THE ROLE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS' ADMINISTRATION IN FOSTERING A LEARNING AND TEACHING CULTURE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MACHAKOS COUNTY, KENYA.

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ABSTRACT

Various educational stakeholders in Machakos County raised concern over the academic performance of public secondary schools which used to perform excellently in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examination. There was a decline in the performance thus need for this study of examining the effects of the principals' role as an administrator in fostering learning and teaching culture which affects academic performance. This study was done in selected public secondary schools in Machakos County Kenya. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. The study was guided by Vygotsky`s Theory of Social Interactionism. The study utilized a sample of 21 selected Public Secondary schools out of 212 public secondary schools in Machakos County. These schools included high and low performing Schools which were purposively selected. Sample size of the study was 200 students of which 100 were boys and girls were 100; 21 principals [men were 11 and 10 were women] and 21 deputy principals [10 men and 11 women], 25 teachers [12 men and women 13], 1 lady County Education Officer from Machakos County. The study adopted a descriptive research design. It employed both probability and non-probability sampling methods. Data analysis was done thematically. Data was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Analysed data was presented using qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods included narratives and descriptions while quantitative methods included tables showing comparisons, fluctuations and distributions in percentile presentations. The study found out that school Principals' role in fostering a learning teaching culture is done through facilitating teachers and students to work together, reinforce the fact of sharing ideas on academic matters and also valuing teachers' and students' ideas. Based on the observation from the study, it is evident that a school principal has various roles to play in a school which if done well, they influence students' academic performance. It was also found that the school principal is very instrumental in creating a positive culture that enhances team work with the school.

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Key Words: *School Administration, Learning and Teaching Culture, Academic Performance.*

1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Over the years, the result of studying on leaners' performance has been identified as one of the main ideas in educational survey. Coleman, Campell, Mcparland, Mood, Weinfeld and York (1966) observed that, school factors had little effect on academic achievement as compared to family background factors. This study sparked off a series of studies as well as debate on whether family or school factors were more significant in relation to a student's academic performance.

The current study however, concerns itself mainly with school factors, with a focus on specific school cultural aspects that may have an effect on learners' academic performance in selected Public Secondary schools in Machakos County, one of the 47 counties in Kenya. The study sought to examine the specific school cultural aspects and their relationship to students' academic performance as evidenced by Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) results in selected Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

Powerful set of beliefs and customs assures there is an inner bond that facilitate tutors to teach learners to learn and for school managers, parents and other stakeholders to play their part in the teaching system. The second reason is exterior: for whatever reason, learning institutions viewed by facial outlook as well as by academic outcomes. In school quarrels, diverse signs, bad reports and absence of real evidence that an institution embraces a unique thing make it hard to attract the confidence and assistance of external organisations. A school can relay its identity to outside organisations and rally them to participate via shared values, rituals and ceremonies, heroes and heroines and a supportive internal network.

Looking at salient school factors that can influence students' academic achievements, Hoy and Feldman (1999), in a study on the School Environment in America asserted that school is more than just the physical facilities. They underscored the need for a caring and supportive school environment which comprises of learner's motivations like trophies and prizes, sponsors to support and aid the students, guidance and counselling, good learning facilities, religious support, good and conducive learning and teaching environment and motivated teachers for learners to be motivated. Hoy, (2010) observed that successful institutions of learning that encourage great academic standards, right administration and collegiality offer an environment more suitable to leaners' excellence and attainment. Watson (2002) says that if the school culture is not hospitable to learning then students' achievement can suffer.

Gruenert (2005) examined the interconnection between institutions of learning, general behaviour and learner progress in which he noticed important connection between different factors of a school's system of beliefs and customs, school environment, administration and learner academic performance. Fink and Resnick (2001) reminded us that school principals are responsible for establishing a pervasive culture of teaching and learning in each school.

The role of a principal with adequate managerial skills to foster a positive teaching and learning school culture cannot be over emphasised.

