

## Secondary Schools' Academic Performance in Kisii Central District in Kenya at Crossroads of Decentralization and Human Resources

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### Abstract

The purpose of his study was to find out whether there exists a relationship between the use of decentralized principals and teachers and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii Central district in Kenya. To test this relationship, three variables that is, decentralized human resources management; locally availed principals, and utilization of decentralized teachers as independent variables were compared with secondary school's academic performance variable. Survey research design and purposeful sampling were used with the help of questionnaires as a tool for data collection. The target population of the study comprised of 73 secondary schools out of which one principal and one deputy principal were selected from each school making a total of 146 respondents as accessible population in this study. The questionnaire items were based on the three said major phenomena against the academic performance of secondary schools in Kisii central district. Reliability of items was tested using Chronbach's alpha index and was found to be .838. Collected data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Interpretation of results were based on  $\alpha$  (.05), 142 degree of freedom ( $df$ ), probability level ( $p$ ), observed  $r$ -values and  $r$ -critical. Results from the  $r$ -tests were presented using tables. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship among decentralized human resources management; locally availed principals; and utilization of decentralized teachers and performance of secondary schools in Kisii central district. Out of this study, recommendations were made to the National government, Kisii county government and Kisii central district secondary schools' board of managers.

**Key words:** School Performance, Decentralized Management, Decentralized Human Resources Management, Decentralized Principals

### 1. Introduction

Decentralization policy that has affected education with community involvement for development in Kenya is not a new phenomenon. However, the idea of recruitment of teachers at school level is new to government owned schools. As governments decentralize politically, other sectors are decentralized too including school operations. Human resources form an important component of resources in schools because it is this resource that manipulates other resources for performance (Levacic, 2000). It is this reason that proper selection of principals and teachers in this decentralization era is essential. Decentralization is hoped to promote ownership of programmes, projects and school governance through community participation (Mogapi, 2010).

Behrman, Deolalikar and Soon (2003) hold that decentralized resources have been advocated mainly in the hope of improving efficiency for institutions. In Kisii central district, decentralization of principals as managers and the teaching staff is viewed as a necessary condition for secondary schools' performance. Decentralization of HR is hoped to create an enabling environment for improved performance of institutions (Fiske, 1996). Devolved services in Kisii central district were through political decentralization that was effected in 2013 though first school-based recruitments of secondary school teachers as part of decentralization started in 2002. It is this assumption that formed the basis for this study in regard to secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district.

## **2. Background to the Study**

Decentralized School management is said to have its origins in the United Kingdom with arguments that in the United Kingdom (UK), disillusionment with party politics in 1960s and 1970s turned activists towards grassroots politics, community action and community work that in turn led to participation of parents in school management, community-based youth service and community-run pre-school play groups (Zajda, 2006; Daun, 2007; Smith, 1985). Decentralization has had an evolution which can be seen roughly in two phases. This include the 1960 – 1970 period that is referred to as embedded liberalism epoch or the post-honeymoon in most African and those countries that had gained independence from colonial masters in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Harvey, 2006). This period saw the reduction of the status in organizational control by local governments to increased state control characterized by fiscal crises. The second period that opened doors in the 1980s and spread to the present is referred to as neo-liberalism epoch. In this second period, decentralization has become a globalized policy in many countries and it has become catchword with many institutions involved in its application (Harvey, 2006; Pasteur, 1999; Daun, 2007). Liberalism and freedom in relation to socio-economic and political affairs prevail more in this period against centralism.

Since 1980s, decentralized governance of schools has replaced state control of schools in terms of management in many countries at a high rate both in developed and developing ones (Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Govinda, 1997). From 1980s, foreign decentralization ideologies were introduced in Kenya as a result of external forces from the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other donor agencies (Ndegwa, 2002; Daun, 2007; Gershberg & Winkler, 2003; Mogapi, 2010). This was through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that were used in many institutions as a push for decentralization. Decentralization that was effected in Kenya in 2013, divided the unitary state as schools were decentralized and controlled by autonomous County governments.

