Target Setting as a Principal Leadership Strategy to Enhance Academic Achievement of Girls in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Target setting is typically the result of a subjective process in which school leaders/principals combine intellectual capital to establish performance expectations for their students. Target setting is widely used by school leaders to promote success, and it has been shown to improve academic achievement in students. This study looked empirically at target setting as a primary leadership strategy for improving academic achievement. The findings indicated that setting goals would likely improve the academic achievement of girls in secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. Target setting supervision, level of target setting, and importance of target setting all influenced the academic achievement of girls in Bungoma County secondary schools. Among the policy recommendations were that target setting be prioritized in school programs because it has shown to have a positive relationship with academic achievement, and that all aspects of target setting, including its importance, the different levels of target setting, and its goals, be effectively communicated to all relevant stakeholders so that they all own the process and work together to achieve the desired goals.

KEYWORDS: Target Setting, Academic Achievement, Principals, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been a key component of the global development agenda. The current performance of Kenyan secondary schools has sparked numerous heated debates about students' academic achievement (TSC, 2019). With the numerous reforms in the education sector, (Sides & Cuevas, 2020), there have been several developments both within and outside the country focusing on which strategies are best suited to improving academic performance in such institutions. The majority of the discussions have focused on the principal as a key factor in achieving excellent academic results (Mitgang, 2012).

According to the Mitgang (2012), paying attention to the role of the principal has become even more important as the United Nations (US) Department of Education and State Education Agencies embark on transforming the nation's 5000 most troubled schools, a task that depends on the skills and abilities of thousands of current and future school leaders.

According to Bartoletti and Connelly (2013), great schools do not exist in the absence of great leaders; therefore, principals are expected to lead their schools within a framework of collaboration and shared decision-making with their teachers and other staff members.

As per TSC CORT (2015), one of the roles of principals is to develop the institutional plan and ensure that institutional academic targets and objectives are met. Setting goals and objectives is critical to achieving them. It is applicable not only in the educational system, but in all aspects of life. According to Students Learning Objectives (SLOs), targets describe where the teacher expects students to be at the end of the interval of instruction and can be described in terms of absolute numbers, percentages, rubric-levels, or any other assessment ending point(Ride, 2015). A target is not simply a test score; it may be expressed as a score on an assessment, but

that score must represent a level of performance that reflects students' performance on critical content knowledge and skills. When comparing actual to target performance, most organizations only require action when the deviation from standards is significant.

Setting goals has been shown to help academic institutions and schools improve their academic performance. Furthermore, research (Rowe *et al.,* 2017, Sides & Cuevas, 2020; Travers, *et al.,* 2015) has shown that goal setting improves academic performance by increasing self-efficacy, motivation, self-regulation, and goal setting in students. Unclear goal setting impacts negatively on the girl's academic achievement especially when it comes to individual goal setting basing in mind the traditional notion that boys are better than girls in all ways, this shatters their dreams limiting them to set low targets.

Theoretical framework

The goal setting theory served as the foundation for this paper's discussions. Individuals are motivated, according to goal-setting theory, when they behave in ways that move them toward specific goals that they accept and can reasonably expect to achieve (Stone *et al.,* 2009). The achievement of desired results is the primary focus of goal setting. According to RIDE (2015), performance targets should be measurable and rigorous, but also attainable for the time period of instruction. Goals that are specific and challenging serve as more effective motivators in both individual and group performance.

Senge (1990) defines learning organizations as places where people are constantly expanding their capacity to produce the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thought are fostered, where collective aspiration is unleashed, and where people are constantly learning how to learn together. Group members may not always have the best combination of knowledge and skills, and they may require motivation to achieve the overall goal. According to Ugwulashi (2012), achieving group goals necessitates allocating time to individual objectives that are collated into organizational goals, and time management must be implemented, demonstrating that activities leading to goal achievement are realistic. In agreement, Seremet *et al.* (2012) state that strategies that promote the attainment of school goals require a significant investment of resources (both time and money), so schools must be rigorous in their evaluation and selection of school improvement strategies to ensure a wise investment. They also emphasize the importance of principals developing their staff's capacity to implement strategies by

identifying staff needs and providing appropriate development opportunities.

Empirical review

Previous research has been conducted in the areas of goal setting and academic achievement (Hematian *et al.,* 2017; Ireri, 2015; Mayse, 2016; Sides & Cuevas, 2020; Watkins, 2019). Positive academic results were achieved by students who actively participated in setting their own targets/goals, as opposed to those who did not (Sides & Cuevas, 2020; Wacera *et al.,* 2018; Watkins, 2019). Goal setting, on the other hand, was found to have no positive impact on students' motivation and self-efficacy in academic performance.

