

Challenges Facing Leadership and Management of Church Sponsored Secondary Schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The Kenya's Education Act 1968 and revised 1980 makes provision for the appointment of sponsors in school management and empowers them to participate in the management of schools or colleges that they sponsor. However, in recent years, the leadership of these schools has faced a numerous of challenges that threaten to undermine their effectiveness and sustainability. This paper reports on the findings of a study conducted in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya on the challenges facing leadership and management of church sponsored secondary schools. The question that underpinned this research survey was; what would you consider being the most serious problems with the sponsor? The study utilized a survey design which comprised 81 principals drawn from 81 secondary schools. The schools were purposively sampled. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires, both open and closed-ended and was analyzed using Statistical package for social sciences resulting in descriptive statistics and were expressed as percentages. The study findings report that some schools blamed sponsors on a number of areas: undue interference with the running of the schools, harassment and intimidation of the principals and also promoting unnecessary transfer of school principals. SDA church and Catholic Church were associated with the issues of intimidation and harassment, undue inference and unnecessary transfers of principals. The study concluded that conflictual relationship between the sponsors and principals undermine positive outcomes of the teaching and learning process. To address these issues, it is recommended that a formalized and transparent framework for the roles and responsibilities of sponsors in school management be established. This framework should be developed collaboratively by the Ministry of Education, representatives from church sponsors, and school leadership.

Keywords: Challenges, leadership, management, church sponsored schools

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Introduction

The role of the church or religious organisations in the provision of education at various levels internationally has been widely documented (Marshall, 2018; Watson, 2010; Nzwili, 2011; Kombo and Gogo, 2004; McNamara & Norman, 2010; Ball & Troyna, 1987; Chadwick, 2012; Donnelly, 2000; Hughes, 2011; Pike & Telhaj, 2008; Arthur, 1993; Francis and Lankshear, 1990, 2001; Wright, 1992; Morris, 2009; Johnson, 2003; Longman & Anderson, 2018). Lovat et al. (2010) report on the positive effects on student learning and well-being in faith schools. In the UK, the Church of England has played a crucial role in the establishment of national network of schools in England and Wales since long before the 1870 Education Act which outlined the mechanism for building non-denominational schools. The Church of England's success is attributable to the National Society which was founded in 1811 (Francis and Lankshear, 1990). Also, Watson (2010) observes that "in nearly every society, before the state began to take responsibility for educational provision during the past century and a half the earliest form of schooling was religious". Watson (2010) further notes that "most modern education systems have been shaped by the interaction between religion (included here are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism as well as Christianity) and the State". For instance, in Italy, Spain and Latin America, Christianity has significantly influenced the shaping of school and university system, while in Saudi Arabia and Iran Islam has influenced schools (Watson, 2010). In Thailand though largely a Buddhist country religious schools exist alongside state one. This was possible through the influence of the King who is a defender of all faiths (Watson, 2010). It is therefore clear from the foregoing illustrations that the Church or religious organisations have not only played a crucial role in the provision of education but a leading role also. Further review of literature reveals that the Church or religious organisation involvement in the provision of education has resulted in dual systems of education, i.e. church/faith schools and state schools. For instance, in

the Netherlands about 69 per cent of primary schools and 73 per cent of secondary school pupils attend privately constituted schools that are funded by the state (Walford, 1995). The Dutch faith-based schools are supported by the state the same way as the state schools and that two-thirds of all primary and secondary pupils are taught within private, a very important feature of the Dutch education system (Walford, 1995).

The Dutch arrangement of funding is a long standing one dating back to 1917 (Walford, 1995). It is also important to highlight that within the Dutch system, any group of parents or citizens may propose the establishment of a private school which if certain criteria are met, will receive state funding (Walford, 1995). The vast majority of these schools are of religious foundation (Walford, 1995). Another important point to underscore about the Netherlands system of education is that there are state schools organised by the state municipalities, Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian schools, Islam, Hindu and Jewish schools. Besides, there are several private – secular schools which promote particular educational philosophies such as Montessori, Dalton, Jeneplan and Freinet Schools (Walford, 1995). Dual and state funded system of education are not limited to the Netherlands alone, but also exist in a number of other countries, for instance, in Denmark any 28 parents can form a private religious school at the expense of the government; the Germany federal government also encourages the establishment of private religious schools and makes financial support for certain recurrent costs. A similar system prevails in Belgium (Watson, 2010). Also in the Republic of Ireland over 300 out of 3200 primary schools and 450 out of 720 second level schools are owned and managed by Catholic Church but fully funded by the state (McNamara & Norman, 2010). The rest of the schools are owned and managed by the state and other minority Churches (McNamara & Norman, 2010). The Church schools in the English system have benefited from a long history of state funding (Johnson et al., 2000).

