

## **Principals' Definition of Instructional Mission and Goals, and its Influence on Learners' Academic Achievement in Kenya's Public Secondary Schools**

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**Abstract:** This study sought to determine teachers' perception of actions taken by principals in defining their schools' instructional mission and goals in public secondary schools in Baringo County. It was guided by four objective which were to determine teachers' perception of how principals: frame their schools' instructional and goals, communicate their schools' instructional goals, and find if there is statistically significant difference in teachers' perception of principals' definition of their schools' instructional mission and goals between extra County and County public secondary schools, and relationship between teachers' perception on principals' definition of instructional mission and goals and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination in Baringo County. The study adopted a survey research design and employed mixed methods of inquiry in a concurrent procedure. A structured teacher response questionnaire and unstructured interview guide were used to collect data from the teachers, principals and their deputies respectively. The study revealed that principals formulated schools' instructional mission and goals in collaboration with teachers, parents and other stakeholders, and communicated them to their schools' constituents during various school forums. There was no significant difference in teachers' perception of principals' definition of schools' instructional goals between extra County and County public secondary schools ( $t(251) = 1.136, p > .05$ ). However, there was a significant difference among low performing, average and high Performing secondary schools ( $F(2,250) = 3.661, p < .05$ ). There was a strong statistically significant relationship ( $r(251) = .177^{**}, p < .05$ ) between teachers' perception of principals' definition of instructional mission and goals and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination in Baringo County.

**Keywords:** Instructional Leadership, instructional Goals, Academic Achievement, public schools.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The success of an organization is determined by its effectiveness and the extent to which it realizes its set objectives [1]. According to Chitiavi [2], school effectiveness leading to high academic achievement can be contributed by various inputs that include; effective teaching – contributing 75% of good academic results, adequate text books / Tuition (15%), good physical facilities & equipment effectively used (9%) and others e. g; supervision, inspection and community support (1%). However, school leadership (by the Principal) which is second to classroom instruction [3] facilitate instructional activities and coordinate curriculum in the school. This way, principals play crucial role in providing instructional leadership which ensure that learners achieve good academic results during their annual national examination. The quality of leadership makes the difference between the success and failure of a school, since good performance does not just happen; it is a result of good teaching and overall effective headship [4]. Instructional leadership establishes the conditions for the possibility of improving teaching and learning where much of the work of school leaders is

done through the development of artifacts that reshape organizational practices around desired instructional goals [5]. To achieve good academic results, therefore, the principal who is the central factor determining academic achievement in a school [4], should actively spearhead the formulation of the school's instructional goals.

S/he frames school instructional goals which contain a school-wide purpose focusing on student learning as being a significant factor of school principalship [6] and communicates them to all members of the school community [7]. This is meant to establish a strong sense of overall purpose [8] and the shared goals would provide organizational structures that guide the school toward a common focus [9]. They play a significant role in determining academic performance in a school due to their tasks and roles [4] through organizational management of schools. The principal manages the instructional program, which according to Weber, in his model, must be consistent with the mission of the school (10) and where the principal focus on those activities that involve the

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principal's working with teachers in areas specific to curriculum and instruction. It is for this reason, therefore, that the accountability movement in education placed attention on students' achievement and also placed responsibility on the school leader [11].

According to Vathukattu [1], school leadership which is coordinated by the principal and which is expected to run the school effectively and efficiently to produce quality results every year in external examinations, ensures congruence through defining the school mission and goals. A school principal, while influencing and redesigning the activities of the school towards setting goal achievements, is expected to manage the students, teachers and the school community around the common goal of raising the students' performance [12]. A principal of a successful school is expected to define the school mission and communicate a clear vision of what the school should be attempting to accomplish to students and staff in such a manner that a shared purpose that unites the efforts of the school members is developed [7].

Locke & Latham [13] observed that goal setting is an effective way to increase motivation and performance. They postulate that goals increase attention to obtainment of the task, increase the effort expended on goal relevant activities, increase persistence to achieve, and increase the development of strategies to obtain the goal [9]. Sinha, [14] noted that the characteristics of principals of effective schools include taking strong initiative in identifying and articulating goals and priorities for their schools, holding themselves and their staff personally accountable for students' achievement in basic skills. According to Meigs, [15], principals are expected to set a clear vision for the school community, support teachers in the work and at the same time being responsible for all the details that allow a school to function smoothly. Barber, Whelan & Clark, [16], added that the role which school leaders play include practices and building a shared vision and sense of purpose.

