

ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY ADMINISTRATORS TO ENHANCE STUDENT RETENTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ALDAI SUB-COUNTY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT: Retention of students in secondary schools is an important move as it gears towards the fulfilment of conceptions which advocates for Education For All (EFA). Many of the studies already conducted have examined the theories that relate to student departure/retention more than the role of institutions in students' retention. As such, the author sought to examine the administrative strategies employed by various school administrators to guarantee secondary school students' retention in Aldai Constituency. The study also sought to explore the challenges faced by school administrators in their application of administrative strategies to ensure students' retention. The study adopted a mixed methods research design. The target population comprised public secondary schools in Aldai Constituency, their respective administrators, classroom teachers and Form Three students. Secondary schools were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The basis of stratification was school type. School administrators were purposively sampled. Simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting the classroom teachers. Questionnaire, interview schedule and content analysis were the main instruments of data collection. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for the study. Qualitative data was analyzed descriptively by computing frequency counts, percentages and measures of central tendency. Multi-linear regression analysis was computed to establish the most ideal administrative strategy that could be employed to ensure maximum students' retention. The study established that school administrators employ free communication, provision of bursaries and grants, enhancement of school culture and raising of school motivation levels administrative strategies in ensuring students' retention. They, however, encounter social, school and home-based challenges in their administration. The study recommends that free and open-communication should be reinforced and applied by all school administrators since it ranked highest in influencing students' retention. The study also recommends that the government should increase budgetary allocation for school bursaries and grants to ensure that needy students from vulnerable backgrounds complete their education.

KEYWORDS: Administrative Strategies, Administrators, Student Retention, Public Secondary Schools, Aldai Sub-County, Kenya.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the critical role secondary education is expected to play in society, many countries in the sub-Saharan Africa are struggling to institute competitive secondary education systems (Nakabugo, Bisaso & Masembe, 2008). DeShields, Kara and Kaynak (2005) have examined the determinants of business students' satisfaction and retention in higher education. They specifically focused on the determinants of student satisfaction and retention in a college or university that is assumed to impact students' college experience. Herzberg's two-factor theory was used; data was collected through a questionnaire which was administered to 160 undergraduate business students at a state university in South Central Pennsylvania. The results of the study indicated the path coefficients from faculty and classes consistent with the assumption that these are key factors that influence student partial college experience. The study focused on students' satisfaction and elaborated on what an organization/institution can do to satisfy students.

A report from Griffith's student retention and strategy 2012-2014 indicates that one of the key strategies to student retention is personal contact, communication and advice to students. The findings of the report show that students feel

much more connected to university if they have positive interactions with staff and peers and that if they know who to go to for advice and help. Further from the report there is a clear indication that this strategy contributes to a student's success in college. This paper focuses on how communication within a school fraternity can contribute to retention of students.

Lopez (1996) has examined how social capital affects Latino students and non-Latino students through college completion. The results of the survey showed that higher social capital leads to greater educational achievement and it enables students to obtain a high school degree and it influences the high rate of college enrolment. However, it is not clear from Lopez's survey whether social capital considerations affect retention of students or not. As such, the current study to focus on bursaries and grants as one of the strategy that administrators employ in order to retain students in school.

CHALLENGES FACING THE ADMINISTRATORS ON STUDENTS RETENTION

Sometimes students drop out of school as a result of years of academic hurdles, missteps, and wrong turns. At times it is about schools and communities having too few resources to meet the complex emotional and academic needs of their most vulnerable students (Furger, 2013). Musau (2007) has conducted a study in Kilome Division, Kenya to investigate the challenges faced by educational planners and other stakeholders in the retention of students in public secondary schools. The sample size consisted of 10 head teachers, 10 guidance and counselling teachers, 24 parents of the drop-outs and 24 drop-outs. Random sampling technique was used to select head teachers and guidance and counselling teachers. Snowballing sampling technique was used on drop-outs and parents. Data collection was through the questionnaire and interview schedule.

The study findings indicated that the challenges facing educational planners and other stakeholders in retention of students in school emanated from social, school and home factors. The study, however, does not touch on the challenges faced by the administrators when implementing strategies on student retention which the current study embarks to study.

Gray and Hackling (2009) have studied on student well-being and retention in Austria. The focus of the study was to find out the factors impacting on quality retention and participation of students. The sample size consisted of 250 year 11 student from two school communities. Survey design was used. Data was collected through focus group discussions. The findings of the study were that school culture, participations, achievement and school policy and governance were the main challenges to their retention.