Prior to the coming of the European missionaries, indigenous and/or informal education system existed in the Kenyan societies (Makori, 2005; Purity, 2019; Dosunmu, 1984) whose purpose was to transmit traditional values, customs, specific skills and knowledge from one generation to the next as well as socialising children through their communities (Makori, 2005). Indigenous education system had neither classrooms nor specialised teachers and thus members of the community were involved in the education of the children (Makori, 2005). Critics claim that the coming of the western education system either destroyed or diluted the indigenous education system (Mackenzie, 1993; Makori, 2005). It is observed that “western formal education came at the expense of African indigenous education which quickly faced the risk of becoming corrupted or extinct”. Formal and western type of education was introduced in Kenya by the missionaries and in collaboration with the colonial administration (Dosunmu, 1984; Kinuthia, 2009). Mabeya and Ndiku’s (2010) and Tan (1997) reports on the nature of partnership observing that the colonial government provided land and financial aid (grant), while the missionaries built new schools, partly financed them, recruited and trained teachers, oversaw the implementation of the curriculum, taught catechism and approved new teaching approaches. Tan (1997) observes further that the Partnership between the missionaries and the colonial government in the provision of education in colonies was anchored on a number of reasons: the financial assistance from the government which allowed the missionaries to expand and strengthen their education system thereby creating a network for religious conversion; lightening the government’s administrative burden; in exchange for qualified graduates from church schools to meet the manpower needs of the colonial administration and the colonial economy; because of the church’s dominant position in the field of education and also allowed the government to maintain a kind of indirect rule on the denominational schools through financial pressure to maintain or improve educational

standards and more especially to ensure that missionaries and their lay colleagues provided education rather than proselytising. In terms of manpower the colonial government, for instance, wanted court messengers or court clerks or people who could read and write, among others (Mackenzie, 1993). Also, in a number of colonies the church and the colonial government shared the workload in the colonial education system through the co-existence of church schools and secular government schools (Tan, 1997). So, they operated a dual system of education provision. In Kenya, this cooperation was strengthened by the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924 (Mabeya and Ndiku, 2010). Consequently, the colonial government let religious initiated schools in the hands of the Church and the clergy became managers (Mabeya and Ndiku, 2010).

The missionaries’ pioneering role in introducing western education in the colonial territories is also supported by Baldwin (2011) who reports that “until the late colonial period the colonial government provided almost no education themselves”. Also “until mid-20th Century opportunities available for western education were provided by missionaries”. Their participation in education was underpinned by the belief that teaching basic literacy was part of their vocation as it was important for converts to read and understand the Bible and for this reason their schools became important in terms of attracting converts (Baldwin, 2011). Also, in mid-nineteenth Century the European Christian missionaries introduced formal teacher education in Kenya (Kafu, 2011). So, it can be argued rightly that the missionaries laid the foundation for the modern education system in Kenya and other former colonial territories. However, it is regrettable that through the influence of the Fraser commission of 1909, the colonial government promoted stratified education policy in schools. The policy provided for discrimination and segregation of pupils on racial lines (Makori, 2005; Mabeya and Ndiku, 2010), such that Europeans, Indians and Asians and as well as Africans had each different curriculum (Makori, 2005). Africans were required to attend technical schools in order to

serve the demands of European elite (Bandi, 2011).

The Education Act 1968 (Revised 1980) also makes reference to sponsor in relation to schools which were previously managed by churches (Republic of Kenya, 1980; Mabeya and Ndiku, 2010). Specifically, the Kenya Education Act Cap 211 (1968) Revised (1980) provides for an agreement to be made between the Ministry of Education and the sponsoring Churches in relations to the rights and responsibilities of the Church sponsor in the management of schools in the country (Mabeya and Ndiku, 2010). The Education Act also empowers the local authority to appoint the former Church school manager as sponsor subject to the community's approval, as mentioned earlier (Republic of Kenya, 1980; Mabeya and Ndiku, 2010).

