



Head Teachers' Leadership Competencies on School Management in Public Primary School: A Case of Ilemela District – Tanzania

Eliana Rutemelwa¹ & Demetria Gerold Mkulu² & Daniel O. Onyango³

^{1,2,3} School of Education, St Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania

Correspondence: Eliana Rutemelwa, School of Education, St Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania

Email: elianarutemelwa@gmail.com

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Abstract

The study aimed at examining the effects of school head teachers' leadership competencies on school management in public primary schools in Ilemela District. The study has motivated by Katz Theory of Managerial Skills which was developed by Robert Katz in 1974. This study intended to assess the factors that hinder school head teachers from using leadership competence in public primary. The study employed mixed research approach whereby convergent parallel design was used. Furthermore, the study used 104 respondents and data were collected through interview guide and questionnaire. The study considered all aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Apart from that, the researcher used sampling techniques which were purposive, simple random and stratified sampling. Qualitative data were analysed and presented through thematic analysis while quantitative data were presented by using tables and charts. The findings revealed that public primary school head teachers' leadership competencies employed in managing schools in Ilemela District were human relations and conceptual competencies. Additionally, the findings showed that head teachers had not been able to use technical competencies effectively in order to motivate teachers and assist them to improve their content knowledge and pedagogical skills. However, in order to improve their ability head teachers should be given training on managing schools, provision of seminars and workshops from time to time in order to sharpen their ability in managing schools. The study recommended that, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should find strategies of improving the course on educational management and leadership to ensure that students complete their diploma and degrees in education with enough competencies on school management.

Keywords: Head Teachers, Leadership, Competence, Public Primary School

Introduction

Leadership competence is a way of meeting school development goals for

provision of quality education (Koskei et al., 2020). Historically, leadership competencies evolved during the industrial revolution. From that time, leadership competencies developed through the critical age in the 1970s where they influenced heavy industrial adventure in the United States and other developed countries in Europe (Abari-Ibolya & Barath, 2010; Giles, 2016). In the United States and other developed countries, leadership competencies have been of great value for decades now due to their importance in influencing workers' behaviour positively.

In Germany, responsibility of leading schools is given to teachers with enough experience in teaching. Teachers who aspire to be heads of schools are required to apply for the positions and get appointed by the ministry of education after vetting. The applicants are supposed to have some form of management experience or qualification through either training on programmes designed to prepare teachers for school leadership or through their jobs (Tulowitzki, 2015). In Philippines, the actions of current heads of schools are required to improve teaching and learning. Gulcan (2012) as cited in Vicera and Maico (2023) lists the characteristics of effective leaders as identifying and communicating the school mission and vision, maintaining the school environment to make it conducive to learning, promoting professional development of staff, monitoring teachers' instruction, maintaining a positive school climate, and initiating the organizational change. These are reflections of head teachers' leadership competencies which contribute to effective school management.

Leadership competency is "the ability to act as a role model for the team, being reliable and have the capacity to solve problems and take important decisions" (Robescu, 2020 p. 221). In relation to school leadership, heads of schools' leadership competencies involve skills and attributes an individual or school head possesses for him or her to be considered as a good leader. According to literature, leadership competencies are crucial for implementation of leadership roles. As such, heads of schools' leadership competencies are a way of providing quality education for all (Koskei, 2020). Quality education is in most cases revealed by learners' improved performance on what they are taught and this is the outcome of effective school management.

In Tanzania, leadership competencies are of great value just like in other developed countries. Programmes for developing leadership competencies are needed to equip head teachers with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to manage and lead schools (Sabimbona, 2010). One of the policy activities in improving the quality of primary school education is considering head teacher preparation in leadership as a condition for appointing them and establishing their continuous professional development programme as vital leaders of quality improvement in their schools (EdQual Tanzania Policy Brief, 2010). This regards heads of school leadership competences as a prerequisite in the managerial performance of schools including provision of quality education.

Additionally, the Tanzania Education and Training Policy of 2014 recognizes the importance of heads of schools in order to execute managerial activities effectively

including the provision of quality education. Due to this importance, the government through the Local Government Authorities and Agency for Development of Education Management (ADEM) builds capacity of head teachers in order to enable them effectively support, manage and use teachers adequately in the implementation of curriculum (John & Mkulu, 2020; MoEST, 2020).

Nevertheless, many heads of schools do not possess necessary leadership skills because of missing seminars and workshops in leadership and management. As a result, they promote teachers without essential leadership skills or seminars and workshops in that field (Kuluchumila, 2014). Tanzania faces an extreme deficiency of preparing and developing heads of schools like other African countries. The condition seems to be worse in many newly established schools particularly those constructed by the community. Majority of the heads of schools promoted to newly established schools lack both experience and training in educational leadership and therefore most of them depend mainly on intuition and rule of thumb in decision making in various matters arising at their respective schools (Kuluchumila, 2018).

