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THE QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN KENYA

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Abstract
This study investigated qualities of effective secondary school teachers in Kenya. Participants comprised of 90 students drawn from secondary schools from three provinces in the country. Out of the 90 participants, 45 were male, whereas 45 were female students. This study employed phenomenological research design. A biographical form and a blank sheet of paper were used to collect data. These data were analyzed using content analysis method. This study revealed 25 qualities of effective teachers in Secondary schools. These qualities included: good sense of humour; knowledgeable in subject-matter; caring and understanding; explaining concepts well; patience and respectful to learners; God fearing; self-confidence and focused; emotionally stable; correcting wrong responses politely; providing social and career guidance; fluent and well-spoken in English; fair to all learners; marking assignments promptly; punctuality to class; counselling learners; willingness to help learners; warm and friendly to learners; preparing well for lessons; involving learners in lessons; encouraging questions; honest and admission of errors; commitment to duty; and being organized. The findings of this study are useful in enhancing professional development, selection of effective secondary school teachers and improvement of the quality of education system.

Keywords: Kenya, effective teachers, qualities, secondary, school

INTRODUCTION

Educators, researchers, policy makers and all stakeholders in education are interested in identifying the practices that lead to improved academic performance of students. Teacher quality has been found to have a strong impact on the student learning (Darling-Hammond, Berry & Thoreson, 2001; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2004)

The greatest economies in the world such as United States of America, China, Japan, and Europe attribute their success to their education systems (Kipkorir, 2011, September 11). Kipkorir also reported that countries like Finland and Singapore are top in education because their teacher training systems admit top students; there is joint admission to teachers colleges and continued professional education after graduation.

Studies on the effectiveness of education system underscore the importance of effective teachers in determining the quality of an education system (Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2007). Clotfelteretal noted that teaching can offset learning challenges of learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds. This notwithstanding, researchers have not exhaustively drawn conclusions regarding the attributes of the most effective teachers. Okpala and Ellis (2005) have argued that effective teachers are caring, encouraging, approachable, enthusiastic, respectful, knowledgeable, empathetic, passionate and have a good sense of humour.

On the contrary, researchers such as MCaffery (2003) and Wenglinsky (2002) have argued that teacher quality is a complex phenomenon and that there is little consensus as to what it is and how it should be measured. According to these researchers teacher attributes such as teacher's background, professional preparation, qualification and skills are well researched, however, these findings are not consistently or strongly associated with learners' high achievements. There is no doubt that there is no consensus about the attributes of the most effective teachers. The identification of qualities of effective teachers is therefore important in the recruitment of teachers who can assist in the improvement of academic performance among schools in Kenya.

This study takes cognizant of the fact that an effective and highly committed teaching force is a prerequisite to raising the education standards and promoting high academic achievement among students in Kenya

The objective of this study was to identify the qualities of secondary school teachers in Kenya as perceived by students. Derived from this objective, the research question that guided this study was: What are the qualities of effective Secondary School teachers as perceived by the students?

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This study tries to fill the gap in literature about what constitutes effective teaching by offering the students' perspective. It is hoped that teachers will understand what their students expect from them and use pedagogical techniques which suit them. The findings of this study will also provide information to policy makers and other stakeholders for policy development and strategies for increasing quality and effectiveness of secondary school teachers and act as a guide for teacher educators in training teachers.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The research method used in this study was qualitative. The participants were asked to freely describe the

qualities of effective teachers on blank sheets of paper. Qualitative responses of the participants in this study were then analyzed in words. From this analysis, a list of qualities of effective teachers was generated. A phenomenological study design was used. Phenomenology is a study where lived experiences for several individuals are described as related to a phenomenon they have in common.

This study involved secondary school students who interacted with teachers regularly inside and out of class, hence were in privileged position to identify effective secondary school teachers and describe their characteristics accurately. This design therefore, helped the researcher to capture the qualities they perceived were describing effective secondary school teachers.

