

# Transformational Leadership: Teachers' Proposed Strategies Used in Public Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** This study explored the strategies to enhance transformational leadership practices of principals in the context of public secondary schools in Kenya. The study employed transformational leadership theory that was conceptualized by Bass (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985). The study utilized descriptive survey design and employed concurrent triangulation mixed method approach of inquiry. Data was collected from a target population of 1,198 teachers, 96 principals using the MLQX5 tool developed by Avolio and Bass (2004). Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides that were analyzed using both descriptive (mean, standard deviation and percentages). Data was presented using frequency tables.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Leadership, Teachers and strategies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty first century has elicited unprecedented reforms in educational systems worldwide brought about by challenges of globalization, the development of information technology and the advent of knowledge-based economy. For example, Kenya is currently undergoing reform in Education policy, legislative and curriculum reforms that are geared towards enhanced skill and training for the global economy (Ogutu, 2017). As these changes occur at policy level, the school becomes the core implementing agency where the principal plays a "mediating role between external demands by policy makers on one hand and teachers' demands on the other hand", Haim & Chen; (2016). The leadership of the principal becomes the single most important factor in the success of the implementation policy at school level. Getting the right people to become school leaders is very important, so is providing these people with the right set of skills to be effective leaders" (Christie, Thompson, & Whitely, 2009). Mitgang & Gill, (2012) contends that principals need pre-service training that prepares them to lead improved instruction and school change, not just manage buildings.

### Research Objectives:

- i. To establish the principals' transformational leadership attributes.
- ii. To propose strategies to enhance transformational leadership practices of principals in public secondary schools in Baringo County.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates that school principals play a central role in the success of educational change, (Lai, 2015). Since school leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally (Beatriz Pont et al, 2008) principals must adopt leadership practices that are critical in bringing positive outcomes in educational change. More specifically, the different ways in which school principals respond to educational change can create conditions that support or inhibit change.

According to Richardson, (2011), low commitment of teachers impedes principal's effort to implement daily school activities and programs that provides an environment that is conducive and supportive to high student achievement. Low teacher commitment leads to chronic absenteeism, poor lesson attendance, disobedience to school rules and regulations and failure to monitor student progress. In most cases, because of low motivation, teachers become effective when they are paid for extra coaching of students. Hallinger & Heck (2010) emphasized the importance of enhancing teacher's commitment to student learning because the lack of it causes problems to the school leader hence contributing to low student achievement. Therefore, principals must adopt leadership strategies that will enhance their leadership capacities in this era of education reforms.

Transformational leadership has been explained by many scholars to be best suited for institutions that are undergoing reform processes. As noted by (Cowan, Joyner, & Beckwith, 2012 cited in Pirtle & Doggett, 2013), effective leadership is a crucial part of school improvement yet leaders at schools in the process of transformation often struggle with how to best guide their staff and students to better outcomes. Research on the leadership actions for transforming schools revealed core actions that leaders take in successfully leading school transformations. These actions can create the conditions needed to shape a school culture where teaching and learning can improve. These include to establish and pursue a vision of your preferred future, increase organizational coherence, provide clear communication of the schools vision, monitor evaluate and review progress, provide resources and support, increase leaders' presence throughout the school and in the community. (Pirtle & Doggett, 2013).

Principal's strategic vision for improved teaching and learning creates a framework for schools improvement efforts. The manifestation of leadership is, therefore, to guide staff and stakeholders towards defining the school vision together. Such leaders align leadership practice to empowering staff to achieve school goals and therefore their vision lives long after they leave the school. Staff involvement is important in defining roles and assigning responsibilities in order to accomplish this vision and school goals, (Bryk et al., 2010). This is supported by Cowan et al., (2012) that school leader's ability to promote staff collegiality and collaboration is enhanced by establishing teams to address school improvement. It is important to note that effective principals supports high levels of teaching and learning because "it is neither teachers alone nor principals alone who improve schools, but teachers and principals working together" (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011).

Sylvia, (2015) while conducting a project entitled, 'the principal's role in the instructional process: Implications for At-Risk students', reported that principals become servants to their vision of success for all students. They convey this vision to teachers, students, and parents through their behaviour and actions. The specific practices is to build a shared vision, foster the acceptance of group goals and demonstrate high performance expectations.