## **3. Statement of the Problem**

Decentralized educational management that has been developing in Kenya since 1983 under the District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD) policy and was officially constituted in 2013 has had problems in terms of the appointment of principals and recruitment of teachers in secondary schools in Kisii central district (Ohito & Ayodo, 2006; Siringi, 2002). In 2002, the policy on recruitment of teachers to all secondary schools was made a prerogative of Board of Governors (BOG) in collaboration with the District Education Officer (DEO). However, as Siringi (2002) reports, the first ever non Teachers Service Commission (TSC) recruitment drive on teachers to secondary schools was marred by bias, corruption and unfairness with unqualified teachers recruited in some schools.

On the appointment of principals, it was found out that to some degree there is a slogan that goes “unqualified but belonging” that is used as a guiding factor in their appointments during decentralization era (Gori, 2001). This has left some schools appoint unqualified principals to head schools as managers. Consequently, as Ohito and Ayodo (2006) report, management of decentralized resources by principals and locally appointed managers has a negative relationship to academic performance of secondary schools.

School output in Kisii central district in terms of students joining public universities under government sponsorship policy based on merit has been very low compared to other districts in Kenya. Intakes to other tertiary institutions have also been low due to low pass rate with poor grades at the form four external examination results. The efforts towards promoting decentralization process and performance of secondary schools were thwarted by the ministry of education officials and now at County level and the school managers in Kisii central district. This has impacted negatively on the academic performance of secondary schools in Kisii central district.

#### **4. Research Hypotheses**

- There is no relationship between decentralized human resources management and secondary schools academic performance in Kisii central district.
- There is no relationship between locally available principals for management and secondary schools academic performance in Kisii central district.
- There is no relationship between the utilization of decentralized teachers and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii district.

#### **5. Literature Review**

Smith (1985) argues that in the study of politics, decentralization refers to territorial distribution of power and that it is concerned with the extent to which power and authority are dispersed through the geographical hierarchy of the state. He further notes that decentralization of governance refers both reversing the concentration of administration at a single centre and conferring powers of local governments. Ndegwa (2002) argues that major development donors to African states have pushed decentralization as a pathway to improving governance and service delivery in Africa. As governments decentralize, different institutions are decentralized as they become beneficiaries of the system. There is also the claim that centralization creates passive conformity and that local autonomy is associated with dynamic innovation. On the other hand, McLean and Lauglo (1985) argue that "Governments may decentralize because the demand for local control is great and it is less threatening to central power to concede to these demands than to resist them" (p. 11). Kenya has decentralized following a variety of reasons that range from external pressure to internal pressures that included the need for good governance with democratic norms.

According to Gori (2012), the management aspect of the decentralized resources plays an important role in resource utilization in relation to school performance. Arunatilake and Jayawardena (2009) and Ross and Levačić (1999) argue that decentralized human resources to a higher degree can have an impact on institutional outcomes. They further argue that managers of decentralized systems can influence the authority given to local level decision-makers by the centre and those that allow greater participation of the community in the decision-making process. As Bush and Bell (2002) argue, the shift to self-management and the pressure on

resources, have led to major developments in the management of people for performance. On the other hand, Gori (2014) found out that the trend towards local management under decentralization with the emphasis of the use of local human resources however, has had challenges some of which have affected performance of schools. On community involvement under decentralization, Gori (2001) found out that some ideologies like “unqualified but belonging” already possessed by some community members among others have been used to deploy clan affiliated principals though not fully qualified for the job. HRM is an important aspect in relation to performance of schools. In his study, Mullins (2007) has emphasized the importance of the understanding of HRM by managers and stated that they need to understand the importance of good managerial practices and how to make the best out of people.

Utilization of local human resources is an important aspect in decentralization systems. In his study, Levacic (2000) has argued that “there is a strong link between utilization of available resources and performance of schools. In this case, management of these resources is considered a major contributory factor to school performance”(p.3). This sentiment is shared by Dambe, Moorad and Afemikhe (2008) who argue that “utilization and not availability is the most important factor in achievement” (p.87). They further argue that availability of resources is not a sufficient condition for utilization of resources but the way they are managed for performance. On the link between resources utilization and outcomes, Levacic (1997) asserts that: “If giving educational organizations greater choice on how they use resources is to result in improvements in teaching and learning then logically there must be a link and the resulting educational outputs and outcomes for students” (p.128).