POPULATIONAND SAMPLING

The research population in this study comprised all Form 3 secondary school students in public secondary schools in Nyanza, Western, and Rift-Valley Provinces of Kenya. Form 3 students were selected from this study because they have interacted with secondary school teachers long enough to offer an accurate description and judgment on the behaviour of their teachers. Participants involved in this study were selected using criterion sampling technique. This study comprised a sample size of 90 participants (45 females and 45 males). This sampling technique ensures that all participants are selected because it was assumed that they had homogeneous environment from which they could draw experiences.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND DATA COLLECTION

Data collection instrument was a blank sheet of paper. On this sheet of paper, participants were required to describe in their own words the qualities of their most effective secondary school teacher. Instructions were clearly written on the sheets of paper. They were also repeated verbally by the researchers to the participants. The research instrument was administered to the students by the researchers. Most participants completed describing the qualities of their effective teachers in about 40 minutes. Immediately after writing their responses, the researchers collected the blank sheets of paper and serialized them in readiness for analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The content data analysis method was used in analyzing qualitative data written on sheets of paper by the participants. According to Leedyand Ormrod (2005) content analysis is suitable in capturing the words of participants in text or written documents.

Under the content analysis as recommended by Yin (2011), the researcher used the gist and analyses in this study. According to Yin, gist analysis is appropriate for the qualitative research because it enables the researcher to capture the meaning of the statements made by the participants concerning the phenomenon being studied. The gist analysis was used to identify the qualities of effective teachers made by participants about the qualities of effective teachers in secondary schools.

At the beginning of the analysis, the completed sheets of paper were photocopied into three sets to enable the researchers obtain a copy each. It was agreed that the researcher and the assistants would read each sheet several times to get an overview of their contents. This reading was done closely and repeatedly in detail until the researchers were familiar with its content and was in a position to conceptualize statements made by the participants about the qualities of effective teachers. The researchers made notes about statements made by the students on the qualities of effective teachers. Key concepts and ideas were identified in the notes.

The researchers then re-read data and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes. Moustakas (1994) reported that this provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Related statements were grouped together to form meaning units or emerging themes from the significant statements. The emerging themes included verb-referent statements such as: Is knowledgeable, caring, and self- confidence for effective teacher.

To assess the credibility of the emergent themes the researchers sampled a few participants, and gave them copies of the analyzed questionnaires and copies of the findings to make comments on and say whether these findings reflected their true perceptions of their effective secondary school teachers.

RESULTS

The emergent themes captured from students' perceptions of effective teachers are reported in Table 1.

The emergent themes reported in Table 1 were interpreted by the researchers to be the qualities of effective teachers as perceived by the participants involved in this study.

Table 1: Emergent Themes on Qualities of Effective Teachers

EMERGENT THEMES	
1.Has good sense of humour • Interesting and fun • Integrates lesson with humour	**14. Fair to all learners** • Treats all learners fairly • Encourages weak students to participate in class
2. Knowledgeable in subject-matter • Good mastery of content • Knows subject-matter well • Offers real life examples	**15. Marks assignments promptly** • Give assignments and return to learners on time. • Always give assignment after every topic
3. Caring and understanding to students • Caring to student inside and out of school • Helps learners in times of needs	**16. Punctual to class** • Always punctual for class • Does not miss lesson.
4. Explains concepts well in class • Repeats concepts until all learners understand • Makes difficult concepts easy to understand	**17. Counsel learners** • Provide counselling to learners • Guide learners about social life
5. Patient and respectful to learners • Helpful and patient with learners • Polite and respectful to students	**18. Willing to help weak learners** • Help weak students • Interested in helping weak students
6. God fearing • Love God • Advice learners on spiritual matters	**19. Warm and friendly to learners** • Pleasant and friendly • Accessible and warm to learners • Good interpersonal relationship
7. Self -confident and focused • Confident with self • Confident and focused	**20. Prepares well for lessons.** • Plans and prepares adequately for the lesson • Does not refer to textbook in class
8. Emotionally stable • Always jovial and happy • Composed • Slow to anger	**21. Involve learners in the lessons** • Attend to individual differences • Involve learners in class • Care about slow learners
9. Smart and presentable • Dresses appropriately • Always smart	**22. Encourage questions in class** • Allows learners to ask questions • Encourage learners to ask questions
10. Attend to lessons regularly • Gives reasons for missing class • Does not miss class • Finds time to cover up missed classes	**23. Honest and admit errors** • Honest does not give false response • Admit errors • Frank
11. Correct wrong responses politely • Correct learners in a polite manner • Corrects students' errors	**24. Committed to duty** • Makes up for the missed classes • Explains when misses lesson • Committed to work
12. Provide social and career guidance • Provide advice about career • Tells the pros and cons of a given career • Inspire students to work hard	**25. Organized** • Presents lessons in a clear manner • Plans and prepare for the lesson • Use a variety of teaching methods
13. Fluent and well-spoken in English • Eloquent and pronounces words clearly • Fluent and persuasive	