Furthermore, current studies concerning the provision of quality education and development of school leadership in Tanzania is obscure. Last studies on education seem not to have impact on practice in a way that can help to improve school management in Tanzanian schools (Sabimbona, 2010). This concurs with a study conducted by EdQual Tanzania Policy Brief (2010) in Tanga where they found that in some of the schools, heads of schools had no ability of bringing change. This situation still exists in majority of the public primary schools in Tanzania today including those of Ilemela district. Not much has been done by the government to develop heads of school leadership competencies despite the fact that majority of them in the district are either diploma or degree holders (Ilemela District Council Report, 2022). Majority of these heads of schools have no training on leadership skills and competencies but they are appointed to the position based on the education level, experience and ability to execute managerial activities. This might be a reason for ineffective management such as teaching without thorough preparations and teaching aids, presence of some sorts of teacher absenteeism in schools leading inadequate performance of teachers, pupils' truancy and unsatisfactory learning (TAMISEMI, 2022). It is because of such deficiencies that the researchers decided to venture on this study about the effects of head teachers' leadership competencies on school management in public primary schools in Ilemela District in order to improve the situation.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership competencies are vital aspects for effective school management which then result into effective teaching and learning. The most important function of an institution on the effectiveness of its leadership is in creating a pleasant environment for

teaching and in providing students with quality education they deserve (Catchillar, 2015). School heads leadership competencies relate positively to the effective school management and leads to positive school climate where teachers are motivated to work and foster, as a result, teaching and learning. However, in Tanzania and Ilemela District in particular, weak leadership persists among head teachers and teachers resulting to poor management and supervision of learning programmes and activities and as a consequence leads to poor performance (MoEVT, 2010) as cited in John and Mkulu, (2020). Again, in Tanzania, particularly Ilemela district, little is known about heads of school leadership competencies despite its importance in school management for improved performance. It is because of this inappropriate management of schools which lead to unsatisfactory performance of pupils and the obscurity of knowledge about head teachers' leadership competencies in public primary schools that the researcher intends to conduct this study.

Study Objective

This study aimed at examining the public primary school head teachers' leadership competencies employed in managing schools in Ilemela District.

Literature Review

Competencies are important skills needed for doing a job (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2008) as cited in Vincent (2012). According to literature, there are three categories of potential competencies for leadership; technical competencies, human relations competencies and conceptual skills (Akpan, 2016).

Technical competencies or skills are crucial competencies for leadership. They involve an understanding of specified activities including the application of tools, techniques, methods, procedures and processes of a specific discipline (Locke, 2010) as cited in Gamala and Marpa (2022). Head teachers should have the technical skills including knowledge and understanding of the subjects taught in their schools and the various methods and techniques of teaching. In addition to knowledge on how to teach, for head teachers to succeed in running their schools as academic units, they must also have knowledge of how to organize the group, how to acquire resources, and how to evaluate performance (Gamala and Marpa, 2022). The head teacher, should be such innovative and creative that the subject content and pedagogical skills he/she possesses must be used for training the teaching staff in respect to all affairs concerning teaching and learning in order to enhance their teaching skills (Godvin et al., 2019) as cited in Laghari et al., (2021).

Technical skills can also be used to provide motivation and encouragement to teachers for the efforts they indicate. Godvin et al (2019) as cited in Laghari et al. (2021) unveils that a manager with enough managerial skills should provide motivation to his

teachers for employing all their creative skills for the benefit of the institution. The technical skills used for managing classrooms and interpersonal skills employed for counselling and motivating teachers can lead to better results of an institution. The head teacher with effective skills for enabling him/her to play a role of a motivator, facilitator, provider of encouragement and support for attainment of the school mission, vision and goals (Malik, 2020) as cited in Laghari et al., (2021) results to improved pupils' performance as a reflection of effective school management.

Among teachers, motivation can be developed using human relations or interpersonal skills and encouraged using rewards and appreciation or pecuniary and non-pecuniary rewards. Various studies and evaluated reports have connected the creativity of workers with the number of resources managed. Head teachers as educational managers have applied rewards for individuals to show the differences in the performance, in what the head teacher is considered important (Laghari, 2021). Human relations competencies involve the ability to work with others cooperatively, creating motivation, communicating effectively, resolving conflicts and encouraging teamwork (Akpan, 2016; Gamala and Marpa, 2022).