Overall, the results showed that goal-setting had a positive effect on students' math achievement and academic motivation to read (McMillan, 2019). Another study found that goal-setting tutoring had a significant effect on improving self-directed education and achievement motivation, but had no effect on learners' academic performance (Hematian *et al.,* 2017). Goal setting commitment, report, feedback, required skills and knowledge to accomplish the goal, and resources are among the elements that can effectively affect the success of a specific goal, according to America, Pacific Institute (2014). Teachers' weekly teaching workload, administration of students' classroom assignments, evaluation of students' Continuous Assessment Test (CATs) results, provision of individualized attention to weak students, time of completion of Form Four syllabus, and setting performance targets for KCSE were other factors that were positively related to positive academic achievement among students (Kimani *et al.,* 2013).

The majority of the literature reviewed indicated that goal setting has a significant positive influence on students' academic achievement. It is therefore critical for teachers and school counselors to instill goal-setting skills in students, and for school counselors to improve peer tutoring to assist students in adjusting to the learning environment. According to Ireri (2015), avoidance of goal achievement has a significant negative correlation with academic achievement. As a result, ensuring well-defined targets in schools is critical to ensuring positive academic achievement.

Materials and Methods

The study targeted girls' secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study's primary respondents were school principals, heads of departments (HODs), and school prefects. The study sought to establish the relationship between target setting and the girls' academic achievement in

secondary schools in Bungoma County. Data on various aspects, themes, and indicators was gathered through questionnaires distributed to principals, HODs and school prefects. Specific statements were used, and respondents were asked to rate them on a 5-point Likert scale. The mean and standard deviation from descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussions

Prefect's opinion of who should supervise the target setting

Prefects were asked to provide their level of agreement on who should be responsible for target setting supervision on a 5-point scale. Standard deviation and the mean from descriptive statistics are adopted to analyze the data. The mean or the average is the most used measure of central tendency and its usage in explaining a data set is bounded to ratio and interval level data (Thompson, 2009). In this study the score of 1 was assigned to Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 to not sure, 4 to Agree and 5 to Strongly Agree. The average mean score is 2.5. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on Prefects opinion of who should supervise the target setting

Supervision of target setting	SD		D		NS		A		SA		Mean	Std.
	n	%	N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%		
The teachers	2	2%	3	3%	3	3%	48	55%	32	36%	4.193	0.75
The principal	3	3%	6	7%	5	6%	35	40%	39	44%	4.148	0.70
The parents	9	10%	31	35%	4	4%	18	21%	26	30%	2.543	0.15
The class secretaries	29	33%	35	40%	4	5%	12	14%	8	9%	2.261	0.83
The education officials	21	24%	47	53%	2	2%	12	14%	6	7%	2.211	0.56
Valid N (list wise)	**88**											

Key 1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

Table 1 reveals that both the principals and HODs strongly agreed (mean = 4.75) that teachers were the most rightful persons to supervise targets setting that would lead to better academic achievements by the learners. The principals strongly agreed by a mean of 4.65 while the HODs strongly agreed by a mean of 4.85. Since teachers are always in the presence of students then they would provide the best supervision and channel out the right direction to move towards goal achievement. The respondents also strongly agreed (mean = 4.55) that the principals were the most appropriate persons to supervise the set targets setting t by. The principals strongly agreed by a mean of 4.51 while the HODs strongly agreed by a mean of 4.85. Principals are dependent on by the rest of the staff in leading the direction and provision of resources needed for curriculum implementation.

On responding to whether the class secretaries were the appropriate persons to supervise the set targets, principals and HODs agreed with a mean of 3.82 The principals agreed by a mean of 3.52 while the HODs agreed by a mean of 4.12. They could have felt that class secretaries are not only expected be role models in performance but are also entrusted in being the first custodians of the programmed school activities in their classes. Further indicate however, that principals and HODs had different views on parents as the most appropriate supervisors of targets setting. The principals' response was neutral by a mean of 2.89 while the HODs disagreed by a mean of 2.42 on parents being target supervisors. The HODS may have felt that the burden of supervision rests on where are curriculum implementers. The principals' views were also different from HODs on magnitude of agreement on whether education officials were the appropriate supervisors of targets setting in schools. Principals were agreed by a mean of 2.96 while the HODs agreed by a mean of 2.35 on the fact that education officials were the appropriate to supervise learne.rs targets. The responses indicate that the principals and the HODs understand quite well their role entrusted to them as supervisors by MOE and TSC and did not expect much from them on the ground.