Rossmiller (1992 in Gkolia, Koustelios, & Belias, (2015) argued that principals need to turn their attention on circumstances that enhance the sense of teachers on their capabilities by influencing a teacher's capacity by providing a vision, being an example through experience and by addressing high expectations of success of individuals as this significantly links to the student outcomes and changes in the teacher behaviour. In addition, as transformational leaders, involve teachers in building a shared vision and setting clear goals for their school, show individualized attention to the needs and aspirations of teachers, and stimulate and challenge teachers to try new approaches. Principals' leadership determine teachers' ability think critically and recommend new ideas that can promote work satisfaction, commitment and performance, (Hilpia & Deros, 2010) Leaders willingness to challenge assumptions and take risks builds the foundation for employee motivation, commitment and extra effort to initiate change in the organization, (Bass, 1985).

Leaders are the stewards of organizational performance, they inspire or demoralize others, first by how effectively they manage their own resilience and next by how well they manage, focus, invest and renew the collective synergy of those they lead, (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, in Day, 2014). Rossmiller (1992 in Gkolia, Koustelios, & Belias, (2015) argued that principals need to turn their attention on circumstances that enhance the sense of teachers on their capabilities by influencing a teacher's capacity by providing a vision, being an example through experience and by addressing high expectations of success of individuals as this significantly links to the student outcomes and changes in the teacher behaviour.

Effective principals take the initiative to identify teachers' strengths, sharpen their skills as Christopher Day & Pamela Sammons (2016) reported that effective principals should take responsibility for raising the quality of teaching and learning and for students' achievement. This implies setting high performance expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes. Successful school principals, therefore, are those who are risk-takers who actively seek out new opportunities, experiences and challenges for their schools to learn and achieve more.

School systems that invest in continuous professional development of teachers improve collaboration, coordinate work and share the best instructional practices, Bierly, Doyle & Smith (2016). Therefore, when designing training programs, it is important to take into account the contribution of teachers on leadership behaviours of principals. In addition, as transformational leaders involve teachers in building a shared vision and setting clear goals for their school, show individualized attention to the needs and aspirations of teachers, and stimulate and challenge teachers to try new approaches, they may also be sought more for advice and collaboration in schools and districts than less transformational leaders, Moolenaar, & Slegers, (2015).

Sylvia, (2015) while conducting a project entitled, 'the principal's role in the instructional process: Implications for At-Risk students'. Reported that principals, become servants to their vision of success for all students. They convey this vision to teachers, students, and parents through their actions. Because the interactions between teachers and students are critical, how principals influence this aspect of the educational process is important. Principals participate in the instructional process through their discussions with teachers about instructional issues, their observations of classroom instruction, and their interactions with teachers when examining student data. To make a difference in the students' academic performance, effective principals therefore, must develop relationships with the teachers through individualized consideration by serving as mentors.

Hussain, Ahmad, & Qadir, (2016) researched on effective principals understanding of direction setting. They established that teachers who engage in open and honest communication with the principal, contribute suggestions and voice their concerns are much more likely to follow the direction set by their leader. They concluded that, developing people through individualized support can take many forms in schools. Subject coaches can model lessons, observe classes, and provide constructive feedback to teachers. Teachers also benefit from peer observations, debriefing sessions with colleagues, and feedback from the principal. New teachers in particular gain support from mentor teachers who are carefully assigned to assist them in the first few years of teaching.

Individualized performance appraisal system therefore strengthen supervision and continuously monitor curriculum implementation at school level. It further motivates teachers to align individual goals to school objectives. Also teachers and other staff included in identifying goals are much more likely to be motivated to achieve those goals. In their critical role as instructional leaders, they set goals, monitor teaching and learning, review and use data for planning and improvement, implement training and provide feedback for growth to their staffs on an ongoing and regular basis, Notam & Henry, (2015). They enhanced the professional capacity of the teaching and non-teaching staff through professional development programmes and the development of future leaders.

Wang, Gurr & Drysdale (2016), in a study of four Singapore primary schools found principals to have contributed significantly to the success of their schools. They reported that principals established collaboration and partnerships to build quality relationships with staff, students, parents, school board and stakeholders inside and outside the school community. Moolenaar & Slegers, (2015). In other words, principals who are more easily accessible within the district may also be more easily reached within the school network. Given that the work of transformational leaders indicates the importance of social relationships to achieve school goals, recent research has suggested that transformational school leaders occupy a more central position in their school's social network than non-transformational leaders (Moolenaar *et al.*, 2010 cited in Moolenaar and Slegers, 2015.)