In Nigeria, effective communication increases the involvement and commitment of staff in the institution for a better result. The success or failure of education as an instrument for national development depends upon the communication skills used in management (Manafa, 2018). This implies that if the school leadership does not use communication effectively, the success of the school gets reduced or fails and vice versa. The act of using communication skills poorly in secondary schools is a problem that results to the decline in the standard of education and poor quality of educational performances in Nigeria specifically in Anambra State (Manafa, 2018).

In Tanzania, a study conducted by Mwita (2021) reports that effective communication is vital for accomplishing administrative plans and for performing daily fulfilments through people. As such, the head teacher is supposed to use communication skills that enable him/her to send and receive information at the same time from subordinates. This establishes a relationship which facilitates the implementation of the school goals and objectives if communication is effective. However, the communication should be that which builds good relationships among teachers, provides encouragements and enforces teachers to implement their responsibilities in a way which does not humiliate them

Head teachers with skills in human relations have good ability or skills to understand human behaviour and the relationship between one individual person and another, the ability to recognise feelings, attitudes, and behaviours and the motivating power of words, the ability to communicate effectively and clearly, and the ability to create cooperation and effective relationships (Kartz, 1970) as cited in Mukarromah, et al., (2019). Through such ability, leaders can develop the ability to work with others, ability to

understand subordinates and other workers in an organization or institution, and ability to motivate workers whether individually or in groups (Stoner and Freeman, 1992) as cited in Mukarromah (2019). This needs the head teachers to place himself or herself in a work group of his or her teachers as one of them and communicate any necessary important information clearly to them (Mukarromah, 2019).

Sustina (1993) as cited in Mukarromah (2019) notes that human relations competencies if well used enhances the capabilities of the components within the school through the head teacher's work of establishing good communication between the school management and teachers and between the school and the community around and thus creating a comfortable working environment for teachers. Human relations competencies are realised in most cases through communication. Poor principals' communication skills may be one of the reasons for many teachers to feel that they are not part of the school system due to their principal's communication pattern which most of the time excludes them from the daily activities concerned with running the school (Oyebanji, 2019). This always caused poor teachers' job performance and ineffectiveness of the whole school system as a consequence.

In general, human relations competencies can put teachers together, working in unison (Catchillar, 2015) and with good professional relationship between the head teacher and teachers resulting to efficiency and effective teaching and learning (Aquino, 2021) as a reflection of good school management. Through human competencies, teachers can be enabled to work as a team.

However, for the head teacher to establish good relations among people in the school and enable teachers work as a team he or she should be of good morals. A study conducted by Latido and Ching (2021) indicates a strong positive relationship between the work of the school head moral principles to motivation of the teachers. One of the school head moral principles in this study was treating teachers fairly. Head teachers, therefore, as a moral choice, should treat all teachers fairly for them to be motivated to work effectively.

Fullan (1993, 2001) as cited in Ramalepe (2015) views moral principles, he refers to as moral purpose, to be one of the vital components of leadership. He perceives moral purpose as the basis for establishing relationships. For him, in order to challenge one to do better, you should build a relationship first. Ramalepe agrees that there should be fair treatment of people whether students, teachers, parents and the community in general. This means that head teachers should be guided by respect to teachers and other stakeholders and establishing good relationships in order to motivate them to work in cooperation with the head teacher for better achievement of the school goals.

Furthermore, literature mentions other skills, the conceptual skills or competencies as crucial for a leader. These are skills which express the ability of the manager like the head teacher to visualise the school in broader relationships like long term plans for

providing and utilizing school educational resources (Akpan, 2016). These relationships can be within the institution for example the relationship between one subject department and another or out of the institution such as between the school and the society. These kinds of relationships contribute much for the efficiency and effectiveness of the school management. For example, if stakeholders out of the school are involved in the school management they can contribute morally and materially for the development of the school.

Kartz, (1970) as cited in Mukarromah et al. (2019) argues that conceptual skills are abilities to analyse, think logically, ability to shape concepts and conceptualize complex and relationships which are ambiguous, creativity in constructing in ideas and ability to solve problems, analysis of events and feeling trends, hope for change, and to be aware of opportunities and underlying problems “Conceptual skills are the ability to organize thoughts, to understand various theories in their fields, to take action and to see trends based on theoretical abilities needed” (Danim, 2010 p. 73).