## 6. Methodology

This study was carried out in Kisii central district in Kisii County in Kenya. The target population comprised of 73 secondary schools out of which one principal and one deputy principal were selected from each school making a total of 146 respondents as accessible population in this study. The researcher applied quantitative research method in this study along with survey research design which was considered suitable in regard to time and the collection of data at a single point (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Survey research design and purposeful sampling were used with the help of questionnaires as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire items were based on the three major phenomena against the academic performance of secondary schools in Kisii central district. Collected data were analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Interpretation of results were based on  $\alpha$  (.05), 142 degrees of freedom ( $df$ ), probability level ( $p$ ), observed  $r$ -values and  $r$ -critical (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Results from the  $r$ -tests were presented using tables.

## 7. Questionnaire’s Reliability and Validity

Estimation of the tool’s reliability is essential for reliable results (Bryman, 2012; Gay, et al, 2006). The tool’s reliability for data collection was tested using Cronbach’s alpha index and was found to be .838. To ensure whether the measure reflected the content of the concept in question, the researcher applied face validity before the items were used to collect data from principals and deputy principals that formed the accessible population.

## 8. Presentation of Data Analysis for Each Hypothesis

Hypothesis one was testing whether there is a significant relationship between decentralized human resources management and secondary schools' academic performance. To test this relationship, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was done that involved the independent variable (decentralized human resources management) which had a mean of 1.55 and a standard deviation of .529 and items testing secondary schools' academic performance (dependent variable) which had a mean of 1.65 and a standard deviation of .297 (see Table 1). The Pearson's  $r$  test analysis produced an  $r$ -value of .552 and a  $p$ -value of .000 (see Table 2). At a  $df$  of 142, the  $r$ -critical at  $\alpha (.05) = .166$ . Therefore  $r$ -value of .552 is greater than a  $r$ -critical (.166) required for  $\alpha = .05$ . Decentralized resources management was one of the elements that were considered to have impacts on secondary schools' academic performance. Out of this result presented in Table 2, it shows that a higher percentage of respondents agreed that the managers' work in managing decentralized resources for academic performance was essential.

The second Hypothesis was testing whether "There is no relationship between locally availed principals and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district". To test this, locally availed principals' items' mean of 2.02 and Standard Deviation of .731 were compared with secondary schools' academic performance ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = .297$ ) as shown in Table 1. A computed Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis produced an  $r$ -value of .679 and  $p$ -value of .000 (see Table 3). At a  $df$  of 142,  $r$ -critical at  $\alpha (.05) = .166$ . This result indicates that,  $r$ -value of  $.679 > r$ -critical (.166) at  $\alpha = .05$ .

The third Hypothesis was testing whether "there exists no relationship between the utilization of decentralized teachers and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district". To check this relationship, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was done involving items' mean for utilization of decentralized teachers variable ( $M = 1.71$ ,  $SD = .579$ ) and secondary schools' academic performance ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = .297$ ) as shown in Table 1. The computation produced a  $r$ -value of .483 and  $p$ -value of .000 at a  $df$  of 142. At a  $df$  of 142,  $r$ -critical at  $\alpha (.05) = .166$ . The results show that an  $r$ -value of  $.483 > r$ -critical (.166) at a  $df$  of 142 (see Table 4).

Table 1  
*Study Variables' Means and Standard Deviations*

Variables	M	SD
Decentralized HRM	1.55	.529
Locally Availed Principals for Mgt	2.02	.731
Utilization of Decentralized Teachers	1.71	.579
Sec Schs' Academic Performance	1.65	.297

$\alpha = .05$ ,  $df = 142$

Table 2  
*Pearson's Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Decentralized Human Resources Management and Secondary Schools' Academic Performance*

Variables		Decentralized HR Management	Secondary Schools Academic Performance
Decentralized HR Management	Pearson correlation	1	.552
	Sig.(2tailed)		.000
	n	142	142
Secondary Schools' Academic performance	Pearson correlation	.552	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	n	142	142

$p < .05$ ;  $df = 142$  ; critical  $r = .1.66$ ;  $a = 0.05$ .

