

School Principal's Leadership Style: A Factor Affecting Staff Absenteeism in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Teacher absenteeism is a persistent problem in many countries as it tends to reduce the quality of education and results in poor performance of students. The purpose of this study was to assess whether principal's leadership style had a relationship with absenteeism among teachers in secondary schools in Baringo County, Kenya. The objectives of the study were; to assess the effect of transformational leadership style on teacher absenteeism, and to establish the effect of transactional leadership style on teacher absenteeism. A survey research design was used for this study. The institutions studied were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The two strata considered were public and private secondary schools. A modified Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to determine leadership style of the principal. The leadership styles were identified as the independent variable, while absenteeism was the dependent variable. There was a significant negative linear relationship between transformational leadership style and absenteeism ($R^2=0.854$, $\beta=-0.927$, $t=13.283$, $F=176.4$, and $p=0.000$), and a significant positive linear relationship between transactional leadership style and absenteeism ($R^2=0.665$, $\beta=0.823$, $t=7.790$, $F=60.70$, and $p=0.000$). It was therefore concluded that principal's leadership style influences absenteeism.

Keywords: transformational, transactional, absenteeism, performance, leadership style, multi-factor leadership questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

For decades business and industry have struggled with the problem of employee absenteeism, a fact that is supported by the vast body of literature that addresses the issue. In fact, absenteeism and staff turnover are the two most frequent outcomes studied in organizational research (Long & Ormsby, 2001). One of the key pillars of Vision 2030 in Kenya is provision of quality education. School systems have been engaged in a system of educational reform designed to change school culture and to improve student achievement. The financial cost of teacher absenteeism is significant. Teacher absence often means that students have lost opportunities to learn. Further, teacher absences disrupt the routines and relationships which support the learning process (Miller, *et al.*, 2007). While research has clearly demonstrated that teacher absence has a negative effect on student achievement (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 1991; Clotfelter, 2007; Miller *et al.*, 2007), the research has not been as demonstrative about the causes or predictors of teacher absence. Conflicting evidence exists about the effects of characteristics such as gender, age, experience, time of week and school culture. For instance, some studies have

shown that female teachers are absent more frequently than male teachers (Scott, 1990; Clotfelter, 2007), while others have found that men are absent more frequently than women (Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, & Rogers, 2006 and Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2005). The results of various studies appear to be contextual in nature, and therefore, are conclusive for the environs in which they were conducted. As a result, there was need to do a study of the teacher absence behaviors in the Kenyan context. Gupta (2003) called excessive absenteeism among school personnel one of the most neglected problems in public education. While teacher absenteeism is widely recognized as a serious problem, there is surprisingly little systematic data as to the pervasiveness or extent of the problem in Kenya. Considering current economic conditions in our country, and the emphasis of using education to attain the Vision 2030 goals, it is important that researchers be able to identify causes of teacher absenteeism in order to develop solutions to the problem. There is widespread consensus that teacher absenteeism is a major threat. This study delved into studying the headteacher's leadership style as a factor that predisposes teacher absenteeism. Baringo

District is one of the hardest hit districts by absenteeism by secondary school teachers in Kenya (Ministry of Education, 2007).

HYPOTHESIS

This study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- H₀₁.** There is no significant linear relationship between transformational leadership style and absenteeism.
- H₀₂.** There is no significant linear relationship between transactional leadership style and absenteeism .

METHODOLOGY

The study used survey design of correlation nature. It utilized correlation and regression. The factor scores for leadership style using the standard MLQ questionnaire was calculated by using the sum of the relevant questions on the likert scale. From the eight factors in the MLQ, a further two factors were generated, namely transformational leadership, and transactional leadership. A table containing the relevant sample sizes means, and standard deviations for each of the factors was generated, table 1.

