



AN ANALYSIS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION IN FORECASTING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS IN KENYA

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Abstract: The lack of quality education, driven by poor academic performance among students has hindered the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in many developing countries including Kenya. This study aimed to assess the impact of principals' instructional supervision on students' academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams in public secondary schools within Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was employed with a target population of 21 public secondary schools. Three schools were randomly chosen for a pilot study and the remaining 18 schools were selected through a census approach. All 18 principals were purposely included in the study while 73 teachers were randomly and proportionally selected using a 30% sampling ratio. The quantitative data gathered through closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as means, frequencies, percentages and chi-square tests with the support of SPSS. The results were presented in frequency tables, percentages and means while qualitative responses from open-ended questions were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Pearson Chi-Square tests revealed a significant relationship between principals' instructional supervision and student performance ($\chi^2(1,4) = 26.928, p = .000$). The study concluded that students performed better in schools where principals actively supervised instruction. Based on these findings it was recommended that principals regularly visit classrooms to monitor student progress and offer feedback to both teachers and students.

Index Terms- Instructional supervision, learner academic Achievement, High schools, Katulani Sub-County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Strong academic achievement is crucial in all educational systems as it helps students attain their educational objectives and enhance their quality of life (Brew et al., 2021). According to Muda et al. (2017) student achievement is often assessed based on the effectiveness of principals in executing administrative practices which is reflected in students' results on standardized tests where high performance is expected. However, a UNICEF (2022) report on education pointed to a global learning crisis largely driven by poor school administration and ineffective teaching methods.

Normand (2015) observed that while principals in France were mandated to promote school improvement at the local level, they lacked the authority to address teaching and learning challenges which remained under the

jurisdiction of state inspectors. This study aimed to examine the impact of principals' instructional supervision on the academic achievement of public high school students in Katulani Sub-County, Kenya. Jerry and Mike (2011) argued that effective principals play a key role in improving instruction, setting high expectations and serving as role models all of which significantly influence student achievement.

Instructional supervision involves the principal overseeing teachers' instructional activities including reviewing professional documents to ensure high-quality teaching practices with the ultimate goal of improving student learning outcomes (Ukaigwe et al., 2015). This idea is supported by Marfan and Pascual (2018) who found that effective instructional supervision by principals in Chile improves teaching practices, enhances student engagement and boosts academic achievement. In a study on employee appraisal in educational institutions in Portugal, Sarrico et al. (2012) found that many principals did not monitor teaching and learning in a structured or systematic way resulting in a lack of understanding of the reasons behind student performance outcomes. Grissom et al. (2021) highlighted that increased pressure for test-based accountability in the United States of America led principals to place greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the learning process, providing feedback and supporting teachers' professional development.

In Nigeria, Ngeripaka et al. (2019) argued that instructional supervision is aimed at improving the skills of academic staff to fulfill their roles more effectively thereby enhancing student academic performance. Davis et al. (2022) found that in junior secondary schools in Central Ghana, students' poor performance was due to ineffective teaching, inadequate syllabus coverage and significant learning gaps that needed to be addressed. Melesse and Molla (2018) emphasized the importance of instructional supervision in Ethiopia for cultivating a culture of accountability and shared responsibility for student success. Manaseh (2016) reported that in Tanzania, principals did not supervise instruction effectively as teachers were not involved in planning school programs and classroom observations were rarely conducted leading to delays in syllabus coverage.

In Kenya, learning outcomes are assessed through various forms of student evaluations including formative assessments such as random tests, class assignments, projects, continuous assessment tests and end-of-term examinations. Formative evaluation is intended to prepare students for the summative evaluation particularly the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exam which plays a crucial role in determining students' progression to career training. This high-stakes nature of the exam has fostered intense competition and led to incidents of examination irregularities (Amutabi, 2019). Amutabi notes that the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) introduced by the Kenyan government places a stronger emphasis on skill development rather than purely cognitive assessment. However, Murithi (2015) found that many principals neglect to prioritize classroom observation and supervision, a gap that negatively affects student performance as also highlighted by Mwendia (2018).