School leadership style is also a key variable in establishing and enhancing positive change. According to McNulty, Waters and Marzano (2005), they identified 21 leadership qualities that have optimistic impacts on learners' learning. Among these qualities seven were specifically associated with enhancing the number two order change. This order change needs changes in outlooks, philosophies and standards that can adversely affect learners learning in contrary to the formal order change that is connected to organisational or structural changes that unlikely influence learners' studying. Some Studies in Kenya such as those done by Nyagosia, et al., (2013) and

Musungu and Nasongo (2008) are among those that have directly linked good performance in school examinations to effective instructional leadership by head teachers. There is need for this study to establish the role played by the Principals' in students' academic performance.

2.0 THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The Principal of any school plays a central role in creating a learning and teaching culture in the school. Furthermore, research studies investigating the indirect impact of Head teacher leadership on learners' performance (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Hoy, 2006, Leithwood, 2004) have indicated that educational leadership is linked to the school's structure and community, which is linked to learners' attainment. The performance of students can be dictated by the principal's leadership style, for example Ochieng (Ochieng, 2001), study on Influence of Leadership Styles on Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Mombasa found out that poor academic performance in KCSE was exhibited by schools whose principals were rated as autocratic leaders (task-oriented behaviour). Autocratic leadership style may have a negative influence on the positive school climate as teachers have no say in how they should perform their work and they are expected to work hard to achieve the goals set by the school leadership. Even though school members overtly accept their responsibilities because of fear, they resist covertly.

Fairman and McLean (McLean, 1988), in their studies with magnitudes of structural health, they concluded that examining the shutting on health of learning institution so as to take advantage on already established managerial powers and to recognize enhancement significances, should be the target of every school Head teacher. Fairman and McLean (1988) described dimensions of organization health like Goal Focus, Communication Adequacy, Optimal Power Equalization, Resource Utilization, Cohesiveness, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, adaptation and problem solving. For example, resource utilization means that the organization is able to maximize the use of its resources by effectively coordinating the efforts of the members of the work unit without straining the rest of the organization. Cohesiveness, an organization that displays cohesiveness has workers who want to become and remain active members of the organization by contributing their talents to influencing the growth of the organization.

Symbolic leadership, according to Deal and Peterson (Deal, 1999), is the capacity to identify and control the school's community. A school Headteacher who comes up with a culture that supports and inspires education like motivating the teachers to perform their level best in their duties by supporting them in their daily school activities, example offering financial supports for educational tours, symposiums, mathematics contest among others motivating students in their day to day activities like rewarding the best and encouraging the others to perform, character building among the teachers and student through mentorship programmers in school, is totally necessary so as to advance learners' attainment in schools (Sergiovanni, 2001; Freiberg, 1999).

Successful educational leaders have learnt to take a holistic view of their institution's world, including the impact of school culture and environment on learners' attainment. The definition of school culture provides school Head teachers with this broad perspective. It offers them with a wide structure for understanding challenging problems like the prevailing school culture which requires much attention and care to handle them and complex relationships within the school promoted by the teachers and students as a result of the school culture (Freiberg, 199; Sergiovanni 2001). These successful leaders in education, deepening their understanding of school culture, they will be better equipped to shape the values, beliefs and attitudes necessary to promote a stable and nurturing

learning environment which impacts student performance (Bossert, 1982). The connection between effective school cultures and leadership is supported by educational research (Sergiovanni, 2001; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1990; Leithwood, 1992; Freiberg, 1999; Leithwood, 2004).

In a study on the results of school culture and environment on learner attainment, Heck, and Hallinger 1998 in Macneil, Busch and Prater (2009) noticed that structural theorists reported long ago that observing culture is the most vital deed that a leader can achieve.

According to theories on the field of education, the Head teacher's influence on learning is influenced by the school's environment and community, rather than having a direct effect. While the findings of the above study are very relevant to this study, its focus was on school climate and culture and the study sought to describe the extent to which a school's culture influences performance. The study also sought to describe a school's culture in relation to a school's academic performance. It not only sought to establish how a leader [school principal] pays attention to culture, but the entire school community.