Table 3  
*Pearson's Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Decentralized Human Resources Management and Secondary Schools' Academic Performance*

Variables		Locally Aailed Principals for Mgt	Secondary Schools Academic Performance
Locally Aailed Principals for Mgt	Pearson correlation	1	.679
	Sig.(2tailed)		.000
	n	142	142
Secondary Schools' Academic performance	Pearson correlation	.679	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	n	142	142

$p < .05$ ;  $df = 142$  ; critical  $r = .1.66$ ;  $a = 0.05$ .

Table 4  
*Pearson's Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Decentralized Human Resources Management and Secondary Schools' Academic Performance*

Variables		Decentralized HR Management	Secondary Schools Academic Performance
Utilization of Decentralized Teachers	Pearson correlation	1	.483
	Sig.(2tailed)		.000
	n	142	142
Secondary Schools' Academic performance	Pearson correlation	.483	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	n	142	142

$p < .05$ ;  $df = 142$  ; critical  $r = .1.66$ ;  $a = 0.05$ .

## 9. Research Findings and Interpretation of Results for Each Hypothesis

### Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between decentralized human resources management and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central. Based on  $\alpha$  (.05), a degrees of freedom ( $df$ ) of 142,  $r$ -critical = .166, results displayed in Table 2 indicate that  $r$  (.522) > .166,  $p < 0.05$  produced during the analysis. The analysis produced  $p$ -value of .000. This indicates that there was a significant effect for decentralized human resources management,  $r(142) = .522$ ,  $p < .05$  on secondary schools' academic performance. From the results of the analysis for the first hypothesis, it was found that there was a significant relationship between the decentralized human resources and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district. According to Pearson  $r$ -test analysis,  $p$  and  $r$ -values produced by the analysis were compared with 0.05 and  $r$ -critical respectively for the interpretation of results. Based on this, null Hypothesis one was rejected. This was therefore interpreted that there was a relationship between the decentralized human resources management and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district.

### Hypothesis 2

Like hypothesis one, the Pearson's product moment analysis done indicated that the relationship between locally availed principals and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district was significant. Results in Table 3 show that  $r$  (.679) > .166,  $p < .05$  at a  $df$  of 142. The analysis produced  $p$ -value of .000. Based on the second hypothesis, this result shows that there is a significant relationship between locally availed principals and secondary schools' academic performance,  $r(142) = .679$ ,  $p < .05$  on secondary schools' academic performance.

Results for hypothesis 2 which was testing the relationship between locally availed principals and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district produced an  $r$ -value which was greater than  $r$ -critical at an alpha level of .05. This led to the conclusion that there was a significant relationship between locally availed principals' work and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district. This means that null Hypothesis 2 was rejected. On the other hand this showed that availing of local principals had an effect on the performance of secondary schools in Kisii central district.

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis tested whether there exists no relationship between the utilization of decentralized teachers and secondary schools academic performance in Kisii central district. The results of the analysis indicate that the use of decentralized teachers had an impact on the performance of schools in Kisii central district. At  $\alpha$  (.05), a  $df$  of 142 and a  $r$ -critical of .166, the results displayed in Table 4 indicate that  $r$  (.483) > .166 and  $p < .05$  as the analysis produced a  $p$ -value of .000. This result, indicates that there was a significant effect on the utilization of decentralized teachers,  $r(142) = .483$ ,  $p < .05$  on secondary schools' academic performance. According to this result as displayed in Table 4, null Hypothesis three was rejected. This was therefore interpreted that there was a relationship between the utilization of decentralized teachers and secondary schools academic performance in Kisii central district.

## 10. Discussions

Decentralization as a form of governance in the control of state affairs, does not only affect politics but also other sectors like the social scene which is the supplier of human capital to the three sectors of the economy. It is this reason that proper manning of the education sector is essential to any well to do nation and for that matter Kisii central district for Kisii County government. Decentralization of human resources management for secondary schools therefore needs to be taken seriously in Kisii central district. In Kisii central district human resources that include the principal, the Board of Management (BOM), teachers and support staff are decentralized. Decentralization which is a new phenomenon in Kenya when compared with countries where it originated is associated with improvement in schools' standards hence better performance. Mullins (2007) links development with institutional performance and notes that a skilled work force depends largely on the achievements and out puts of schools. However, the question is, to what extent is skilled workforce and its selection for use in Kisii central district effected?