NEED OF THE STUDY

Quality education which is reflected in good academic performance of students plays a crucial role in equipping learners with the skills necessary for gainful employment and advancing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across many nations. However, data from the Katulani Sub-County Education Office (2023) reveals that secondary schools in the region have consistently underperformed in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations. This persistent underperformance has been attributed partly to inadequate professional development for teachers, insufficient syllabus coverage and lack of classroom observations as noted by the Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO). As a result, the majority of learners who sat for the KCSE examinations in Katulani Sub-County over the years have failed to meet the qualifications necessary for entry into university programs. Despite government efforts to provide learning resources and build the capacity of school principals, the trend of below-average performance in secondary schools continues. This persistent issue served as the basis for this study.

Objective of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the impact of principals' instructional supervision on students' academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams in public secondary schools within Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Italy, Agasisti et al. (2018) conducted a study on how the teaching strategies of school administrators influence learning outcomes in junior high schools. The research surveyed 1,073 school administrators using a questionnaire and the data was analyzed through Latent Class Analysis (LCA). The findings revealed that schools where principals emphasized instructional leadership had lower average test scores in reading and mathematics. While the study had a larger sample size compared to the current research, it lacked data on how principals' monitoring of instructional activities impacted learning outcomes in secondary schools in Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

In South Africa, Shava et al. (2021) carried out qualitative research to explore the roles of principals in fostering school improvement. Six principals from six public secondary schools were purposively selected and interviews were conducted to gather data which was then organized into themes. The study found that principals contributed to school improvement by managing the instructional program, overseeing learning processes, supervising teachers, coordinating curriculum activities and observing classes. However, the small sample size may have increased the margin of error potentially affecting the reliability of the results compared to the larger sample in the current study.

In Tanzania, Bakebula (2018) studied the impact of community secondary school administrators' practices on student achievement. Using a descriptive survey design, the study sampled 155 participants and gathered data through interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS while qualitative data were evaluated through theme analysis. The study found that principals' failure to monitor teachers' performance negatively affected student achievement. Bakebula suggested that principals should oversee teachers' preparation of professional documents and instructional materials. However, this study did not examine the impact of principals' instructional supervision on academic outcomes in Katulani Sub-County, Kenya.

Obunga (2019) conducted a study in Loitokitok Sub-County, Kenya to investigate the impact of principals' instructional supervision practices on students' KCSE performance. The research utilized a descriptive survey design collecting data from 14 administrators, 135 teachers and 540 students through interview schedules and questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with visual representations provided through graphs and tables. The findings indicated that principals' instructional supervision practices such as providing feedback and monitoring syllabus coverage were insufficient resulting in incomplete syllabus coverage that negatively impacted students' KCSE performance. Notably, this study was conducted in Loitokitok Sub-County, Kajiado County whereas the current research took place in Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County.

Kieleko et al. (2017) explored the effect of principals' workload on instructional supervision practices in public secondary schools in Lower Yatta Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design collecting data from 26 principals and 115 teachers through questionnaires. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and results were displayed through percentages, frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs. The study found that principals reviewed teachers' schemes of work, class attendance, lesson plans, students' lesson notes and records of work covered during instructional supervision. It also highlighted that such supervision aided teachers' professional development, enhanced pedagogical skills and ensured timely syllabus coverage. However, this research did not examine the impact of principals' instructional supervision on student academic performance in public secondary schools in Katulani Sub-County.

Makau et al. (2016) conducted a study in Makueni County, Kenya to explore the relationship between instructional supervision and student performance in science subjects. Using a descriptive research method, the study included a sample of 68 schools, 68 administrators and 272 science teachers selected through proportional sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and correlation coefficients were used for analysis. The findings revealed that inadequate instructional supervision contributed to poor learning outcomes in science subjects. Unlike the current study which focused on all seven subjects assessed at the KCSE level (five core subjects and two electives), Makau et al.'s research was limited to Biology, Physics and Chemistry.