Ndiga et al,(2014) contends that when teachers are involved in decision making and general management of the school, they become motivated and put more effort in their work, ultimately making a positive influence on the students' academic achievement. Teachers perceive that creating opportunities to be active part of school goals and giving support for individual professional development are important roles of transformational leaders. It is therefore important for leaders to have structures in place that enable staff and parents to participate in making decisions, become familiar with the learning goals, and collaboratively engage in leading the school improvement efforts and transformation, (Cowan et al., 2012; Harris, 2002; Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Notman & Henry,( 2011) found out that successful principals took seriously their professional responsibility for growing other leaders within the school by distributing leadership through delegation and shared decision making. This validates principal's leadership since independent decision by the principal quite often than not leads to resistance by the teachers. Notman & Henry, (2011) further established that all principals who advocated the use of helpful support systems for both teachers and students realized improved learner outcomes. Support for teachers included meaningful professional development, assistance with behaviorally challenged students, and establishing a climate of collegiality and mutual support.

An underlying objective for all personnel support systems according to Notman & Henry, (2011) was that it would demonstrate an ethic of care and how much the school valued its students and teachers. Three aspects further rounded out the major leadership strategies used by these successful principals. First, the ability to integrate different cultural expectations into the school, and to foster cultural diversity and inclusiveness, was a hallmark of each principal's level of cultural awareness. Second, principals took seriously their professional responsibility for growing other leaders within the school by distributing leadership through delegation and shared decision making. Finally, the ability to have ones "finger on the pulse" of events in the life of the school was identified as a leadership skill. Principals obtained this organizational knowledge through involvement in activities at the grass-roots level of the school, through active listening and interpretation during daily discussions with students and staff, and through maintaining effective networking links outside the school.

From reviewed literature, it can be noted that many researches imply that transformational leadership behaviors, such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation are positively related to greater employee acceptance, better performance, and increased job satisfaction at schools. Basically, the effects are vision building, high performance expectations, developing consensus about group goals and intellectual stimulation. One of the major reasons for continued interest by scholars in the links between leadership and student outcomes is the desire by policy makers to improve educational achievement and the belief that school leadership is critical in achieving this goal. Therefore, principal's transformational leadership practices are key for transforming schools, Aydın, (2012).

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Strategies to enhance the transformational leadership among principals were scored on a 5 point scale as follows; 1 = strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Undecided 4 = Disagree and 5 = Strongly disagree. The table below presents strategies that principals can adopt to enhance transformational leadership practices in their schools as proposed by teachers

**Table 1: Strategies as proposed by teachers to enhance the transformational leadership among principals**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
i) Identify and develop a leadership style or model that fits the school's needs and culture	103	103	6	1	0	4.2	1.2
Percentage (%)	45.8	45.8	2.7	0.4			
ii) Use assemblies to honour students and teachers for academic accomplishments	123	91	3	6	2	4.5	1.3
Percentage (%)	54.7	40.4	1.3	2.7	0.9		
iii) Contacting parents to communicate improved/exemplary student performance/contributions	97	111	11	1	3	4.3	1.3
Percentage (%)	43.1	49.3	5.8	0.4	1.3		
iv) Supporting teachers actively in their recognition/reward of students	127	87	6	3	2	4.5	1.3
Percentage (%)	56.4	38.7	2.7	1.3	0.9		
v) Develop goals that are easily understood and used by teachers in the school	110	98	14	2	1	4.4	1.2
Percentage (%)	48.9	43.6	6.2	0.9	0.4		
vi) Referring to the school's academic goals when making curricula decisions with teachers	107	104	9	4	1	4.4	1.2
Percentage (%)	47.6	46.2	4.0	1.8	0.4		
<b>Average Mean</b>						<b>4.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>

Teachers were asked if principals identified and developed a leadership style or model that fits the schools' needs and culture. More teachers (91.6%) were in agreement that an effective model of leadership needs to be adopted as compared to the principals where 80% agreed. This implies that teachers were not satisfied with the leadership model adopted by their principals. They strongly felt that principals needed to adopt effective leadership strategy that would inspire teachers and the entire school community to enhance performance and learning outcomes. This was strongly supported by the County Director Teacher Management that principals' adoption of a leadership model that encourages, stimulate and inspire teachers to achieve school goals would take schools to a higher level of academic performance.