Regardless public or church/faith-based schools, the role of head teacher is very crucial in the development and effectiveness of a school. It is an area or subject that has attracted much discussion and empirical research (Johnson, 2003). Southworth (1995) as cited in Johnson (2003) observes that headship is not simply a technical matter but it also borders areas such as social, moral and educational beliefs. Nias et al., (1992) as cited in Johnson et al., (2000) note that: "there is a view, that culture of the school starts with the beliefs and values of the head, and then seeks to promote the same values and beliefs in the staff". The values and beliefs that the head teacher is interested in sharing are what Leithwood (1994) as cited in Johnson et al., (2000) describes as: "enduring beliefs about the desirability of some means and once internalized becomes standard or criteria for guiding one's action and thoughts, for influencing the actions and thoughts of others". Therefore, the headteacher according to Sullivan (1991) as cited in Morris (2000) is expected to be the prime agent articulating, embodying and implementing the school's mission and ethos. However, Johnson (2003) observes that the role of the head teacher has changed such that: Once the headteacher was regarded as leading profession and leading by personal example is now a proactive manager, who builds a positive,

achieving whole school culture that permeates the classroom and supports the teaching and learning going on with it. Consequently, the head teacher has become more answerable to and accountable to what Balls (1994) as cited in Johnson (2003) describes as 'new audiences' comprising governors, central government agencies such as Ofsted and parental demands. The role of the head teacher of a Church/ faith-based school is much more linked to the mission, ethos, aims, Church identity and expectations.

Headteachers in a study made it clear that a Catholic school is fully part of the Catholic Church (Johnson, 2003). It can therefore be argued that a church/ faith-based headteacher has a dual role in the school that of ensuring that pupils or students achieve academically and spiritually. However, conflicts and tensions between the Church leadership and head teachers have been reported, for instance, a study involving head teachers and governors drawn from Oxfordshire in the UK reveal conflictual relationship between head teachers and parish priests which tended to produce specific disagreements (Arthur, 1993). In one school, for instance, there had been much conflict with two parish priests over the preparation of the first communion and the head teacher had to accommodate the differing views of both priests (Arthur, 1993). There were also tensions linked to parish payment for school repairs. One priest, for instance, refused to contribute the full amount requested on the ground that the school did not have many of his parishioners even when it had a number of non-Catholics from his parish (Arthur, 1993). There were also issues between schools and diocesan schools commission and especially in relationship to capital expenditure. Two head teachers in the study claimed that the diocesan schools commission would appoint architects without consulting the schools' governors (Arthur, 1993). Also, one head teacher in the study strongly objected to the practice of priests meeting as an area committee to advice the archbishop on educational matters (Arthur, 1993). Tan (1997) also reports about Church – State conflict which he describes as 'ideological conflicts'.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research approach in order to understand the extent of the phenomenon. The sample comprised of 81 secondary school principals who were purposely selected from the schools within Uasin Gishu County. The composition of the sample was male (70%, n=56) and female (30%, n=24). Each participant was contacted and provided a written explanation of the main purpose of the research. They were also assured of confidentiality. All those who agreed to participate in the study were asked to sign and return informed consent declaration form. Questionnaires were then delivered to one hundred school principals but

only 81 of them completed and returned questionnaires, representing a response rate of 81%. Each survey questionnaire consisted of 61 items which were closed, open-ended/ free response and rating scale in nature. Quantitative data was coded and analysed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) yielding descriptive data.

Results and discussion

The study reveals significant challenges faced by the leadership and management of church-sponsored secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County. These issues are distributed among various sponsors as illustrated on Tables 1 below.