Data analysis results of this study indicate that the decentralized human resources management in Kisii central district had a direct relationship to secondary schools' academic performance. Decentralized human resource management for organizational performance is a widely conceived notion which has shown that managing of the availed resources to a higher degree can have an impact on secondary schools outputs and later outcomes. Managing decentralized human resources form an integral part in integrating school activities and that it is the cornerstone for school effectiveness. The results indicate that decentralized human resources management in Kisii central district has an impact on performance of secondary schools. The rejection of null hypothesis one on the effect of the management of the decentralized human resources as a factor for secondary schools academic performance on one hand has an implication that management of decentralized resources is insignificant. On other hand, it should be noted that the best management tactics should be applied for better results.

Availing of principals locally has an impact on secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district. On the other hand it means that secondary schools' academic performance can be influenced by locally availed principals. This shows therefore that the Kisii central district community members will not elude the responsibility of availing the right principals who can perform for schools in the district. The local community has the responsibility to guard against what is developing in the Kisii county that is negative in terms of the supply of local personnel for use in schools. Such local born negative ideologies such as "unqualified but belonging" (Gori, 2001) and "appoint if related" (anecdotal, 2013) will not help in the selection of the best principals from the locality for use in schools. Study hypothesis two was rejected out of the analysis done. The implication for the rejection of null hypothesis two is that if the locally availed principals manage badly, then this will impact negatively on the performance of secondary schools in Kisii central district.

Locally availed teachers for use in secondary schools is happening in many decentralized states. Utilization of locally availed teachers has been advocated for and is related to having advantages that include it being cheap and easily available. However, its selection in Kisii central district seem to face problems in selection of personnel. The results of the analysis on data collected that was seeking whether there was a no relationship between its selection and

utilization in Kisii central district and secondary schools academic performance warranted the rejection of hypothesis three. This meant that there is a relationship. This relationship shows and implies that proper selection is paramount if secondary schools are to perform better.

Available literature indicates that management and leadership are essential for better institutional performance. Like all counties in Kenya, Kisii County, gives more than 90% of the principals to manage decentralized teachers and that it is the management part that helps to convert the inputs into results or outputs from schools. Decentralized human resources management was found to have a relationship to secondary schools' academic performance just like locally availed principals and utilization of decentralized teachers. The implication from this results of analysis is that the system has to select the most qualified personnel for school performance for the district.

### **11. Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to find out whether decentralized human resources management to and its relationship to academic performance of secondary schools in Kisii County. To establish this, survey research design along with quantitative research methodology and questionnaires were used to collect data from 142 teachers. Analysis of data was done using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis with the help of SPSS software. The findings revealed that there was a relationship among decentralized human resources management; locally availed principals and utilization of decentralized teachers and secondary schools' academic performance in Kisii central district

This study established that human resources provided by the Kisii county community that include principals and teachers play a vital role in the management and teaching of secondary schools for performance in Kisii central district schools. From the findings of the study, the implication is that for secondary schools in Kisii central district to perform well, school management and teaching using decentralized personnel is essential. In other words, the proper selection of the said human resources is important for school performance.

### **12. Recommendations and Further Research**

In decentralization era, school-based management is the direction for many countries. This type of school improvement efforts requires a concerted effort from the local community members who are not only suppliers of personnel but also financiers. Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations were made.

- Appointment of decentralized principals should be based on merit and not on the notion "unqualified but belonging" or "appoint if related" local ideologies that are now taking root in Kisii central county.
- The appointment of principals should be based on agreed policies and guidelines. One of the policies should be a minimum of five years experience as a deputy principal or ten years teaching experience with good track record.
- Principals as managers of schools should not be restricted to come from Kisii county only but from any county within the republic of Kenya provided they meet the laid down policies and guidelines.

There are many factors that affect performance of secondary schools that were not considered in this study. There is need to consider other factors that are likely to affect secondary schools' academic performance that include the following:

- Research on whether the quality of the locally availed principals and teachers has an

impact on secondary schools' organizational performance in Kisii central district.

- Research on whether the relationship between the national government has any relationship with the academic performance of secondary schools in Kisii Kisii central district in Kenya.
- Research on whether clan affiliation has a relationship with the appointment of principals and teachers for Kisii central district secondary schools and how it impacts on the performance of secondary schools.

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