Cheboi (2014) examined the role of principals' instructional supervision and its impact on student achievement in high schools in Baringo County. The research employed a survey methodology with a mixed-methods approach. A total of 277 respondents were selected from 48 public high schools using a stratified sampling

method while 12 administrators and 253 teachers were purposively included. Data collection involved interviews and questionnaires and the analysis was conducted using both inferential and descriptive statistics. The study found that principals were more engaged in setting instructional objectives than in managing daily instructional activities. However, Cheboi did not investigate how principals' administrative practices affected student learning outcomes in Katulani Sub-County.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Robert House's Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (1971). As explained by Keya (2019), the theory highlights how leaders can guide their subordinates toward achieving organizational objectives. The Path-Goal Theory underscores the relationship between leader behavior and the characteristics of subordinates including their skills and needs. Applied to this study, the theory implies that principals could adopt an achievement-oriented leadership style, set high performance standards and promote a culture of ongoing improvement (Keya, 2019). Through instructional supervision tailored to the specific context of each classroom, principals could provide support that helps teachers and students reach their educational goals.

Landrum and Daily (2012) point out that the Path-Goal Theory offers the benefit of inspiring employees to achieve results as team members become more effective when they understand their tasks and their purpose. However, applying the theory in practice can be challenging due to its incorporation of multiple management and leadership concepts. Moreover, the theory places significant emphasis on the leader's influence over employees while giving less attention to the reciprocal dynamics between them. Despite these limitations, the Path-Goal Theory was still relevant to this study as it offered a framework for understanding how principals could leverage instructional supervision to enhance students' academic performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was employed for the study, targeting 21 public secondary schools. This design was considered suitable as it enabled the researcher to illustrate how instructional supervision impacted student academic performance in public secondary schools within Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. Three schools were randomly selected for piloting while the remaining 18 schools were included in the main study through a census approach. All 18 principals were selected purposively. A 30% sampling ratio was applied to choose 73 teachers using a combination of stratified proportionate sampling and simple random sampling. Two distinct questionnaires were developed for data collection (Orodho, 2012), one for principals and another for teachers. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies and percentages as well as inferential statistics like chi-square, facilitated by SPSS. Findings were presented through frequency tables, percentages and means. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions were transcribed, organized into themes and presented narratively in alignment with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Descriptive Statics of the Study Variables

The study aimed to assess the impact of principals' instructional supervision on students' KCSE performance in Katulani Sub-County, Kenya. Table 1 presents a set of statements for which teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) to strongly disagree (1)..

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Table 1: Teachers' Response on Principals' Instructional Supervision and Learners' Academic Achievement

Statement	5		4		3		2		1	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The principal checks teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans, record of work covered and pupils' progress records	31	44.9	25	36.2	6	8.7	4	5.8	3	4.3
The principal has time tables for monitoring learning experiences to ensure that the syllabus is covered on time	25	36.2	22	31.9	12	17.4	7	10.1	3	4.3
The principal frequently visits classrooms and provides constructive feedback to teachers and learners after classroom observations	35	50.7	27	39.1	3	4.3	1	1.4	3	4.3
The principal monitors learners' performance by checking their class attendance register, lesson notes and assignments weekly	37	53.6	23	33.3	5	7.2	2	2.9	2	2.9

The majority of teachers' perspectives as outlined in Table 1 indicated that principals monitored students' performance by checking class attendance registers, lesson notes and assignments weekly with 53.6% strongly agreeing and 33.3% agreeing. However, 2.9% disagreed, another 2.9% strongly disagreed and 7.2% were undecided. A significant proportion of teachers also confirmed that principals frequently visited classrooms and provided constructive feedback to both teachers and students after observations with 50.7% strongly agreeing and 39.1% agreeing. Conversely, 4.3% strongly disagreed, 1.4% disagreed and 4.3% were undecided.

Similarly, a substantial number of teachers agreed that the principal checked professional documents as shown by 44.9% who strongly agreed and 36.2% who agreed. On the other hand, 5.8% disagreed, 4.3% strongly disagreed and 8.7% were uncertain. The statement that the principal maintained timetables to monitor learning experiences and ensure timely syllabus coverage was supported by many teachers with 36.2% strongly agreeing and 31.9% agreeing. However, 10.1% disagreed, 4.3% strongly disagreed and 17.4% were undecided.

