

Principal's Visionary Leadership and Financial Management in Secondary Schools in Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

An ideal funding system in a secondary school provides a key avenue for ensuring that its operations are running smoothly. It should have reliable structures of administration with competent staff such as the bursars and accounts clerks. Nevertheless, that has not been the case due to delays caused by the government when releasing funds and fees paid by the students to secondary schools. The purpose of the study was to investigate principals' visionary leadership and financial management in secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. The study used a survey research design that was descriptive and cross-sectional. The target population was 389 secondary schools which were sampled through a random sampling method to get schools. It further used a purposive sampling method to obtain 117 principals and 117 bursars. The study administered questionnaires and also collected secondary data. Piloting was done in twelve secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County. The study analysed quantitative data using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean. It also carried out correlation analysis to test hypothesis. The study found that there was low professional advancement of staff working in the accounts office which was attributed to a failure of principals to push for the same, fearing that the staff may leave the school for greener pastures after the training. The study recommends that principals should make the initiative of ensuring that they motivate the accounting staff by equipping themselves with the skills and expertise for career advancement.

Keywords: *Principal's Visionary Leadership, Financial Management, Secondary Schools, Meru County, Kenya*

1.0 Introduction

Finances provide key support towards ensuring that every activity in a learning institution becomes successful. In a learning institution such as a secondary school, availability of finances provides the necessary bargaining power for the management to hire qualified staff, get quality infrastructure, acquire a greater number of textbooks, provide different nutritious types of

meals, and implement quality construction needs of school buildings (US Department of Education, 2021a). Therefore, financial management is defined by US Department of Education (2021b) as the process of putting into practice management principles such as planning and reporting on usage of the assets of a learning institution.

It is the wish of every government, sponsor, donor, and other financier that the allocated finances be used in accordance with the purposed need without diverting to any other purpose. However, there has been a concern about financial management in secondary schools. In California, secondary schools have issues related to late or lack of book-keeping (poor record keeping) leading to unaccounted items hence massive losses and wastage of resources; and spending more than what was budgeted leading to unmanageable debts (bankruptcy) (Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2022). In New York high schools, financing systems have suffered from delays in the disbursement of funds from the government leading to shortages of teaching aids such as books, chalks, teaching boards, and laboratory chemicals (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2022). In European countries such as the United Kingdom, there have been late fee payments in secondary schools which makes various operations such as the purchase of food materials stalls (Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC], 2022).

Secondary schools in the Asian nation such as China have experienced weak auditing systems which causes funds to be diverted to unbudgeted activities such as paying unnecessary allowances, trips, and lunches (World Education News [WEN], 2019). In Ghana, secondary schools have suffered from inconsistency in monitoring and evaluation of the finances of the school thereby creating loopholes for funds theft (Shabtai, 2022). In Ethiopian secondary schools, there are insufficient financial reserves to provide shelter in times of financial hardships leading to destabilizing operations to the point students have to be sent home to collect fees (Ministry of Education- Ethiopia, 2020). In Kenya, there have been poor funds mobilization skills by the principals hence over-relying on previous donors and financiers who may decide to pull out from the relationships (Mutisya & Mwanja, 2018).

These issues have caused schools to become bankrupt due to excessive borrowing. As evidenced, the above problems are related in one way or another to the visionary leadership of the principal. The principal who happens to be the most senior staff in a secondary school ought to possess various skills that would enable them to deliver on the mandate of good financial management. Visionary leadership is a type of proficiency whereby a principal emphasizes long-term goals that an institution should attain in the future (Brookings, 2022). Vision leadership is interpreted in terms of building vision, nurturing collaboration, surety of results, and encouraging a learning culture.

1.1 Problem Statement

An ideal funding system in a secondary school provides a key avenue for ensuring that its operations are running smoothly. It should have reliable structures of administration with competent staff such as the bursars and accounts clerks (Ministry of Education- Kenya, 2019). The staff should manage day to day utilization of funds with authorization from the principals so that the funds are not directed to unbudgeted projects or misappropriated. This is in line with the government's recommendations for a robust financial system in secondary schools for the effective delivery of their mandates (Akala, 2022; MOE, 2020).

