their teachers. Their responses were summarized in Table 3.

The obtained results revealed that in all public secondary schools teachers preferred using discussions and lecture methods in the teaching and learning processes (Table 3). Other methods such as the use of assignment, investigation, experiment, project and dramatization were employed less frequently.

Challenges experienced by headteachers in their attempts to provide quality education

Data obtained indicated that all the sampled public secondary schools in Gucha district experienced financial constraints, inadequate facilities and teacher shortage while 86.4% faced problems of admission of students with low marks, student absenteeism, transfer and indiscipline. It was also noted that over 80% public schools experienced the problem of community interferences such as demands to have schools headed with their own

Table 2. Curriculum supervisory approaches employed in public secondary schools.

Approaches	Mixed n = 37		Boys' n = 4		Girls' n = 5		Total n = 46	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Check records of work	37	100	4	100	5	100	46	100
Schemes of work	37	100	4	100	5	100	46	100
Departmental supervision	11	29.4	4	100	2	40	40	36.9
Check on students' marks	31	83.8	4	100	4	80	39	84.7
Frequent testing	34	91.9	4	100	5	100	44	95.6
Self appraisal	12	32.4	3	75	1	20	16	34.7
Attendance registers	37	100	4	100	5	100	46	100

people with or without the necessary qualifications, withholding fees payments and transferring children from one school to another frequently.

Training

Results indicated that the majority (90%) of headteachers and teachers had undertaken initial training courses (e.g. Diploma and first Degree). It was also noted that a half of headteachers (50%) had received short in-service courses in school and financial management. However, very few (6.4%) headteachers and teachers had managed to further their education to masters level. About 30% of teachers from all schools had received training in the teaching of Science and Mathematics in Secondary Schools Education (SMASSE).

Teacher distribution

Results on the composition of teacher distribution in public schools revealed that overall schools had 20.2% untrained teachers, 11% Approved Teachers, and 9.3% diploma holders. However over a third (37.7%) of the teachers were first degree holders in Arts and 23% in science. Results indicated that schools had a shortage of science teachers, especially in physics and chemistry. It was also reported that in cases of teacher shortages, form 4 school leavers were sometimes employed instead of a qualified teacher.

Physical facility, teaching and learning materials distribution in public schools

Results on facilities indicated that all schools had inadequate physical, learning and teaching materials. The ratio of textbook-pupil was 1:20. It was also reported that over 81.1% Mixed and Girls schools had no essential facilities, such as transport, tapped water and electricity. However, all boys' schools were reported to have adequate transport and water supply. Results also

indicated that all public schools had inadequate guidance and counseling services and over half of headteachers reported that their schools had locally appointed counselors.

Student indiscipline

Data obtained also indicated that schools within the sample experienced similar student indiscipline problems. In boys' schools the major problems were drug abuse (100%), fighting (60%), student absenteeism (75%), disobedience to teachers (75%) and destruction of property (50%). It was also revealed that mixed and girls' schools experienced student absenteeism (97.2%), failure to do assignment (100%), student flirting (60%), disobedience to teachers (80%), and destruction of property (Table 4). The results, however, indicated that common indiscipline problems in public schools were student absenteeism, destruction of property, failure to do assignment and disobedience to teachers.

DISCUSSION

The use of written records as illustrated in Table 2 was headteachers' most preferred method of supervising the curriculum in secondary schools. This present findings illustrate that headteachers found it easy to check on teachers' records due to their accessibility and availability. Headteachers did not employ self-appraisal frequently. This could be due to lack of experience on how to use it successfully or because teachers felt intimidated and victimized by headteachers. On the other hand, this could indicate lack of concern or commitment on the part of headteachers. Lack of departmental supervision could be due to lack of heads of department appointed by the Teachers Service Commission. This could also be the result of headteachers' lack of experience on how to utilize and encourage self-appraisal. Results indicated that there was also a lack of class visits and observation on the part of headteachers. This could be due to either headteachers being

Table 3. Methods of teaching and learning employed in a sample of public secondary schools in Gucha.