It is important to note here that change in education policy leads to school transformations. Consequently, principals must create conditions required to shape the school culture where teaching and learning can improve. This is a critical issue because, principals should consistently strengthen school culture while articulating high expectations for all students, including teachers that are too often marginalized and blamed for schools not making adequate yearly progress, WETA Public Broadcasting, (2017).

Additionally, it is important for school leaders to have structures in place that enable staff and parents to participate in making decisions that affect school performance. To achieve this, parents are contacted to communicate improved student performance and contributions as 43.1% of the teachers strongly agreed 49.3% agreed. This enables the stakeholders of the school to become familiar with the learning goals, and collaboratively engage in leading the school improvement efforts, Newmann, et al, 2001, cited in Pirtle, & Doggett, 2013). As found out by Yukl, (2009), collaborative decision making builds trust, creates team resilience and leads to a shared vision. Teachers play a critical role in the implementation of school goals and their actions directly impact on students' academic performance. Thus, involving them in decision making especially on curriculum matters and general governance of the school, motivates them to invest extra effort in achieving school goals.

All principals (100%) support teachers actively in their recognition/reward of student's contributions to an accomplishment in class as 56.4% of the teachers strongly agreed and 38.7% of them agreed. The additional responsibility of principals is to motivate and provide on-going support to their instructional teams. Teachers and students should feel valued and their efforts appreciated by their leader. Teaching can be frustrating and lonely because of increasing demand for high performance using limited resources as well as low pay. Therefore, all teachers need professional advice and individualized support in order to overcome their daily challenges they face (Keefe et al., 2004). Motivated teachers support student achievement and seek out additional learning opportunities to improve their teaching skills hence transfer knowledge to the learners. .

95% of the principals developed a vision and goals that are easily understood and implemented by teachers in the school as supported by 48.9% of the teachers who strongly agreed and 43.6% of them agreed. Clearly articulated vision and goals are achieved because all staff are made to understand their roles and responsibilities. As articulated by Cown et al, (2012), principals who share their vision and aspirations with followers promote staff collaboration in addressing school improvement.

Transformational leaders also keep on referring to the school's academic goals when making curricula decisions with teachers and this was reported by 47.6% of the teachers who strongly agreed and 46.2% agreed. Therefore, the most critical thing in a school for transformational leaders is creating a vision and describing what stakeholders, teachers, and students would do to achieve the vision provided in a framework for the school's improvement efforts. The development of school strategic plans enable principals to rally all followers to focus on delivering results.

#### **4. SUMMARY**

In this period of education reforms, focus is on school leadership because it is at this level where implementation takes place. Principals must adopt strategies that will enable them provide effective leadership. Principals who adopt transformational leadership practices develop a high performing team of all stakeholders. A transformational principal develops a school culture of high performance that is embraced by all the stakeholders. Such principals encourage open communication with stakeholders and establishes a reward system that recognizes the effort of members of the team who excel in performance. Open communication creates access to the leader by all stakeholders and provides an avenue for all stakeholders to share ideas that help in enhancing the schools performance. Parents and guardians should be contacted whenever students have performed exemplary well as this motivates students to work even more towards better performance.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The practice of transformational leadership by principals has great advantage to the school and all stakeholders. Therefore, school leaders are encouraged to adopt transformational leadership strategies that will enhance effective leadership practices. To accomplish school goals, the study noted the following leadership strategies to be applicable for transformative leaders; involving stakeholders in decision making, mentoring, coaching and encouraging teachers to taking responsibility for students' performance. Everyone should be involved in determining school goals, beliefs and visions at the beginning of the year as it is believed that sharing is caring.

Additionally, principals who create a positive and a productive learning environment that serves to accomplish the schools purpose while promoting positive relationships, open communication and support for teachers and students achieves high academic performance. Communication lines should be open and the teachers should work together for consistency among them in their teaching and in handling situations. The Principal should not only have high expectations of the teachers' efforts and commitment but should also put effort himself or herself. Teachers should share ideas and experiment with new ideas, posing questions for others to think about. Transformational leadership in the school is a definite advantage for everyone involved. With transformational leadership the environment in and around the school will dramatically improve performance and students will benefit from attending school.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings, it is recommended that the process of selecting, assigning and training of school leaders must include practices that meet school effectiveness demands especially in this era of changes in education policy. Identification and development of school leaders need to be formalized through exposure of newly recruited teachers to early leadership responsibilities and experiences.

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