Target setting and the girls' academic achievement

On a 5-point scale, principals, HODs, and prefects were asked to rate their level of agreement on target setting in their institutions. In this study, a 1 meant strongly disagree, a 2 meant disagree, a 3 meant not sure, a 4 meant agree, and a 5 meant strongly agree. The Kruskal-Wallis h test was used to examine differences in respondents' opinions. The mean score is 2.5 on average. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

According to the results in table 2, the principals, HODs, and prefects strongly agreed (mean = 4.34) that the best level to set achievable targets was at the school level. The principals strongly agreed by a mean of 4.32, HODs strongly agreed by a mean of 4.25, and prefects strongly agreed by a mean of 4.45.

Descriptive statistics on Principals, HODs and prefects' response on Target setting Level

Table 2. Level of Target setting

Level of target setting	Mean			Weighted mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error
	Prefects	HOD	Principals			
School overall level	4.45	4.25	4.32	4.34	1.253	.123
At departmental level	3.25	3.45	3.12	3.27	1.325	.185
At subject level	3.25	3.24	3.51	3.67	.856	.174
At students individual level	3.44	2.26	2.13	2.61	.954	.147
Valid N (list wise)	**88**	**76**	**17**			

Source: Field Data (2022)

Principals, HODs and class secretaries strongly agreed (mean of 4.34) that the best level to set achievable target was at school level. The principals strongly agreed by a mean of 4.32 while the HODs strongly agreed by a mean of 4.25 and the class secretaries strongly agreed at a mean of 4.45. Basing on these responses the all of them may have felt setting of the overall school mean places them in a position to work as a team.

The principals, Heads of Departments (HODs) and class secretaries' responses agreed by an overall mean of 3.27 that the other level to set achievable target was at the departmental level. The principals agreed by a mean of 3.12, HODs agreed by a mean of 3.45 and class secretaries also agreed at a mean of 3.25. Most of the activities for curriculum implementation are coordinated at the departmental level and this could be the possible reason why they all gave a positive response. The principals, HODs and class secretaries were of agreed by a mean of 3.33 that the other level to set achievable target was at the subject level. The principals' responded by a mean of 3.12 while the HODs agreed by a mean of 3.25 and the class secretaries agreed at a mean of 3.51. Individual subjects if well supervised would also immensely contribute to departmental targeted mean scores.

The principals disagreed by a mean of 2.13, the HODs agreed by a low mean of 2.26 while class secretaries agreed a mean of 3.44 on setting targets at individual level. A study conducted on the effect of goal setting for motivation, self-efficacy and performance in elementary mathematics by Sides and Cuevas (2020) revealed that students who were actively involved in setting their own targets/goals performed better/ showed an increase in their math's performance as opposed to those who did not.

Importance of setting targets and the girls' academic achievement
On a 5-point scale, principals, heads of departments, and prefects were asked to rate the importance of setting goals in their institutions. In this study, a 1 meant strongly disagree, a 2 meant disagree, a 3 meant not sure, a 4 meant agree, and a 5 meant strongly agree.

Table 3: Importance of setting targets

Statement on importance of setting targets In their school in relation to KCSE performance	Mean		Weighted mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error
	HOD	Principals			
Setting of targets is a great motivation to both students and teachers	4.85	4.65	4.75	1.264	.154
Target setting provides clarity to the teachers on what is expected of them	4.58	4.51	4.55	.854	.136
Setting targets help teachers improve on their teaching methodologies	4.12	3.52	3.82	.654	.158
Setting targets gives teachers a sense of direction	2.42	2.89	2.66	1.025	.125
Setting targets brings about unity of purpose in class	2.35	2.86	2.38	1.253	.145
Valid N (list wise)	**76**	**17**			

Source: Field Data (2022)

All respondents strongly agreed that setting of targets is a great motivation to both students and teachers at a mean of 4.75. Principals strongly agreed by a mean of 4.65, HODs strongly agreed by a mean of 4.85. McMillan (2019) who carried out a research on the effects of goal-setting as a strategy on student motivation and academic achievement found out that goal-setting had a positive effect on the students' math's achievement and academics motivation towards their reading nature. The respondents also strongly agreed that target setting provides clarity

to the teachers on what is expected of them at a mean 4.55. The principals strongly agreed by a mean of 4.51 while HODs at a mean of 4.58. They could have felt it provides a road map for tangling of activities at hand in order to achieve academic excellence of the female students. Both respondents also agreed that setting targets help teachers improve on their teaching methodologies at a mean of 3.82. The principals agreed by a mean of 3.52 and the HODs agreed by a mean of 4.12. TSC- Kenya (2019) asserts that a teacher is not only required to demonstrates use of different instructional methods during lesson delivery but also identify professional gaps (TSC- Kenya, 2019) of which intervention is could be sort through workshops. KNEC and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) syllabus gives a teacher direction in preparing schemes of work and lesson notes.