Mwangi (2009) in a study titled 'Role of School Leadership in Student Achievement in Kenya' found out that the student success is highly influenced by principals' leadership, involvement, demonstrated dedication, awareness and emphasis in quality improvement, and access to knowledge and diverse viewpoints. While Mwangi's study is very informative to this study, the study's focus was on one aspect, that is, school leadership but this study when looking at implications of a school culture to academic performance, is holistic and seeks to study all that takes place in a school such as school ceremonies, rituals, values, traditions, climate, leadership, shared ideology and collaborative efforts.

Lambert (2000) depicts the Headteacher as the torch bearer for the school's aspiration, the core actor in instructional preparation, and a partner who rallies teaching staff and even guardians into conversations about the school's service in Academic Development Institute (2010). The Headteacher is the school's attention regulator, constantly stressing better student performance as the school's primary target. The principal creates an atmosphere of high standards for student success and ensures that teams work well together.

Habegger (2008) addresses the significance of a school's culture in a report entitled "The Head Teacher's Role in Good Schools: Developing a Positive School Culture. She looked at the various duties of Head teachers at the 3 schools, which included ensuring that instruction was consistent with state academic content requirements, maintaining quality improvement in the building, planning instruction for student achievement, establishing relationships with parents and the community, and cultivating a culture where each child felt respected. She learned what these Head teachers and their schools are doing inversely as a result of this. The solution is to be found in the school culture. Head teachers must cultivate a positive school culture that encourages learners and grownup to study and participate. Yes, a school principal's other duties and obligations are crucial. However, a positive school culture is important. It is the Head teachers' studies conscious decisions to concentrate their time on building a positive school atmosphere that allows the other fields, designing instruction for student' success, to attain notable results as well. These school leaders understand that school culture is at the core of change and development. As they trained for attainment tests, pursued professional discussions and study, respected their learners and tutors, and sought support from guardian and society at large to increase the school's efficacy, the Head

teachers of these high-achieving schools developed a culture that encouraged and inculcated trust in teachers. As a result, the headteacher's optimistic culture allowed for ontological improvement.

The Head teachers focused on developing optimistic school culture by participating in undertakings that strengthened both the learners' and grownup's ability for learning and achievement, for example, visiting each tutor before class began, welcoming learners as they get into the building, and offering shared preparation for teachers. The researcher also discovered two main types of undertakings that the Head teachers focused on and participated in to assist build an optimistic culture: fostering a sense of affiliation and offering clear guidance for all learners, tutors, guardians, and community members.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

Trochim (2006) notes that research design is the method that a researcher uses to study, measure and analyse data and research problems. The study deployed a mixed methods research design which involved Quantitative and Qualitative approaches. This method was chosen since it enhanced the validity of findings in line with Almpanis (2016) who noted that no single design existed in isolation and hence the need to combine different designs.

In Quantitative Technique, the Study formulated questionnaires that were guided to the specific target groups with an allowance of closed ended and open- ended questions. These were later collected, analysed, tabulated and interpreted according to the study objectives. The Quantitative approach entailed the use of a descriptive survey study design which gives the researcher the opportunity to identify the attributes of a certain variable based on observation or correlation between variables.

The researcher used descriptive survey design in her research to obtain the research data on the magnitude of Implications of School Culture on Academic Performance in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya. The qualitative technique deployed the use of Interviews that were descriptive in order to get an in-depth insight through elaborate answers from the respondents based on their actual (real-time) experiences. Accordingly, no attempt was made to change behaviour or conditions, the situations were reported as they appeared.

According to Lokesh (1984), this design helps to acquire consistent and accurate knowledge about the existing state of nature, and to derive as many general deductions as possible from the evidence found. This design cannot be experimented for they deal with the interactions amongst variables that cannot be manipulated. The researcher simply chooses the appropriate variable for the study of their interactions since the events or circumstances have already happened or exist (Best and Khan, 1993). The selection of this study design for the research was based on the truth that in this type of research, the researcher doesn't manipulate study variables. These techniques denote to the way in which information are amassed and analysed, and the kind of generalizations and illustrations resultant from the information. According to Myers (2009), the study method is a strategy of enquiry, which moves from the underlying assumptions to research design, and data collection.