According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), student retention and success are two of the most challenges facing higher education in the United States (US). Further the report reveals that no single administrator is empowered to implement strategic retention and student success plan. According to the report, for students to be retained in schools it is the whole institution which is involved. Going by the report, retention and success of students in colleges and universities in the US is a challenge. Nevertheless the report does not elaborate on the strategies which the managers use in trying to retain these students in the colleges. Further the report does not indicate whether there are any challenges faced while implementing the strategies in schools.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Cotton (2003) asserts that two related lines of research have demonstrated the influence of school leaders in school improvement. The first line of inquiry is what is known as school effectiveness research which identifies the characteristics of effective schools that influence the high-achieving schools. The second line of research focuses primarily on the head teacher's role as an instructional leader. In this context, the roles of head teachers in developing instructional programmes have mainly contributed to create more high-achieving schools.

Edmonds (1979) argues that school administration approach is critical in determining students' retention in schools and their subsequent academic achievement. Further, on the basis of his research on administratively effective schools in Detroit and a review of previous studies involving effective schools in New York, California, and Michigan, he concludes that head teachers' administrative strategies have predominantly contributed towards the creation of administratively effective schools. These factors are anchored on strong administrative leadership approaches and strategies. In line with these findings, Austin (1979) suggests that an administratively effective school which can promote student outcomes need to provide a climate that stimulates ideas and facilitates the exchange of ideas with colleagues.

For the purposes of seeking the perceptions of school communities on administrative strategies which mostly help the schools to be effective, Townsend (1997) has conducted a comparative study between Australian and American schools. The study employed an empirical survey involving a total of 1000 respondents, 427 from Victoria, Australia and 573 from the United States. The respondents comprised of 12% head teachers, 34.9% teachers, 31.8% parents, and 21.3% students. Based

on the data analysis, Townsend (1997) concludes that an effective school is primarily characterized by appropriate administrative strategies, good staff, good policies and a safe and/or supportive atmosphere in which staff, parents and students are encouraged to work as teams towards common goals. Purkey and Smith (1985) identify school administration strategies as some of the major factors in improving academic performance. They clarify that this factor emphasizes strong leadership from administrators, teachers or integrated teams are important in initiating and maintaining the improvement processes.

Based on data obtained from school effectiveness research within the Flemish technical secondary education, De Maeyer, Rymenans, Van Petegem, Bergh and Rijlaarsdam (2007) conclude that school administration has an indirect effect on student achievements. In this case, schools scoring high on this characteristic put a strong emphasis on their pupils' achievements, including ensuring high students' completion rate. Some recent studies have also evaluated the literature on school improvement research in the current context of school reforms. For instance, case studies conducted by Sun, Creemers and Jong (2007) between 1999 and 2003 in eight European countries, i.e. Belgium, Finland, The Netherlands, UK, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, show that several ideas from school improvement research such as setting national goals in terms of school improvement and strong administrative approaches in steering and empowering school improvement efforts are important. In particular, on the basis of their data collection procedures using interviews, audio and video-tape recordings, Sun, Creemers and Jong (2007) affirm that school goal setting in terms of employing effective administrative strategies is a key factor that influences effective school improvement.

A meta-analysis study exploring the relationship between school heads' administrative approaches and student achievements has also been conducted by Cotton (2003). He reviewed 81 reports, consisting of 49 studies at primary level, 23 at secondary level, five combinations of reviews and studies and four textbook analyses and research-based guidelines on administrative strategies employed by head teachers. The sample reports were predominantly from the US low socio-economic status (SES) schools, involving: students, teachers, head teachers, school council members, community members, and superintendents. Based on these studies, Cotton (2003) concludes that head teachers who are knowledgeable in the appropriate administrative strategies such as cordial relationships, free communication policy, support of needy students and understanding of staff members' concerns record a higher students' completion rate and have higher numbers of high achieving students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Retention of students in school is done with the aim of making the students complete the secondary education in time yet student retention in secondary school education has become a concern to the stakeholders in education (Mbuva, 2011). The efforts to improve retention have largely been ineffective, as demonstrated by insistent attrition rates (Reason, 2009). Retention of students in schools will contribute immensely to the achievement of MDGs (Chabari, 2010). The school administration has an important part to play in student retention. This is because the administrators are equipped with the knowledge and skills that support these practices for improved educational outcomes (Bell, Bolam & Cubillo, 2003). In agreement, Waruini (2012), in a study on factors affecting access and retention of the boy-child in secondary schools of Mathioya District established that even with the introduction of free secondary education boys continued to drop out of schools.

Further, Onuko (2012) conducted a study on impact of bursary schemes on retention of students in public secondary schools in Gem District and found out that without good governance and efficient management of Constituency Bursary Committees in relation to allocation of bursaries to beneficiaries in schools and financial management in particular, investment in education from any source would not bear the necessary fruits. The researcher recommended a further study be conducted on school initiative programmes to ensure student retention in public secondary schools. Many researchers have focused on students' retention. Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers and Rumbergerger (2004) and Mbuva (2011) reveal that for students to stay on at school there is need to have a supportive staff, need to focus on students individual and check on the academic needs in order to enhance retention of students.