A correlation, the linear relationship between two quantitative variables, was used to assess the variations in one variable as the second variable changes. Linear regression was performed to determine whether sufficient evidence existed to allow the researcher to determine that there is a linear relationship or linear model between the dependent variable, and the independent variables.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 241 respondents from the 30 secondary schools in the District. Of the 241 respondents who were expected to participate in this study, 157 (65%) responded by completing and returning the questionnaires. The MLQ was used to determine the leadership style. The MLQ scoring key (appendix C) was used to generate the scores. The sample sizes, means and standard deviations of each of the MLQ factors are given in Table 1. Idealized attributes, idealized behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration scores were combined (summed) to generate the transformational leadership scores, while contingent reward, management-by-exception active and management-by-exception passive scores were combined (summed) to generate the transactional leadership scores. From table 1, the means obtained by principal self ratings (M_s) were generally higher than those given by the raters (M_r) for transformational leadership style. This can be attributed to the fact that people tend to view their abilities more favorably than what others would do. While for transactional i.e. MBE (A), and MBE (P), and contingent reward the means for raters were

higher than those of the raters. Contingent reward factor of transactional leadership had the highest mean score ($M_s = 2.4226$, $M_r = 2.5545$). Hence the headteachers studied were more predisposed to use transactional leadership style, the contingent reward factor.

The study sought to know if there is a problem of teacher absenteeism and the majority (n=104, 66.0%) indicated that there is a problem with (n=53, 34.0%) indicating that they disagree that there is a problem of teacher absenteeism. This implies that absenteeism is a problem among the teachers.

Correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationships between leadership styles and absenteeism. The correlation coefficient (R) was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship. Results showed a very strong and negative (R= -0.927) relationship between transformational leadership style and absenteeism at 95% confidence level. A strong positive relationship between transactional leadership style and absenteeism was also found (R = 0.823) at 95% confidence level. This is captured in table 3 (a) and (b).

In order to investigate the relationship between leadership styles and absenteeism, hypothesis one and two were set and tested as follows:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant linear relationship between transformational leadership style and absenteeism.

Regression analysis was carried out to test the null hypothesis. Using regression analysis, hence the regression parameters obtained the hypothesis was tested by constructing the following linear model: $A = B + \beta * TF$ where: TF is transformational leadership style (the independent variable) B is the y-intercept, β is gradient/slope of the regression line and A denotes absenteeism (dependent variable). Thus the linear equation relating transformational leadership and absenteeism took the form: $A = 1.054 - 0.927 * TF$. This model had a high correlation (adjusted $R^2 = 0.854$) and is strongly significant ($F = 176.435$ and $p = 0.000$ which is less than the significance level of 0.05) while $\beta \neq 0$. In ANOVA, large F and R^2 observed values indicates that most of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the regression model. Hence the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there is a significant negative linear relationship between absenteeism and transformational leadership style.

This findings mirror the study by Michaelowa (2002) who found that managers who used a participatory or democratic management style inspired the employees to have a sense of belonging and thus reduced rates of

absenteeism. The inspiration from the leader influences the employees to have the vision of the institution as their own vision and thus will always want to see the institution perform better by being part of the success story.

H₀₂: There is no significant linear relationship between transactional leadership style and absenteeism.

By considering the second leadership that is transactional leadership style and with the aid of regression analysis the researcher constructed the following linear model using the regression parameters: $A=B + \beta*TS$ where: TS is transactional leadership style (the independent variable), B is the y-intercept, β is gradient/slope of the regression line and A denotes absenteeism (the dependent variable). The values of the coefficient β and constant B were found to be 0.823 and 4.707 respectively (table 4.10). Thus the linear model relating absenteeism and transactional leadership style took the form: $A=4.707 + 0.823*TS$. This model has a high correlation (Adjusted $R^2=0.665$) that is 66.5% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the model and is strongly significant ($F=60.677$, $t=7.790$ and $p = 0.000$ which is less than the significance level of 0.05) while $\beta \neq 0$. Hence the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there is a significant negative linear relationship between transactional leadership style and absenteeism at 95% confidence interval. Absenteeism among teachers remains both a costly problem and a problem which potentially jeopardizes the quality of education that children in our society receive. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that leadership styles influence absenteeism.

The results of this study will help the policy makers to consider training the managers of the institutions on the influence of leadership style on teacher morale and hence levels of absenteeism

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