The respondents also agreed that setting targets gives their teachers a sense of direction (mean 2.66). The principals agreed by a mean of 2.89 and the HODs agreed by a mean of 2.42. The processes involved in the actual sense gives teachers a way forward on how to achieve set targets. Finally respondents further agreed that setting targets brings about unity of purpose in class (mean 2.38). The principals agreed by a mean of 2.89 while HODs by a mean of 2.46. Since all stake holders work toward set goals, then it should follow that target setting brings is likely to bring unity in class.

Spearman correlation of target setting and the girls' academic achievement
In order to establish the relationship between target setting and the girls' academic achievement in secondary schools, spearman correlation analysis was used to find out if there existed a relationship. A correlation is a number between -1 and +1 that measures the degree of relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient value (r) that ranges from 0.10 to 0.29 would be considered weak, from 0.30 to 0.49 would be considered medium and from 0.50 to 1.0 would be considered strong. Therefore, a positive value for the correlation would imply a positive relationship and a negative value for the correlation would imply an inverse or negative association. The study findings are shown on table 4.

Spearman correlation of target setting and the girls' academic achievement
A correlation is a number between -1 and +1 that indicates how closely two variables are related. Correlation coefficient values (r) ranging from 0.10 to 0.29 are considered weak, 0.30 to 0.49 are considered medium, and 0.50 to 1.0 are considered strong. As a result, a positive correlation value implies a positive relationship, whereas a negative correlation value implies an inverse or negative association. Table 4 displays the study's findings.

Table 4: Spearman correlation of target setting and the girls' academic achievement in secondary schools

		1	2	3	4
1. Girls' academic achievement in secondary schools.	Spearman Correlation	1	.712**	.568**	.763**
	Sig.		.000	.032	.000
2. Target setting supervision	Spearman Correlation	.712**	1	.652*	.652*
	Sig.	.000		.000	.009
3. Level of target setting	Spearman Correlation	.568**	.652*	1	.785**
	Sig.	.032	.000	.042	.000
4. Importance of setting targets	Spearman Correlation	.763**	.652*	.785**	1
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)					
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)					

According to the correlation matrix in Table 4, there is a positive link between goal setting and girls' academic achievement in secondary schools. The correlations ranged from 0.568 to 0.763, with a p-value of 0.001. Effective setting of goals is likely to improve the girls' academic performance in secondary schools. The Spearman correlation index obtained on the relationship between target setting supervision and girls' academic achievement in secondary schools is r= 0.712, which is positive with a p-value 0.0001 less than alpha = 0.05. The second variable effective level of target setting was also correlated with girls' academic achievement (r =0.568, =0.032). The third variable, 'Importance of setting goals,' was found to be related to girls' academic achievement at (r =0.763, 0.0001) at = 0.05. This reveals that goal setting as a principals' leadership strategy is likely to improve the girls' academic performance.

Conclusions

This paper investigated target setting as a leadership strategy for improving academic achievement of girls in Kenyan secondary schools. The null hypothesis, which stated that H_{01}: "*There is no significant statistical relationship between principals' leadership strategy on target setting and the girls' academic achievement in Bungoma County secondary schools'* was tested*. The correlation was 0.568-0.763, with a p-value<0.001 indicating that target setting is likely to improve the academic achievement of girls in secondary schools. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis accepted; "*There is a significant statistical relationship between principals' leadership strategy on target setting and the girls' academic achievement in Bungoma County secondary schools.*

Recommendations

➤ Targets set at whatever level should be communicated to all stakeholders for the purpose of working as a team.

➤ Targets should be set at the appropriate time, and the resources required for their implementation should be made available on time to ensure the smooth operation of the activities involved.

➤ Ministry of Education and TSC to combine efforts and organize workshop on target setting since it has a positive correlation with girls' academic performance.

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Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare no competing interest.

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