Nevertheless, that has not been the case due to delays caused by the government when releasing funds and fees paid by the students to secondary schools (All Africa, 2021; UNICEF, 2018). The delaying of finances has inhibited various operations in secondary schools. As a result, the

principals have to rely on their proficiency such as visionary leadership to mobilize funds and manage reserves till the funds are available.

1.2 Research Objective

To investigate principals' visionary leadership and financial management in secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀1: Principal's visionary leadership had no significant influence on the financial management in secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Review

A study by Li (2020) investigated how Chinese schools were being transformed as a result of reliable leadership methods. The study relied on secondary data from reports and articles from the year 2010 to 2019. According to Li (2020), the study applied vote counting and narrative synthesis designs. The study established that many reviewed studies indicated that the various leadership methods that were commonly used in schools such as high schools included moral modeling, charisma, clear vision and involvement of everyone in decision making, developing personnel, motivating and managing resources such as finance through the set direction. Moreover, Li (2020) used secondary data to derive this conclusion which is bound to biases. Additionally, the study did not assess how learning culture would be developed by leaders.

Regionally, In South Africa, Sobunkola (2021) explored various strategies that are related to visionary leadership used by principals to ensure students pass at grade 12 and adequately provided resources to teachers. The study used Upper Echelon Theory's effectiveness to inform the study. Ten school principals from Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga were interviewed, and a relevant analysis of documents was done. The study further found out that in as much as many secondary schools required visionary leadership, it was not possible because of ineffective leadership whereby there is total disconnect and simply no unity between the management and teachers; inadequate financial support such as timely payment of salaries and allowances, purchase of required books, chalks, tables, and chairs for purposes of learning; and poor monitoring techniques on the quality of teachers recruited during the recruitment process. Nevertheless, Sobunkola (2021) use of ten sampled principals was so small for their results to have meaningful statistical significance.

Locally, Bomet and Kitur (2021) assessed the kind of relationship that the transformational leadership style used by the principals had with performance of students in their K.C.S.E examinations. Being descriptive research design-oriented study, Kitur (2021) selected 114 respondents. These respondents were 109 directors of studies and 5 quality assurance officers. The study used questionnaires to collect data from the 109 directors of studies, interviewed quality assurance officers and there was document analysis. The study by Kitur (2021) found that, when a principal allowed the development of teachers and students through nurturing collaborations and motivating them, academic performance increased. Further, Kitur (2021) did not examine other types of transformative leadership styles that allowed vision-building and encourage learning culture were not examined.

In Trans Nzoia, Sabwami et al. (2020) examined how a principal's transformational leadership skills influenced public secondary schools' financial management of resources. The target population included thirty principals and three hundred and twenty-two teachers sampled using the formula suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The interview guides were used on

principals while questionnaires were used on teachers. The study by Sabwami et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership skills such as involving personnel in decision-making, achieving set goals, and linking the school's vision with a stable financial management system positively influenced financial management systems. However, Sabwami et al. (2020) failed to examine the role of transformational leadership in encouraging a learning culture.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Contingency theory was developed by Fiedler (1964) and it indicates that when managing or making decisions in an organization, there is no best way to do so unless the optimal course of action is undertaken based on the environment. The environment could be internal or external. Internally, managers would optimize the use of leadership styles and experiences while externally, they would use various job designs and the structure that an organization normally operated. In a secondary school set-up, a principal relied on various methods to ensure that they were better positioned to deliver in terms of financial management. A principal would combine various internal attributes such as visionary leadership when managing finances.

Contingency theory is key in understanding visionary leadership since making a decision to build a vision and nurturing it through incorporating an ever-learning culture helps to have desired results. To attain this, it could be done by combining diverse attributes. A leader would incorporate what they know and what resources are present to achieve their desire of ensuring suitable financial management goals are attained. Visionary leadership would provide an epitome of how, when, and where to invest the funds for the greater good of the secondary school.