Table 2 included a set of statements where principals were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) to strongly disagree (1).

Table 2: Principals' Views on Teacher Motivation and Learners' Academic Achievement

Statement	5		4		3		2		1	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The principal checks teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans, record of work covered and pupils' progress records	9	52.9	6	35.3	1	5.9	1	5.9	0	0.0
The principal has time tables for monitoring learning experiences to ensure that the syllabus is covered on time	7	41.2	6	35.3	2	11.8	0	0.0	2	11.8
The principal frequently visits classrooms and provides constructive feedback to teachers and learners after classroom observations	5	29.4	7	41.1	2	11.8	2	11.8	1	5.9
The principal monitors learners' performance by checking their class attendance register, lesson notes and assignments weekly	8	47.1	5	29.4	2	11.8	1	5.9	1	5.9

According to the findings in Table 2 most principals supported several statements related to their instructional supervision practices. Specifically, 52.9% strongly agreed and 35.3% agreed that they reviewed teachers' professional documents such as schemes of work, lesson plans, records of work covered and student progress reports. Only 5.9% disagreed and 5.9% were undecided about this practice. Additionally, 47.1% strongly agreed and 29.4% agreed that they monitored student performance by checking class attendance registers, lesson notes and assignments on a weekly basis. However, 5.9% disagreed, 5.9% strongly disagreed and 11.8% were undecided on this practice.

The study also found that 41.2% of principals strongly agreed and 35.3% agreed with maintaining timetables to monitor learning activities and ensure timely syllabus coverage. However, 11.8% strongly agreed while another 11.8% disagreed with this statement. Lastly 41.1% agreed and 29.4% strongly supported the principal's role in frequently visiting classrooms and providing feedback to teachers and students following observations. Nonetheless, 11.8% disagreed, 5.9% strongly disagreed, and another 11.8% remained undecided on this practice.

Inferential Statistics

A chi-square test was performed to evaluate the relationship between principals' instructional supervision and students' academic performance in the KCSE in Katulani Sub-County, Kenya. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Chi-square Test on Teachers' Views on Principals' Instructional Supervision and Learners' Academic Achievement

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.928(a)	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	23.003	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.080	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	69		

Table 3 shows that the chi-square value was $\chi^2(1,4) = 26.928$ with a p-value of .000. These results indicate a statistically significant relationship between principals' instructional supervision and students' academic performance. This finding suggests that the instructional supervision practices implemented by head teachers influenced the students' academic outcomes in the context studied. The p-value of .000 demonstrates that this relationship was highly significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Table 4: Chi-square Test on Principals' Views on Instructional Supervision and Learners' Academic Achievement

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.451 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	19.376	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.598	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	17		

Table 4 reports the results of a Pearson chi-square test showing a chi-square value of $\chi^2(1,4) = 28.451$ and a p-value of .000. This indicates a statistically significant association between principals' views on instructional supervision and students' academic performance. The results imply that principals' perspectives on instructional supervision significantly impacted learners' educational achievement.

Moreover, qualitative data gathered from both teachers and principals reinforced the critical role of effective instructional supervision in boosting student performance. A majority of 61 teachers (88.4%) indicated that effective supervision led to more comprehensive syllabus coverage which in turn contributed to better student achievement. Similarly, 14 principals (82.3%) underscored that supervising teachers' instructional activities ensured that teachers remained dedicated and focused on their duties.

Discussion and Interpretation

The primary aim of this study was to examine the influence of principals' instructional supervision on students' academic performance at KCSE in public secondary schools in Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County. The findings support the assertion by Ngeripaka et al. (2019) that supervision of instruction enhances teachers' ability to effectively fulfill their academic responsibilities ultimately leading to improved student outcomes. Analysis of data in Tables 1 and 2 demonstrated that a significant proportion of teachers (53.6%) strongly agreed that principals monitored learners' performance through weekly checks of class attendance registers, lesson notes and assignments. This viewpoint was shared by 47.1% of the principals indicating a general consensus on the importance of these practices.