Methods	Mixed n=37				Boys n=4				Girls n=5			
	HTs		CMs		HTs		CMs		HTs		CMs	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Class discussion	37	100	37	100	4	100	4	100	5	100	5	100
Group discussion	37	100	37	100	4	100	4	100	5	100	5	100
Lecture method	29	78.4	23	62.2	3	75	3	75	2	40	3	60
Assignment	16	43.2	14	37.0	2	50	3	75	3	60	1	20
Investigation	3	8.1	6	16	1	25	2	50	1	20	1	20
Project	7	18.5	15	40.0	1	25	2	50	1	20	1	20
Experiment	12	32.4	6	16.0	3	75	3	75	4	80	2	60
Dramatization	2	5.4	10	27	2	50	3	75	1	20	1	20

Table 4. Indiscipline problems experienced in public schools.

Indiscipline problems	Mixed schools n = 37		Boys schools n = 4		Girls schools n = 5		%
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Drug abuse	15	40.5	4	100	1	20	20
Fighting	13	35.1	4	100	2	40	40
Theft	18	48.6	4	100	3	60	60
Student flirting	18	48.6	1	25	2	40	40
Student absenteeism	36	97.2	3	75	5	100	100
Disobedient to teachers	25	67.5	3	75	4	80	80
Failure to do assignment	37	100	1	25	4	80	80
Destruction of school property	17	45.9	2	50	1	20	20
Use of home clothes	10	27	1	25	4	80	80
Cheating in examination	13	35.1	1	25	3	60	60

committed to administrative functions or ignoring it as well as regarding it as a less important aspect of their supervisory role. However, absence of class visits meant that teachers could decide to attend to their lessons or not. This therefore left headteachers employing the easiest alternative method, that is, the checking of records. This also made strategies of curriculum supervision inefficient and inadequate since they were not balanced between inside and outside teaching and learning venues. This finding is inline with the views given by Nyamu (1986) who observed that supervisory methods employed by headteachers were inadequate since they were limited to checking of teachers' professional records.

The frequent use of discussion and lecture methods could be due to inadequate teaching and learning facilities. It could also be attributed to the nature of learners depending on admissions criteria and lack of frequent in-service training on methodology. Methods of learning and teaching are linked fully on the availability and adequacy of facilities. Use of methods such as class discussions and lecture methods suggest that much of the work was initiated and done by teachers since they could use the very few textbooks, make notes and then

discuss these with the learners. However, this rendered the whole learning process fully teacher-centred. The missing aspect of student assignment, investigation, experiment, project and dramatization illustrates that teaching in most cases was done theoretically and therefore no room was left for discovery on the part of learners. This could be due to lack of facilities for practical teaching. This finding is similar to that of Gogo (2002) who concluded that low performance could be attributed to lack of adequate finance which resulted in inadequate supply of teaching and learning materials and equipment. Lewis (1984) also observed that a shortage of textbooks and teaching materials had harmful effects on satisfactory teaching in mathematics and sciences.

Schools in the sample experienced financial constraints as revealed from the findings. This could be due to non-payment of fees, accumulation of arrears and untapped school resources. This could also be attributed to mismanagement of school funds. The issue of finance is crucial to the provision of quality education since it determines the quality of physical facilities, teaching and learning materials, quality of teacher motivation and teachers employed at the time of shortage. It also impacts on the methods of teaching and learning

employed in schools as they depend to a large extent on the facilities available. It also supported efficient utilization and exploitation of school resources. Hence, many of the problems experienced in schools, such as community interferences, student indiscipline, absenteeism, and transfers, lack of adequate facilities, shortage of teachers, could all be attributed to have stemmed from financial constraints.