The contingency theory was criticized by Mitchell et al. (1970) that it did not advocate for flexibility in leadership styles but for changing a leader when tough situations come by. However, this weakness did not affect the current study since the study was not only examining a principal like a leader only but also a manager portraying good professional practice. Being in management involved coordinating different elements to attain the desired goals. Attainment of desired goals was bound to encounter various challenges. When that happens, it is part of the role of the manager to look for solutions instead of avoiding them.

3.0 Methodology

The study used mixed methods research approach and a survey research design that was descriptive and cross-sectional. The target population was 389 secondary schools. The study used a simple random sampling method to get a sample of 117 secondary schools which was 30% of the target population. It further used a purposive sampling method to obtain 117 principals and 117 bursars. The study administered questionnaires to principals and bursars and also collected secondary data on financial management. Piloting of research instruments was done in twelve secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County. The study analysed quantitative data using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean. It also carried out linear regression analysis and correlation analysis to test a hypothesis. Qualitative data was analysed using the thematic method.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Reliability Statistics

This study used the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient test to measure reliability. Twelve principals and bursars answered the pilot study's questionnaire. The population was obtained by using 10% of the sampled population. The results of the reliability test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Questionnaire- principals and bursars	0.863	24

According to Table 1, the questionnaire issued to principals and bursars had a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.863. As per Taber's (2018) directive, when an instrument's results ranged from 0.71 to 1, it is reliable. Therefore, it was evident that the questionnaire had a Cronbach Alpha of above 0.7.

4.2 Response Rate

The study distributed questionnaires to 117 principals and 117 bursars. The response rate results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Response Rate

Respondents	Sampled	Response	Percentage
Principals	117	87	47%
Bursars	117	97	53%
Total	234	184	79%

The results in Table 2 reveal that the returned and completed questionnaires were 184(87 principals, 97 bursars) which was a 79% response rate. A study by Doss et al. (2021) proclaimed that when the response rates in any study are above 70%, they are referred to as excellent results.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of Financial Management

Financial management constituted the dependent variable and had indicators such as resource mobilization, information analysis on books of accounts, interpretation of financial policies, transparency and accountability in budgeting, risk management, and financial control. The questionnaires had options organized in Ordinal Likert scale such that 1- strongly disagreed, 2- disagreed, 3-neutral, 4-agreed, and 5-strongly agreed. The results of the first questionnaire are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Financial Management

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
N= 184						
Clear financial policies on funds allocation to different departments	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (8%)	169 (92%)	4.92
Distinguished roles between the accounts department and school management especially in control of finances	0 (0%)	29 (16%)	59 (32%)	48 (26%)	48 (26%)	3.26

Availability of a reporting system through which risk is effectively communicated and managed when it arises.	0 (0%)	98 (53%)	0 (0%)	86 (47%)	0 (0%)	2.95
Acceptance of Financial Accounting Standard Board (FASB) as basic principles followed when maintaining books and in financial information analysis.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (8%)	169 (92%)	4.92
The finance department is actively engaged in mobilizing students, parents, and stakeholders such as Ministry of Education officials, and the board of members as a measure of soliciting funds.	0 (0%)	33 (18%)	15 (8%)	83 (45%)	53 (29%)	3.24
The rule of law and code of ethics guides financial management processes in issues pertaining to accountability and transparency.	0 (0%)	15 (8%)	6 (3%)	86 (47%)	77 (42%)	4.21

The results presented in Table 3, indicated that 169(92%) respondents strongly agreed and 15(8%) agreed that there were clear financial policies on funds allocation to different departments, on a mean of 4.92. Additionally, 169(92%) strongly agreed and 15(8%) agreed on a mean of 4.92, that most secondary schools had accepted the use of Financial Accounting Standard Board (FASB) as basic principles followed when maintaining books and in financial information analysis, on a mean of 4.92. The results indicated that most secondary schools had established various local and international policies that related to financial management such as equitable allocation of resources to departments and acceptance of FASB principles in bookkeeping respectively. Therefore, the principals were not operating in a vacuum but stood guided in the management of school finances both from local and international policy framework perspectives.