A number of studies reveal school goals (containing a school-wide purpose focusing on student learning) as a significant factor of school principalship [6]. However, despite this fact, the overall Kenya's student performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination is poor. In the last five years (2010 - 2014), 27.74 % scored C+ and above, and implied that 72.26% of the KCSE candidature failed to score the minimum grade - C+ to get automatic admission into Kenyan universities. In the period, the same scenario was replicated in Baringo County where 71.32% of the total candidature in public secondary schools scored a mean grade of C and below (28.68% scored C+ & above); this is despite very high expectations by education stakeholders in Kenya (and

especially Baringo County) of public secondary schools whose success is measured in terms of good performance in national examinations and belief that principals are the persons responsible for this [17].

Little has been done to understand how principals' definition of school goals impact students' academic achievement through instructional leadership practices which according to Mascall, Leithwood & Straus [18] is an emphasis everywhere in contemporary leadership literature in the developed world. It has been observed by Mwangi [19] that education scholars and practitioners in Kenya need to pay closer attention to what principals do in their day-to-day enactment of leadership with reference to the formulation of instructional goals. This is because principal's leadership can make a difference in students' learning [20] and that there is a link between high quality leadership and positive school outcomes, including student achievement [21]. This study therefore sought to determine teachers' perception of actions taken by principals in defining school instructional mission and goals in public secondary schools in Baringo County. The following objectives guided this study;

- i. To determine teachers' perception of how principals' frame their schools' instructional and goals
- ii. To establish teachers' perception of how principals communicate their schools' instructional goals
- iii. To find out if there is a difference in teachers' perception of principals' definition of their schools' instructional mission and goals between extra County and County public secondary schools.
- iv. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between teachers' perception on principals' definition of instructional mission and goals, and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination.

The study further sought to test the following hypotheses;

Ho1: There is no significant difference in teachers' perception of principals' definition of school instructional mission and goals between extra County and County public secondary schools in Baringo County.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' perception on principals' definition of school instructional mission and goals and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination in public secondary schools in Baringo County.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey that adopted survey research design and employed mixed methods approach of inquiry in a

concurrent procedure. It involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to best understand the research problem [22]. This is because educational institutions are social setups which face various complex challenges that beg for solutions which are appropriately addressed through researches using both research paradigms [23] and attempts to fit together the insights provided by these empirical research paradigms into a workable solution [24]. It brings an intersection of pragmatic philosophical worldviews, strategies of inquiry and research methods into the study [22]. The research utilized the complementary strengths of both paradigms to strengthen inferences [23] and triangulate the research findings.

### The Population and Samples of the Study

A population of 24 extra County and 31 County public secondary schools in the study area

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rift\\_Valley\\_Province](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rift_Valley_Province)), 55 principals and their deputies, and 738 subject teachers were accessed. Based on a precision rate and a 95 % confidence level [25], the sample size calculator (<http://www.surveysystem.com/index.htm>) was used to draw a sample of 48 schools, 48 principals and their deputies and 253 subject teachers by simple random method from extra County and County schools respectively as shown on Table1 below. Quota sampling was used to obtain the two sub-groups based on their respective population ratio of the school type. The schools were stratified into extra County and County schools to reduce sample error due to difference in group composition [26] since the two categories of public secondary schools (County and extra County) have heterogeneous characteristics.

**Table-1: Research Population and Sample Sizes**

Sub-County	Number of	Category of Schools		Total Number of Schools
	Teachers	Extra County	County	
Koibatek	221	10	7	17
Baringo North	128	3	9	12
Baringo Central	241	5	8	13
Mogotio	80	4	2	6
Marigat	50	1	4	5
East Pokot	15	1	1	2
<b>Total Pop.</b>	738	24	31	55
<b>Sample Size</b>	253	21	27	48

**Source:** County Education Office of the respective Sub-Counties (Baringo County-2011)

### Instruments

A structured questionnaire developed to use a set of five response categories of the Likert type scale was used to collect data from teachers and unstructured interview guides from the sampled principals and their deputies. In a concurrent procedure the quantitative data was collected alongside qualitative data [27], where the structured questionnaire was a superior instrument (QUAN) while the interview guide was a complementary instrument (quali). The instruments were validated by the supervisors and the questionnaire piloted, its reliability calculated, and a reliable Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha of 0.912 obtained and used. The quantitative data was organized, summarized, and descriptive and inferential statistics worked out. Their outputs were presented on

contingency tables for easier understand and conclusions drawn based on the research objectives. The qualitative data from principals and their deputies were broken down, conceptualized and put together in categories and sub-categories [28] based on the research objectives and the emerging themes reported jointly with the quantitative data.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine teachers' perception of principals' definition of school's instructional mission and goals in public secondary school in Baringo County. Table 2 below gives the quantitative data on the two subscales of the principals' definition of instructional mission and goals and the qualitative data reported alongside the analyzed data.