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study revealed that knowledge of the subject-matter was one of the most important aspects of effective teachers. Participants in this study indicated that students valued a teacher who demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the subject-matter. In their written responses, participants suggested that an effective teacher, "knows what he/she is teaching, rarely glances at a text-book during the lesson and has a good grasp of the subject-matter". These findings were consistent with those reported by Wenlinsky (2002). Wenlinsky reported that no matter how kind, amicable and well meaning a

teacher was, he could not succeed unless he had a thorough knowledge of the subject he/she is teaching.
This study also found out that pedagogy was an important hallmark of an effective teacher. Teachers who demonstrated that they were well prepared, organized, explained and presented their lesson content well, involved learners, encouraged questions and corrected learners' incorrect responses politely, were highly regarded by the participants in this study. These findings agree with those noted by Guarino, Stantibanezand Daley(2006),andSaafin(2005). who reported that good organization and ability to teach in an effective manner are important to learners.

Affective qualities that characterized an effective teacher include: caring and understanding, fairness to all learners, patient and respectful, emotional stability, willingness to help and warm and friendly to learners according to participants in this study. These results concurred withthe findings of earlier studies conducted by Day (2004), HayMcber (2000), and Robertson (1996).

Another important finding was that professional qualities were found to be desirable in effective teachers. These qualities included: Commitment to duty, self-confidence, honesty and admitting errors. Participants preferred a teacher "who was honest and admitted errors", "who was confident and focused on his work", and "committed to their work and did not miss lessons or waste learners time". These results were in line with Ralph(2003) who identified five attributes of effective teachers: commitment to learners' knowledge of materials, organization and collaboration with others. He also reported that self-confidence is an important issue for high school students. It can be concluded from this study that students perceived professional qualities to be important in describing an effective teacher

One significant aspect of the findings of this study was that an effective teacher also possesses counselling skills. These skills are demonstrated in taking personal interest in students by helping them make career choices and assisting them tackle social and psychological challenges by offering counselling services. This finding can perhaps be explained by Rao (2003) who posited that adolescent stage is characterized by a host of problems that require to be met and resolved with understanding.
The most interesting finding of this study is that participants indicated that spiritual qualities were significant in describing effective teachers. In their written responses, participants wrote that "great teachers fear God and provide spiritual guidance to learners". This finding agrees with the Taylor's (2008) Dispositions Model, which indicated that spiritual maturity is an important attribute of an effective teacher. Regnerus (2001) reported that church going also benefited students because churches often offer positive role-models for students. Perhaps a plausible explanation for this finding is that students are in need of teachers with good morals who should provide them with spiritual and moral guidance and role-models to emulate.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that in addition to the attributes commonly reported by the previous studies such as cognitive, affective and professional qualities that describe effective teachers, this study reported counselling and spiritual qualities were perceived by the students to be important in describing an effective teacher. Our findings also demonstrate that secondary school students understand the qualities of effective teachers. Their written comments about qualities of effective teachers can help teachers understand their students better and tailor their pedagogical skills towards assisting students learn effectively. The 25 qualities of effective teachers can be used in identifying and recruiting teacher trainees into the teaching profession.

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