Therefore, the above results were consistent with contingency theory in the sense that the principals were able to exploit their knowledge of the interpretation of financial policies to correctly apply the set FASB and school financial policies to make financial decisions such as the proportions to allocate to departments. This action would minimize complaints and departmental conflicts since each of them is allocated what the school policy dictates.

This kind of approach was also advocated by African Union (2021) which reported that as African education systems were advancing, there had been great strides made to have institutional, government, and international-based policies related to finances. The head of these institutions was keen not only on implementing the institutional financial goals but also on aligning them with the set policies. These policies were greatly borrowed from the institution itself and also from global financial institutions.

That notwithstanding, 98(53%) disagreed on a mean of 2.95, that most secondary schools had a reporting system through which risk was effectively communicated and managed when it arose. This meant that risk was not adequately handled, hence, relied on the personal experiences and expertise of the principals to mitigate them. This left the secondary schools in

a very tight spot since some risk factors were normally beyond the control of the principals and did not have a clear channel to whom he or she would report (Bagine, 2022).

Financial Management of Secondary Schools

Further on, the study collected secondary data on the financial management of secondary schools. The study analyzed the collected data through SPSS software and presented the findings as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Financial Management of Secondary Schools

Financial Indicators	Mean
Gross Income	3.27
Net Income	2.09
Return on Assets	3.91
Return on Equity	3.27
Capital Employed Ratio	4.38

The results in Table 4. revealed that most secondary schools' capital employed ratio had a mean of 4.38. This indicated that principals were putting effort into managing finances such that adequate amounts were being invested in various projects. That notwithstanding, the net income had a low mean of 2.09 revealing that the expenditures of many secondary schools were in excess as compared to their income levels. The results meant that the schools had weak financial control in the sense that the principals had less influence to regulate how money was spent on various projects such as buying buses, building classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, and administration blocks among others. In support, the Ministry of Education- Ethiopia (2020) admitted that there were insufficient financial reserves to provide shelter in times of financial hardships leading to destabilizing operations to the point secondary school students have to be sent home to collect fees

4.4 Results of Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership was the independent variable and had indicators such as building vision, nurturing collaboration, surety of results, and encouraging a learning culture. The questionnaires had options organized in Ordinal Likert scale such that 1- strongly disagreed, 2- disagreed, 3-neutral, 4-agreed, and 5-strongly agreed. The results of the first questionnaire are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Visionary Leadership

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
There are visionary strategies established by the management to measure and achieve the overall attainment of financial plans	0 (0%)	9 (5%)	0 (0%)	29 (16%)	146 (79%)	4.68

Clear visions have created a favorable environment used when mobilizing funds	0 (0%)	24 (13%)	6 (3%)	24 (13%)	130 (71%)	4.42
School leaders undergo training that enables them to develop leadership skills	6 (3%)	42 (23%)	39 (21%)	53 (29%)	44 (24%)	3.89
We are involved in making financial decisions pertaining to ways to achieve the desired vision within a specific timeline	0 (0%)	48 (26%)	44 (24%)	48 (26%)	44 (24%)	3.14
The school management provides finances for teaching staff to attend leadership summits, seminars, and training to be equipped adequately with leadership skills	87 (47%)	77 (42%)	20 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (%)	2.21
The school allows non-management staff to contribute their opinion on how to attain the desired goals in a more economical way	0 (0%)	15 (8%)	0 (0%)	116 (63%)	53 (29%)	4.16

The results presented in Table 5, indicate that 146(79%) strongly agreed and 29(16%) agreed on a mean of 4.68, that there were visionary strategies established by the management to measure and achieve the overall attainment of financial plans. Additionally, 130(71%) strongly agreed and 24(13%) agreed on a mean of 4.42 that there were clear visions that have created a favorable environment used when mobilizing for funds. The results indicate that the school principals were a step ahead towards incorporating their visionary proficiencies by having strategies that had very clear goals which enabled their institutions to implement them when sourcing for funds. These strategies and goals were well thought out, highly consulted, and communicated in advance to all concerned parties, to bear the required financial results. A study such as Galigao et al. (2019) in the Philippines, established that how a school financial management system would work, relied heavily on ways through which school heads would approach, implement and communicate both the school's vision and professional goals.