Dropout rates in secondary schools in Aldai Constituency are reportedly alarming. Statistics from the District Education Office (Table 1) indicate that, on average, secondary schools lose twenty students who drop out annually. There is need, therefore, to establish the causal factors of this worrying trend. The study thus sought to zero in on the influence of administrative strategies employed by school administrators on retention of students in public secondary schools in Aldai Constituency in Nandi County in Kenya.

Table 1: Drop outs in secondary schools in Aldai Constituency

School	Year	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4	Total	%
Chepkuny mixed	2011	24	42	22	19	24	20.9
	2012	23	24	18	18		
	Drop outs	1	18	4	1		
Koibarak mixed	2011	53	40	70	30	20	17.4
	2012	47	38	65	23		
	Drop outs	6	2	5	7		
Koitabut	2011	45	46	43	46	11	9.6
	2012	46	49	40	38		
	Drop outs	-	-	3	8		
Kapkures mixed	2011	119	97	127	103	47	40.9
	2012	116	95	91	97		
	Drop outs	3	2	36	6		
AIC Bonjoge Boys	2011	60	57	55	50	13	11.3
	2012	50	57	58	50		
	Drop outs	10	-	3	-		
Total No. of drop outs		20	22	51	22	115	

Source: Nandi South District Education Report, 2013 (p. 25-28)

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in Aldai Constituency, Nandi County, targeting public secondary schools. Principals, deputy principals, senior teachers, teachers and students were involved. Principals, deputy principals, and senior teachers were involved because they are equipped with the knowledge and the skills that support the administrative strategies which can be used to improve educational outcomes. Responses from teachers and students were used to ascertain the information given by the school administrators. Aldai Constituency was targeted because hardly have studies on administrative strategies have been conducted in this area. Public secondary schools were targeted because the government funds them through the free secondary school funds.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a descriptive survey design. This is because the design allows for the collection of both the qualitative and quantitative data. Through the qualitative approach the feelings of the respondents are captured. It also gives room for the data to be transcribed from the interview in order to get the meaning or give the picture of the whole thing. The descriptive survey design is also used because the respondents were in a position to describe the members of the population and give a report about the state of the variables (Ogoti, 2010).

The target population for the study was 1641 respondents: 31 principals, 31 deputies, all the 31 senior teachers, 87 teachers and the form three students whose population is 1,473 in all public secondary schools in Aldai Constituency, Nandi County. The principals, the deputies and senior teachers were the main respondents for the study because they formed the administrative structure of the school and therefore had facts that were relevant to the study problem. Therefore, the author's sample consisted of 10 public secondary schools which were selected using random sampling technique. The basis of stratification was school type. The study sourced data from 10 principals, 10 deputy principals and 10 senior teachers of the selected schools. Twenty-six (26) class teachers were randomly sampled from the selected schools.

The data collection tools used in the study were questionnaire, interview schedule and document analysis. The interview guide provided in-depth information that was not captured in the questionnaire document analysis validated information provided by the two instruments. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this study. Qualitative data was analyzed descriptively by computing frequency counts, percentages and measures of central tendency. Multi-linear regression analysis was computed to establish the most ideal administrative strategy that could be employed to ensure maximum students' retention.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Information on administrative strategies was solicited from school administrators (principals, deputy principals and senior teachers). The study identified four main strategies that were commonly employed by school administrators in public secondary schools.

Of the 30 sampled administrators, 22(73.3%) of them indicated that they employed strategies that enhanced free communication in their administrative duties, 11(36.7%) employed strategies of enhancing school culture, 21(70%) embraced facilitation of provision of bursaries and grants to the needy students while 14(46.7%) employed strategies that enhanced level of school motivation. Figure 1 below illustrates these findings.