Researchers in the social sciences developed qualitative analysis techniques to analyse social and cultural phenomena. Since qualitative research is naturalistic, it aims to analyse the daily lives of various groups of people and cultures in their natural environment. According to Dooley (1984), the methodology of qualitative research includes the techniques of semi structured interviewing and participant observation in natural field settings. The study used Interview schedules for school

principals and their deputies plus the County education officer. This method was chosen because it takes an interpretive, realistic approach to its subject matter, trying to make sense of or understand phenomena in terms of the meanings that people attribute to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Quantitative research methods were also employed so as to enhance the study`s objectivity, reliability and validity, representativeness and generalization of the study findings. Quantitative research methods seek to quantify relationships between variables. For this study, variables such as aspects of school culture and students' academic performance, emphasis on ideology and students' academic performance, academic orientation and students' academic performance, as well as central role of school principal were quantified on a scale of 1-10, so as to determine the extent they affected each other.

3.1 TARGET POPULATION
The study was carried out in 21 public secondary schools out of 212 public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya with a student population of 84 800. This was a study to establish whether school culture had any strong relationship and remarkable influence on students' academic performance, as seen in performing and non performing schools. The study was also undertaken in only high and low performing schools which were purposively selected. The target population of the study comprised of 2000 students, 212 principals, 212 deputy principals, 800 teachers and one County Education Officer from Machakos County, Kenya.

3.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

These are methods employed to obtain data as well as the sample size to be studied. Sampling technique is a method or procedure for specifying how the researcher obtains a sample taken from a population (Campbell et al, 1995). The researcher applied both probability and non-probability sampling methods and techniques to collect quantitative and quantitative data. Stratified random sampling technique was used to get a study sample of 21 schools from a total of 212 public secondary schools where schools were stratified according to type, for example, girls, boys or mixed school. The aim of using stratified sampling was to achieve a desired 10 percent representation from various sub groups from the population (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2013).

The study choice of Machakos County was arrived at purposively due to the growing concern of parents and education stakeholders on an increasing trend of poor performance of most secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Selection of public secondary schools and not primary schools was therefore purposive. Drawn from sampling frame of 212 public secondary schools located in Machakos County, Kenya, stratified sampling technique was used to categorize the schools in three strata of High performing schools (7), average (7) and low performing schools (7) as evidenced by KCSE Exam results in the years 2017 and 2018 were purposively selected for the study. The stratified sampling frame of schools is presented in table 1

Table 1 Stratified Sampling of Schools

Stratified random sampling of schools	Mixed	Boys	Girls	Total
High performance	1	3	3	7
Average performance	1	3	3	7
Low performance	1	3	3	7
Total	**3**	**9**	**9**	**21**

3.3 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample frame for the study was 212 public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Stratified sampling was then employed to categorize these schools into 3 strata of: High, average and low performing schools based on 2017 and 2018 KCSE results. These results were obtained from Machakos County education office located in Machakos town. Purposive sampling was then employed to pick only high and low performing schools for the study, based on a school mean score of Grade C+ and above and grade D+ and below were treated as high and low performing respectively. Grade C- and C plain was treated as average. Determination of high, average or low was based on a school having half or more than half of its candidates falling within those levels. A sample of 200 students was drawn from the 21 schools selected; 21 principals and 21 deputy principals; 21 teachers and 1 County Education Officer from Machakos County office. The sample size is presented in table 2

Table 2 Sampling Frame of Informants

Respondents	Sample size			Percentage
	Male	Female	Total	
County Education Officer	0	1	1	100
School principals	10	11	21	10
Deputy principals	11	10	21	10
Teachers	12	13	25	10
Students	100	100	200	10
Total	**133**	**135**	**268**	

3.4 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

A Research Instrument is a tool designed to collect or obtain data on a topic of interest from research subjects. This study used questionnaires, interview schedules and Focus Group

Discussions. The logic of using many tools for data collection was to strengthen evidence since weakness of one tool was corrected by strength of another tool. Triangulation of findings was done to enable credibility of the findings of the study. Apart from closed-ended questionnaires, Likert Scale rating was also used because it is considered appropriate in measuring perceptions of the respondents.