That notwithstanding, 87(47%) strongly disagreed and 77(42%) disagreed on a mean of 2.21, that the school management provided finances for teaching staff to attend leadership summits, seminars, and training to be equipped adequately on leadership skills. This meant that the principals relied on the directives that the Ministry of Education had towards empowering their leadership capabilities. For example, there was a limited financial budget sent by the ministry to the school which was hardly enough to amicably handle all needs of the school, let alone pay for leadership training (Berhanu, 2018). Therefore, the principals had to align their vision of equipping the leadership skills of the staff with those of the ministry and allow individual staff to attend seminars, conferences, and training on personal financing basis (Bilkisu, 2018). The only thing principals had to do was to encourage the staff to make personal initiatives to develop themselves (Berhanu, 2018). According to Jiang et al. (2018), the low financing problem was a problem to the point that the principals in China hardly got adequate training or

professional development hence negatively affecting their ability to make informed decisions and realistic visions.

4.5 Correlational Analysis of Visionary Leadership and Financial Management

In testing the relationship between visionary leadership and financial management, the study had a null hypothesis that visionary leadership had no significant influence on financial management in secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya. Therefore, the study used Pearson correlational analysis to test the hypothesis of the influence of visionary leadership on financial management for principals/bursars and heads of departments as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Visionary Leadership

Pearson Correlation Analysis			Principals/Bursars	
			Visionary leadership	Financial management
Pearson	Visionary leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.552**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	184	184
	Financial management	Pearson Correlation	.552**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	184	184

The results presented in Table 6, revealed that Pearson correlation coefficient $r=0.552^{**}$ at $\alpha < 0.000$ and 99% significance level. This meant that there was a positive influence since the Pearson correlation value was less than 1 and the significance level was less than 0.05. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that visionary leadership had a significant influence on financial management in secondary schools. In agreement, Sobunkolan (2021) also established that when visionary strategies such as nurturing collaboration with teachers were implemented by principals, they were able to understand the teaching needs of teachers and hence provide a budget for them. This provision of a budget would enable the principal to plan and manage funds in such as way wastage is minimized.

5.0 Conclusion

The conclusions made on visionary leadership were that principals relied on the directives that the Ministry of Education had towards empowering their leadership capabilities. Therefore, the study noted little professional advancement of staff working in the accounts office which was attributed to a failure of principals to push for the same, fearing that the staff may leave the school for greener pastures after the training.

6.0 Recommendations

The recommendations are that the principals should make an initiative of ensuring that they motivate the accounting staff regarding equipping themselves with the skills and expertise for career advancement. The principals should expand their thinking capabilities by enrolling in a professional management course and also use personal and organizational influences to connect the staff with various financiers such as county scholarships, Help for the working staff, study grants from NGOs, and saving in sacco to get loans. The principals should also liaise with the Ministry of Education to have qualified professional staff transferred to the schools. The

principals should also see to it that there is a need for succession planning in the finance department.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy, and Practice

The above results on visionary leadership are consistent with contingency theory since the principals ensured that they were able to operate effectively under both the internal and external environment to optimize financial management. In the internal environment, the findings reveal that the principals maximized on developing personal goals that complimented the school's overall vision which enabled them to mobilize funds. Additionally, they used strategies put into place from the policy framework to eventually measure how much they had achieved on the intended financial plans. Therefore, the principals made decisions after consulting with the vision they had to have the inner motivation and master the art of mobilizing funds which was later assessed based on the established visionary structures in the school.

In relation to policy, the principals were able to exploit their knowledge of the interpretation of financial policies to correctly apply the set FASB and school financial policies to make financial decisions such as the proportions to allocate to departments. However, more attention should be taken by the management to ensure that as they are allocating finances to departmental budgets, reserves are required to be established. This will create extra finances to incorporate and implement various innovative suggestions without necessarily pressuring stakeholders such as parents, government, or donors to increase the funding.

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