Furthermore, 52.9% of principals strongly agreed that they reviewed teachers' professional documents including schemes of work, lesson plans, records of work covered and student progress records. This was corroborated by 44.9% of teachers who agreed that such practices were being implemented. However, there was a notable difference in perceptions regarding classroom visits and feedback. While 50.7% of teachers strongly agreed that

principals frequently visited classrooms and provided constructive feedback, only 29.4% of principals strongly affirmed this practice. This discrepancy indicates that while some teachers felt supported through classroom observations, principals might not have been engaged in consistently delivering feedback.

These findings underscore the importance of feedback as a crucial component of instructional supervision. Effective feedback helps teachers identify their strengths and areas that need improvement hence contributing to professional growth and better instructional delivery. Therefore, it is essential for principals to prioritize consistent and constructive feedback after lesson observations to enhance teaching practices and consequently student academic performance. The results imply that while instructional supervision practices such as monitoring academic records and reviewing teaching plans were generally acknowledged, the feedback mechanism needs strengthening. Principals should focus on fostering a supportive environment where teachers receive regular actionable feedback to improve instructional methods and boost student achievement.

A notable proportion of teachers 36.2% strongly agreed while 35.3% of principals concurred that school principals had timetables in place for monitoring learning activities to ensure the syllabus was covered on time. These findings hint that inadequate oversight of learning activities might have led to syllabus delays which could be linked to poor academic performance. Qualitative data further confirmed that students achieved better results in schools where principals effectively supervised teaching.

Conversely, a small percentage of teachers (1.4%) disagreed with the statement that principals frequently visited classrooms and provided constructive feedback to both teachers and students following observations. Additionally, 10.1% of teachers indicated that principals did not consistently check teachers' professional documents on a weekly basis. These findings suggest that insufficient instructional supervision by principals may have contributed to subpar learning outcomes in Katulani Sub-County, Kenya. Enhancing principals' supervision practices such as regular classroom visits and providing feedback would likely improve students' academic performance.

The results summarized in Table 3 showed a statistically significant connection between principals' instructional supervision and students' academic performance in KCSE as evidenced by the Pearson's Chi-Square test results from teachers: $\chi^2(1,4) = 26.928$, $p = .000$. Similar findings were noted in the principals' results with $\chi^2(1,4) = 28.451$, $p = .000$ as detailed in Table 4. These outcomes underscore the vital role of instructional supervision in boosting students' academic achievement and highlight the need for ongoing efforts to strengthen supervision practices in Katulani Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

The results align with the study by Melesse and Molla (2018) in Ethiopia which highlighted the significance of instructional supervision in fostering teachers' commitment to educational objectives and enhancing learning outcomes. Similarly, the findings are consistent with Kieleko et al. (2017) who found that administrators who regularly reviewed teachers' professional documents helped instructors to refine their teaching practices, ensure timely syllabus coverage and advance their professional development ultimately leading to improved student performance.

CONCLUSION

The study underscored the importance of effective instructional supervision by principals in enhancing students' academic performance. The researcher concluded that principals who emphasize instructional leadership, monitor learners' performance and ensure curriculum coverage have a positive impact on student achievement. It was also concluded that effective instructional supervision including monitoring learner performance and reviewing teachers' professional documents are among the most effective administrative practices for improving academic outcomes. Additionally, timely preparation of professional documents and regular class attendance propel teachers and students to strive for better performance. Furthermore, the practice of principals frequently visiting classrooms to oversee the learning process and provide constructive feedback to both teachers and students was shown to positively influence learners' academic success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggested the following measures:

- i. Principals should regularly oversee students' progress by checking class attendance records, lesson notes and assignments each week.

- ii. Principals should ensure that professional documents are prepared and utilized promptly to support timely syllabus completion.
- iii. Principals should periodically visit classrooms to observe teaching and learning activities, identify learning challenges and teachers' training requirements and provide constructive feedback to both educators and students.
- iv. From a policy standpoint, the Ministry of Education should mandate consistent curriculum monitoring by requiring principals to submit routine reports.

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