4.0 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study examined the central of a school Principal in fostering learning and teaching culture and its effects on academic performance in selected public secondary schools in Machakos County Kenya. Informants were asked to rate the central role of their school Principal in fostering a learning and teaching culture, based on the following variables: where the school Principal facilitates teachers and students working together, school principal reinforcing sharing of ideas on academic matters, Principal values teachers and students ideas, builds trust and confidence among students and staff, supports and rewards risk-taking as well as innovative ideas, guides and directs objective realization and engage staff in decision making. The variables were rated on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least and 10 the highest.

Table 1 Role of a School Principal in Fostering a Learning and Teaching Culture

Role of school principal in creating a teaching and learning culture	On a scale 1-10					F	%
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**		
Guides and directs school objectives realization	8	6	7	5	5	31	12.7
Principal values teachers' and students' ideas	9	5	9	6	6	35	14.3
Engage staff in decision making	8	4	9	5	5	31	12.7
Builds trust and confidence among students and staff	9	6	8	6	6	35	14.3
Reinforces the sharing of ideas on academic matters	8	7	8	7	7	37	15.2
Facilitates teachers and students working together	9	7	9	8	7	40	16.4
Supports and rewards risk-taking and innovative ideas	9	5	10	6	5	35	14.3
TOTAL	**60**	**40**	**60**	**43**	**41**	**244**	**100**

Three predominant aspects on the role of a school principal in fostering a learning and teaching culture is presented in table 1 where the highest rated was where the school principal facilitates teachers and students working together with 16.4% (40), followed by school principal reinforcing sharing of ideas on academic matters with 15.2% (37), where principal values teachers and students ideas, builds trust and confidence among students and staff, supports and rewards risk-taking as well as innovative ideas, all tied with 14.3% (35) each, guides and directs objective realization and engage staff in decision making, both at 12.7 % (31) each.

The preceding observations on the role of the school principal in fostering a learning and teaching culture indicated that: School principals' role in facilitating teachers and students working together,

reinforcing sharing of ideas on academic matters as well as valuing teachers' and students' ideas, were central roles identified by the study.

A comparison on individual schools' cumulative scores on central role of the school principal in fostering a learning and teaching culture, as shown in table 1, indicated that two had the highest scores of 60 respectively, while several schools had 40, 43 and 41 respectively. In order to establish the central role of school principal, in fostering a learning and teaching culture and students' performance, a chi-square test was performed based on these scores. The researcher used KCSE mean score of 2018 as a measure for students' academic performance. For the null hypothesis, the investigator hypothesized that there is no significant association between the role of school principal and learners' academic performance. In order to calculate the expected frequencies, the researcher used the following formula:

$$fe = fr \times fc.$$

The study was tested at 0.05 confidence level. The calculated value was 13.596 while the critical value was 7.815. This confirmed the findings of the study scores, indicating that there was significant association between the role of a school principal and students' academic performance.

These findings concur with Mwangi (2009), whose study titled 'Role of School Administration in Learners Attainment in Kenya' found out that the headteachers' administration involvement portrayed dedication, sensitivity and attention on incessant innovation and transparency to knowledge and varying opinion seriously affecting leaners' achievement.