Inadequacy of facilities could be due to financial constraints faced by schools. Since mixed schools and girls' depended on the good-will of the parents, especially those from the community, financial constraints probably stemmed from non-payment of fees. Lack of facilities affected the methods of teaching and learning used in schools. Hence, availability of facilities meant that teachers could save time for extra work on the part of students since many of the activities could be done practically. However, this was a missing aspect in most sampled schools. This finding was in-line with the views of Eshiwani (1984), who asserted that availability of classrooms, desks, laboratories; workshops and library were symbols of high education quality. Lewis (1984) also made a similar observation that shortage of textbooks and teaching materials had harmful effects on satisfactory teaching in mathematics and sciences. Mwiria (1985) also suggested that students' performance was affected by the quality and quantity of teaching and learning resources. He noted that schools with adequate facilities such as laboratories stood a better chance of performing better in examinations than poorly equipped schools.

Findings from this research revealed that schools were irregularly visited by quality assurance officer. This could be because of the inaccessibility of some schools or lack of commitment on the part of the respective officers. Lack of visitation is an indication that headteachers did not receive the advisory services which they could expect from the officers, especially on supervisory methods of curriculum implementation. This therefore, meant that every headteacher did things in his or her own way, hence, affecting the universality of a balanced and uniform education for all children in the District.

Findings also revealed that school had inadequate guidance and counseling services. This could be due to either a lack of trained counselors in schools posted specifically to handle students' matters or because of uninterested headteachers in the establishment of such essential services in the schools. However, the counselors in schools were found to be locally appointed, untrained, inexperienced, and had inadequate counseling skills. This eventually had an effect on the smooth running of student discipline in schools. The findings of this study were in line with the observation made by Makinde (1984) who suggested that the trained school counselors had skills and competencies that could assist him/her use the peer groups for beneficial educational purposes in schools. The Constitution of Kenya Review

Commission (CKRC, 2000) maintained that the government should ensure that the guidance and counseling departments in schools were operational with a person who would be always available for the students, if the management of discipline was to succeed in schools. Ndiritu (1996) observed that lack of serious guidance programs was the major cause of dismal academic performance in learning institutions.

Conclusions

Various generalizations can be derived from our study:

- (i). Headteachers employed inadequate methods for the supervision of teachers in the sample schools, preferring to rely on written records to establish the quality of education delivered.
- (ii). Methods of teaching and learning employed in the sample public secondary schools were more teacher-centred and this failed to encourage students to learn by participation and experimentation.
- (iii). Financial constraint was the major challenge faced by headteachers and all other challenges such as inadequate facilities, low quality teachers employed, student absenteeism, student transfers and indiscipline, unexploited resources and lack of in-service training are linked to this.
- (vi). Quality assurance officers had ignored their roles of visiting the sample schools and offering the necessary advice on the improvement of quality of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was therefore recommended that:

- (i). Secondary school headteachers should take up their roles as quality assurance officers in their schools and ensure that there is adequate departmental supervision.
- (ii). Headteachers should introduce staff appraisal through locally designed forms to enhance standards and engage in evaluative class observation, to ensure that a variety of teaching methods, apart from class discussion, is utilized.
- (iii). Headteachers should devise school income generating projects to alleviate current financial problems that result in student absenteeism, transfers, indiscipline and inadequate facilities.
- (iv). Headteachers should frequently invite quality assurance officers to advise on school affairs and community relationships. The quality assurance officers should also increase the frequency of their visits to schools in Gucha district. The Ministry of Education should devise a timetable of events (an inspection schedule) to be utilized by the headteachers for inspection and evaluation in schools.

(v). Headteachers should be in constant communication with the Teachers service commission to ensure that school receive adequate staffing for the delivery of quality education.

(vi). Headteachers should devise strategies, such as old students' associations and organize communal fund-raisers, to help equip schools for the delivery of quality education.

Suggestion for study research

Headteachers' perceptions of self-evaluation and how it may be encouraged in Gucha secondary schools.

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