**Table 2: Teachers' perception of Principals' Instructional Leadership practices on Defining school's Instructional Mission and goals**

Subscale	N	M.R	Std Deviation
Framing school's instructional goals	253	3.8827	.80419
Communicating instructional goals	253	4.0183	.73953
<b>Overall</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>3.9896</b>	<b>.68018</b>

The table shows that teachers agreed at Mean

Response (MR) = 3.88, Standard Deviation (SD) = .80

and  $MR = 4.02$ ,  $SD = .74$  respectively that their principals frame and communicate their school goals to the relevant members of the school and stakeholders. This agrees to Jacobson [29] argument that principals' essential practices include framing school goals that encompasses setting goals that emphasize academic achievement for all students and communicating regularly formally and informally to the school community in various school forums. The principal should create, communicate and deliver a vision for the school, taking account of the concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders in the school [30]. If a principal rallies a constituency of teachers and students to support those goals, then the motivation to achieve the goals is likely to follow. On being interviewed, the principals and their deputies corroborated the quantitative data that principals formulated their schools' instructional mission and goals in collaboration with students, subject teachers, and teaching staff, Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA) and Board of Management (BOM) at the beginning of the year and every term. This concurred with Musungu [31] who indicated that at the beginning of every year, session, term or month there is need for collective goal setting and strategizing on a mission to achievement of school objectives.

They further reported that principals informed their school constituents about the set instructional goals in different school forums, displayed the school goals and policies on the school and class notice boards. Parents were informed during academic days and the schools' annual general meetings, while the Board of Management/Parents Teachers' Association (BOM/PTA) members were informed by the principals who are their secretaries during their top management meetings. They added that principals used subject teachers to emphasis the schools' academic goals while teaching students, class teachers and house teachers during class and house meetings respectively, and their schools' director of studies (DOS) while releasing examination results. However, respondents agreed at a higher mean response that their principals communicate the school's goals than framing the school's goals. On the overall, respondents agreed at a relatively high Mean Response ( $MR$ ) =3.99 and matched by a low standard deviation index ( $SD = .68$ ) that their principals frame and communicate school's instructional mission and goals. An analysis of the responses based on the category of schools (extra County and County) is shown on Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Teachers' perception of Principals' Instructional Leadership practices for Category of schools on setting instructional mission and goals**

Category of Schools	N	M.R	Std Deviation
Extra County	146	3.9844	.74149
County	107	3.9055	.815645

The table indicates that teachers agreed at  $MR=3.98$  and  $MR= 3.91$  that principals set instructional mission and goals in extra County secondary and County secondary schools respectively. The table further, shows that principals in extra County secondary schools prevalently set instructional mission and goals compared to their counterparts in County secondary schools at a relatively higher  $SD=.82$  compared to  $SD=.74$ . It was established from the interviews that this was an established routine in majority of the extra County schools and that in few well established extra County schools, their instructional school goals were guided by the school mission, vision and objectives that are stipulated in their periodic strategic plans which they said have pre - determined projected level of performance and strategies to achieve the academic targets.

However, it was reported that the set instructional goals were not strictly pursued and attained by the principals except in most established extra County and the high performing schools. This

concurs with the analysed data shown on Table 3 above and 4 below, which shows that respondents generally agreed at  $M.R=3.98$  and  $MR=4.12$  that principals in extra County and High performing schools respectively lead in defining their schools' instructional mission and goals. Most principals and deputies reported that in majority of schools, principals preside the planning of instructional activities but had weak implementation system of the planned strategies. They added that planning of instructional strategies and communicating them to the school stakeholders was a routine practice in most schools but was not effectively implemented to optimize on academic outcomes. This was reported to be worse in County secondary schools and the low performing secondary schools which had relatively lower  $MR=3.91$  and  $MR= 3.85$  respectively as shown on Table 3 and Table 4. They added that most principals lacked strategic follow up or commitment to implement the set academic targets. Table 4 below show an analysis of the responses based on schools' level of performance on definition of instructional mission and goals in high, average and low performing schools.