Besides the preceding quantitative findings, the themes generated from teachers who never filled questionnaires in Focus Group Discussions confirmed the preceding findings. A female teacher from school C, for example, when asked to briefly summarize the roles played by the school Principal in fostering a learning and teaching culture in the school, had this to say:

> *"It is important for the school principal to value teachers' and students' ideas. Nobody has a monopoly of ideas in this world, especially in knowledge provision or acquisition. You may have a good idea but someone else may have a better one. I am happy that in this school, our Principal values everyone`s ideas, be it students, teachers and even subordinate staff. This makes us feel part and parcel of the school. It feels good when you see your logical ideas being accepted since it motivates you even to work harder. I think that this is one major reason, among many, that has influenced good performance of our students, since madam Principal joined this school 3 years ago. Before then, it used to be `one man`s show', we could only take orders. Not only does our Principal engage staff members in decision making, she reinforces the sharing of ideas on academic matters among both staff and students. There is a good working environment in the school, since the Principal facilitates students and teachers working together", (Kamueni, a female teacher, 2019).*

This observation attests to the power of active participation in decision making and how effective consultation unites a school to pursue a common goal and purpose to improve discipline and academic performance. It shows that when a school fraternity is talking with each to promote a sense of team spirit and team work, performance in academic work and discipline improves since a

sense of responsibility and a sense of belonging is created and nurtured. Dialogue creates good relationships between staff and students and makes them pursue a common goal.
A male teacher and director of studies observed that:

> *"Teachers and student's active involvement in decision making process was key in enhancing ownership and commitment in the learning and teaching processes. This has provided us with an environment where there is a relatively high level of cooperation among staff, school management and students. There is collegial support as well as unity of purpose in our instructional processes, thanks to our able principal"*, *(Mtush, a male teacher and director of studies, 2019).*

This observation suggests that active and effective communication promotes unity and focus especially when teachers and students are involved in decision making on issues that touch on academics and discipline. Indeed, this commitment creates a culture of unity and purpose in pursuit of school ethos of good discipline and academic performance.

A key informant from Machakos County who was a Quality Assurance and Standards Officer of education had this to say:

> *"A school principal is like a mother in a family in whom everything depends on. She observed further that, the principal has to create a positive culture in the school by engaging students and teachers working together, facilitates partnerships and cooperation not only among the school community but also parents and the wider community. The principal facilitates instructional planning, sets and monitors standards and maintains continuous improvement and must have good problem-solving skills and nurtures a culture where everyone feels valued"*, *(CQASO, Machakos County, 2019).*

It is notable from the preceding observations that it is evident that the school principal has various roles to play in school which if done well, they influence students' academic performance, as demonstrated by several informants. Documentary analysis of KCSE mean grades for 2017 and 2018 for the schools, support the same. As given by informants, central roles for school principal in establishing a learning and teaching environment includes: Creating a positive culture that enhances teamwork, involve students and staff in decision making, values their ideas, supports innovative ideas and facilitates all school community members to work together. In short, defines the school culture and guides and helps all in school to practice it on a daily basis.

These findings concur with Habegger (2008) whose study titled, The Principal's Role in Successful Schools: Creating a Positive School Culture, talks about the impact of a school's culture on students' academic achievements. She looked at the various duties of Headteachers at the 3 schools, which included ensuring that instruction was consistent with state academic content requirements, maintaining quality improvement in the buildings, planning instruction for student achievement, establishing relationships with parents and the community, and cultivating a culture where each child felt respected. In summary it was found that schools' Principals have a great role in fostering a learning and teaching culture indicated that school principal's role in facilitating teachers and students working together, reinforcing sharing of ideas on academic matters as well as valuing teachers' and students' ideas, were central roles identified by the study.

Based on the observations form the study, it is evident that a school principal has various roles to play in a school which if done well, they influence students' academic performance.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

It was established that the school Principals' central role was in facilitating teachers and students in working together. Continued achievement orientation motivated by school culture, shared ideology and supportive school leadership, results in good achievement in academic endeavours.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of this study it was recommended that the school Principals should facilitate student and staff to work together on academic matters with a more open and participatory approach and create a conducive environment for learning and teaching which will in turn lead to high academic performance.

Another recommendation given was on another study which could be carried to explore various school leadership styles and their influence on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Kenya.

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