Table 1: Challenges facing Leadership and Management of Church Sponsored Secondary Schools

Sponsors	Undue Interference	Harassment and Intimidation	Transfers of principals
Seventh Day (SDA) Church	3.7	2.5	4.5
Catholic Church	2.5	2.5	4.8
Church of God (COG)	2.5	0	0
Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG)	2.5	0	0
Lutheran	1.2	0	1.1
African Inland Church (AIC)	0	0	0

Undue interference

Undue interference in the day-to-day operations of schools is a prominent issue, especially in SDA Church-sponsored schools, which reported a mean score of 3.7. This type of interference undermines the autonomy of school principals, making it difficult for them to implement policies and manage the schools effectively. Similar concerns, though to a lesser extent, were reported in schools sponsored by the Catholic Church, Church of God (COG), and Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), with a mean score of 2.5. These findings emphasize the negative impact of such interference on school management. According to Ngware et al. (2006), external interference can lead to conflicts within the school, disrupting the learning environment and lowering morale among staff and students.

Similarly, Otieno (2013) emphasizes that the autonomy of school leaders is crucial for the successful implementation of school programs and policies.

Harassment and intimidation

Harassment and intimidation of school principals were also significant issues, particularly in SDA and Catholic Church-sponsored schools, each with a mean score of 2.5. Such behavior not only affects the well-being and professional integrity of the principals but also hampers their ability to lead effectively. As highlighted by Oduro and MacBeath (2003), harassment and intimidation can create a hostile work environment, leading to high turnover rates among school leaders and a consequent lack of continuity in school management.

Unnecessary transfers of principals

The practice of unnecessary transfers of school principals is most pronounced in SDA and Catholic Church-sponsored schools, with mean scores of 4.5 and 4.8, respectively. Frequent transfers disrupt the continuity of leadership and negatively affect the implementation of long-term strategic plans. This finding aligns with the work of Bush and Oduro (2006), who argue that stable leadership is essential for the sustained improvement of school performance. In contrast, frequent changes in leadership can lead to a lack of consistency in the management approach, adversely affecting school outcomes.

Distribution of challenges among various sponsors

The study shows that these challenges are unevenly distributed among different church sponsors. For instance, while the SDA and Catholic Churches are significantly associated with all three issues (undue interference, harassment, and unnecessary transfers), other sponsors such as the Church of God (COG), Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), Lutheran Church, and African Inland Church (AIC) exhibit fewer problems in these areas. This disparity suggests that some church sponsors may have more effective governance structures and better relationships with school leaders. For example, schools sponsored by the AIC reported no issues in any of the three categories. This could be attributed to better-defined roles and a more collaborative approach to school management. Research by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) supports the idea that clear governance structures and positive relationships between sponsors and school leaders are critical for effective school management.

Study findings further reveal a much-polarised relationship between the principals and sponsors characterised by undue interference with the day today running of the school by the sponsor; the sponsor influencing unnecessary transfer of head teachers or principals, and harassment and intimidation of principals by sponsors. Undue interference, unnecessary interference, harassment and intimidation,

among others by the sponsors are both unhealthy and unprofessional and may result in conflicts and tensions. All this undermines effective education provision. Issues with the sponsor are attributable to lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities. Onderi and Makori (2013) observe that lack definitions of roles and responsibilities often result in tensions and conflicts, which in turn undermine the smooth running of institutions. Depending on the degree of the issues identified, they may seriously or negatively undermine the effectiveness of NSPs as partners in the provision of education. While there is a strong case for NSPs and their role in education, the relationships between the sponsors and principals have been identified in the study as problematic and may undermine their contribution towards education.

Conclusion and recommendation

It is clear in this article that the church/ faith-based organisations continue to be the key constituents in the provision of education in Kenya and other parts of the world. However, conflictual relationship between the sponsors and principals undermines positive outcomes of the teaching and learning process. SDA church and Catholic Church were associated with the issues of intimidation and harassment, undue interference and unnecessary transfers of principals.

To address this issue, it is recommended that a formalized and transparent framework for the roles and responsibilities of sponsors in school management be established. This framework should be developed collaboratively by the Ministry of Education, representatives from church sponsors, and school leadership. The framework would include clearly delineate the boundaries of authority and involvement for sponsors to prevent undue interference in the daily management of schools. Establish guidelines for fair and transparent processes in the appointment, evaluation, and transfer of school principals, ensuring that such decisions are made based on merit and the best interests of the school community. Also, include conflict

resolution mechanisms to address disputes between sponsors and school principals in a constructive and non-confrontational manner. And finally provide training programs for sponsors and school leaders on effective collaboration and governance practices, promoting mutual understanding and respect for each party's role.

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