**Table 4: Teachers' perception of Principals' Instructional Leadership practices for schools' Level of performance on Defining Instructional Mission and Goals**

Level of Performance	N	M.R	Std Deviation
High Performing Schools	83	4.12	.59
Average Performing Schools	73	4.04	.57
Low performing Schools	97	3.85	.80

Table 4 indicates that teachers agreed that their principals define and communicate schools' instructional mission and goals in their respective schools as showed by a relatively high MR= 4.12 in high performing schools, MR=4.04 in average performing schools and MR=3.85 in low performing schools. However, it is evident that the practice is more in high performing schools at a higher MR=4.12 and a lower SD= .59 as compared to average and low performing schools with a lower MR= 4.04 and 3.85, and standard deviation in the teachers' response of .57 and 0.80 respectively. This agrees to Bossert et al [32] who observed that principal's leadership emphasize goals and student achievement through setting instructional goals, developing performance standards for their students, and expressing optimism about the ability of their students to meet instructional goals.

To test the first hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was run and the results indicated on Table 5 below. From the table, no significant difference was found ( $t(251) = 1.136, p > .05$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected and a conclusion drawn that there was no significant difference in teachers' perception of principals' instructional leadership practices between extra County and County public secondary schools in Baringo County. However, in an attempt to compare the means of the teachers' perception of principals' instructional leadership practices in low performing , average performing and high performing schools a one-way ANOVA was computed and shown on Table 6 below.

**Table 5: Independent Sample Test Comparing Extra County and County Means**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Extra County and County Means	Equal variances assumed	.459	.499	1.136	251	.257	.09823	.08650
	Equal variances not assumed			1.110	208.075	.268	.09823	.08847

**Table 6: A one-way ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.317	2	1.658	3.661	.027
Within Groups	113.239	250	.453		
Total	116.556	252			

**\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.**

Data on the Table above a significant difference ( $F(2,250) = 3.661, p < .05$ ) was found among low performing , average performing and high performing schools with regard to teachers' perception of principals' instructional leadership practices in these schools.

In order to determine whether there was a relationship between teachers' perception on principals' definition of instructional mission and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination in public secondary schools in Baringo County, a 2 - tailed Pearson Correlation was run and the output is shown on Table 7 below.

**Table-7: Correlations between School means and Performance at KCSE**

		Extra County and County Means	Performance at KCSE
Extra County and County Means	Pearson Correlation	1	.177**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	253	253
Performance at KCSE	Pearson Correlation	.177**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	253	253

**\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)**

When a 2-tailed Pearson correlation was calculated, a strong positive correlation that was significant ( $r(251) = .177^{**}$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was found. The null hypothesis is therefore not accepted and concluded that there was a strong statistical significant relationship between teachers' perception on principals' definition of school instructional mission and goals and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination in public secondary schools in Baringo County.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the above findings of the study;

1. Principals formulated their schools' instructional mission and goals to enhance instruction and consequently boost students' academic achievement in collaboration with students, teachers, parents and teachers Association (PTA) and Board of school Management (BOM) members.
2. Principals communicated the formulated goals to the members of their schools and other stakeholders during various school forums with; students (e.g students' assemblies), teachers (e.g during staff meetings, briefs), parents (such as academic days, AGMs), B.O.M /PTA members during school management meetings and the stakeholders during general meetings such as the prize giving ceremonies. The school academic goals were displayed strategically on the school notice boards and in some schools written on school buildings. The principals used all teachers to articulate the schools' academic goals during all school sessions with students and parents.
3. There was no significant difference ( $t(251) = 1.136$ ,  $p > .05$ ) in teachers' perception of principals' definition of schools' instructional goals between extra County and County public secondary schools in Baringo County. However, there was a significant difference ( $F(2,250) = 3.661$ ,  $p < .05$ ) among low performing, average and high Performing secondary schools.
4. There was a strong positive correlation that was significant ( $r(251) = .177^{**}$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between

teachers' perception of principals' definition of instructional mission and goals and students' academic achievement at KCSE examination in Baringo County.

## Recommendations for Practice

Principals need to pay more attention, involve all the school constituents when formulating their schools' instructional goals and effectively implement the defined goals so as to enhance effective instruction and consequently students' academic achievement. The study recommends that Kenya Management Institute should empower principals in County and low performing schools so as to better their management and instructional leadership in framing instructional mission and goals.

## Suggestions for Further Research

1. Replicate this study in other parts of the country using a bigger population, difference sampling techniques and different approaches to data collection than the ones used in this study.
2. Studies may be carried out to establish how other principals' instructional leadership practices namely; managing the instructional program, promoting a positive school learning climate and developing a supportive work environment jointly and/or separately influence learners' academic achievement.

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