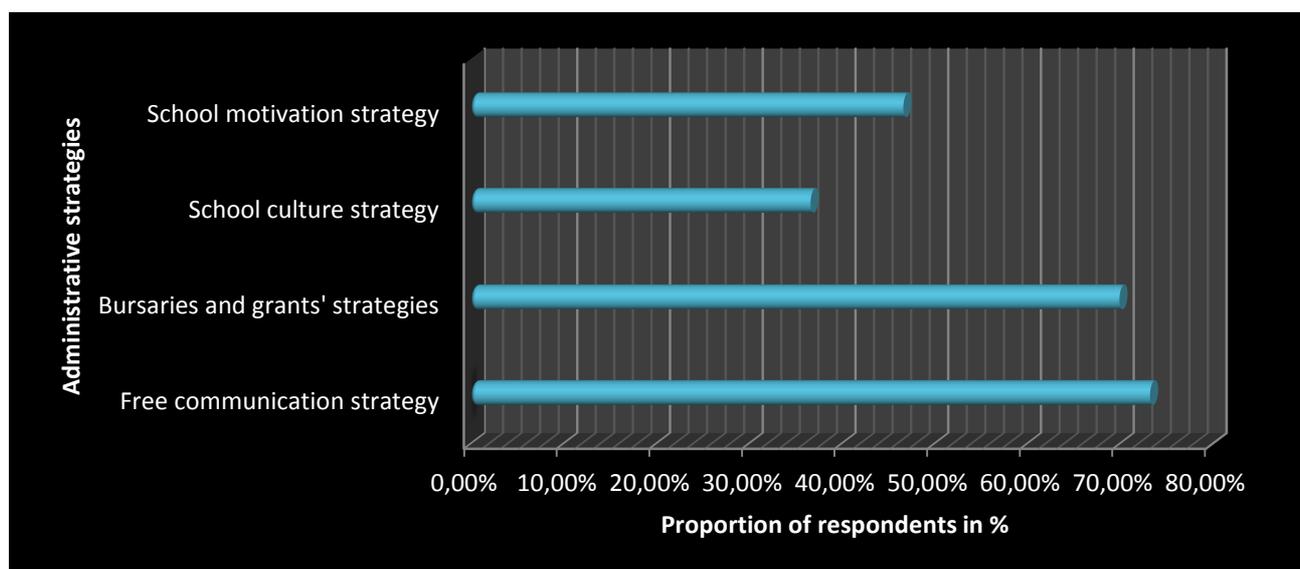


Figure 1: Administrative strategies employed by principals

Source: Field data, 2014

Communication strategy was the most commonly employed administrative strategy. According to Joey (2013), communication is essential if a school administrator is to be successful in creating and maintaining a healthy learning environment and that putting both verbal and non-verbal communication skills into practice can greatly improve a school's organizational flow, which in turn provides secure boundaries for students' academic performance and positive reinforcement. In line with this claim, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) has investigated the effect of parent and teacher communication in elementary schools in America. The target population was parents, teachers and students. The findings of his study showed that when teachers and parent dialogue, they develop trust and a mutuality of concern and appreciation of contrasting perspectives amongst teachers, parents and students.

CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN THEIR USE OF VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES TO ENSURE RETENTION OF STUDENTS

The study identified three main categories of challenges that secondary school administrators faced in their struggle to retain students. These were categorized into: social challenges, school challenges and home challenges. Social challenges involved negative students' peer pressure; lack of academic resilience; lack of academic focus and hence inadequate visionary studies' techniques, and lack of role models.

School challenges comprised inadequate physical facilities and resources to cater for the needs of vulnerable students; inadequate staff, and lack of co-operation from the teaching staff. Finally, home challenges comprised inadequate parents' cooperation on matters pertaining to education of their children; lack of parental support for girl education and poverty.

4 CONCLUSION

The study identified four main strategies that are commonly employed by secondary school administrators in Aldai Constituency. These strategies are geared towards ensuring students' retention. These administrative strategies are: free communication, provision of bursaries and grants, enhancement of school culture and raising the school motivation level. Of these strategies, free communication was highly preferred by most secondary school administrators followed closely by the provision of bursaries and grants. Raising level of school motivation and enhancement of school culture were the least employed administrative strategies in as far as students' retention was concerned.

The study further identified three main categories of challenges that secondary school administrators in Aldai Constituency experienced in their quest to retain students. These categories are grouped into: social challenges, school challenges and home challenges. Social challenges comprised of: negative students' peer pressure; lack of academic resilience; lack of academic focus, and lack of role models. School challenges comprised: inadequate physical facilities to cater for the needs of vulnerable students; inadequate teaching staff to provide personalized student attention, and inadequate corporation from the teaching staff. Finally, home challenges consisted of: inadequate parents' cooperation on matters pertaining to education of their children; lack of parental support for government education, and poverty which hampers parents/guardians from providing essential needs to their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study it is recommended that free and open-door communication strategy should be reinforced in all secondary schools as an administrative strategy. This is because this strategy allows students to feel free and be at ease to share with their teachers, issues that would otherwise be challenging on their own. Any drop-out plans by students are thwarted before they are actually executed. In addition, the government should increase the budgetary allocations for school fees bursaries and grants, particularly for students in vulnerable regions. Sufficient funds should be set aside for students from humble backgrounds to ensure that such students successfully complete their education.

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