With conceptual competencies therefore, the head teacher can solve a lot of problems hindering the school development and performance through his or her creativity, establishment of good relations with stakeholders who can then contribute for the school development and solve problems and conflicts arising from within and outside the school. Therefore, head teachers are supposed to involve stakeholders so that they can participate in the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) (Jaboya, 2018). SBM refers to the decentralization of authority in decision-making to the school level (Muttaqin, 2016). In Tanzania education system, the school leadership is supposed to encourage both external and internal stakeholders to participate in school management in order to enhance the learners' academic performance (Nakiyaga, 2021). Through involvement of stakeholders, school heads become accountable to their constituents in terms of planning together, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluating school interventions (Nakiyaga et al., 2021). This enables stakeholders to participate in providing solutions to problems which hinder the school development for improved performance.

However, in relation to participation of various stakeholders in school activities, Tanzania is one of the countries that face challenges in this area such as school leaders' exclusion of community members in school meetings, long distance between places where schools are located and home, illiteracy level of particular communities due to poor educational background and some community members' beliefs that it is the responsibility of teachers to do all the school activities alone, which makes them not to see the necessity of being involved (Lema & Mwila, 2022). Naidoo and Anton (2013) as cited in Lema and Mwila (2022) provide an emphasis that families and communities are not given the opportunity to participate in school development plans, school budget and decision-making for the attainment of quality education.

Research Methodology

Research Approach: This study used a mixed methods approach in order to achieve its purpose. The mixed methods research approach is the central premise that uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches for a better understanding of research problems in the same study (Creswell & Plano 2007).

Research design: A convergent parallel design was used. A convergent parallel design is a mixed method strategy in which a researcher gathers both quantitative and qualitative data, analyse them separately and then compares the results to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other (Creswell, 2014). The application of this design enabled the researcher to focus on one aspect during the analysis of data before going to the other to confirm the accuracy of the data. The design enables complementarity between quantitative and qualitative data.

Target population: The target population comprised public primary school head teachers, primary school teachers in Ilemela District, Ward Education Officers (WEOs) and the District Primary Education Officer (DPEO), who made a total of 1514 respondents. **Sample size:** From a population of 1514 respondents, a convenient sample of 104 was selected and it was able to provide appropriate information for the study. The study used non-probability sampling (purposive) to select primary schools from which head teachers and teachers were sampled. The criteria for selecting primary schools using purposive sampling was the availability of suitable respondents for providing information for the study. Head teachers, WEOs and the DPEO were selected purposely because of the importance of their information while teachers were selected using probability sampling (stratified and simple random).

Research instruments: Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative data collected from questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive analysis was suitable in this study because it involved descriptions, analysis and interpretation of circumstances existing during the study. Basic statistical techniques including frequencies, percentages and totals were used in analyzing different items of the study. Data collected were analysed according to the nature of the response and then they were coded. After coding, the responses were transferred into a summary sheet by tabulating. This was then tallied to establish frequencies and then converted into percentages. Frequencies and percentages were used because they communicate the study findings to readers easily. A number of tables and charts were used to present data findings. Qualitative data recorded from open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews were analysed using thematic analysis and summarized to get themes using open coding. In recording, analysing and presentation of the findings, names of schools and respondents were not mentioned but such codes as Ht₁ and W₁ were used to observe confidentiality. Mbawala (2017) explains that data analysis is a research process

which includes data ordering for easy use and management for answering the studied question. It is a process which examines data critically, put it into categories depending on their relationships and since this study is a mixed-research, the researcher analysed and summarized data for easy management and use for answering the study questions adhering to this approach. The data findings were presented using a number of tables and charts, narrative forms and quotations.

Validity and Reliability: To determine the validity of the research instruments, the study used the content and face validity while reliability was measured using split-half method.

Ethical Consideration: The researcher adhered to the requirements and directives of ethical considerations. For avoiding plagiarism, acknowledgement/citation of all sources used in this study was done properly with adherence to APA manual 7thed.

Results and Discussion

The study presents the results and discussion thematically in relation to the research objective guiding this study.

Public Primary School Head Teachers' Leadership Competencies Employed in Managing Schools

A sample of 94 teachers were asked to agree or reject the statement that heads of schools encourage teachers to work as a team. Their responses are presented in Figure 1.

Results from figure 1 show that majority of the teacher respondents agreed that head teachers encouraged teachers to work as a team (70.2 percent). Very few respondents, (29.8 percent) rejected the statement that head teachers encouraged teachers to work as a team. The few who rejected head teachers to encourage team presented a surprising response for head teachers not to encourage teamwork. The majority who agreed that head teachers encourage teamwork among teachers added that in mobilising teachers to work as a team, the used such strategies as encouraging and ensuring unity among teachers, treating teachers fairly, providing teachers with motivation, listening to teachers concerns and delegating duties to teachers. This implies that head teachers used human relations competencies to establish relationships among teachers so that they can work as a team.

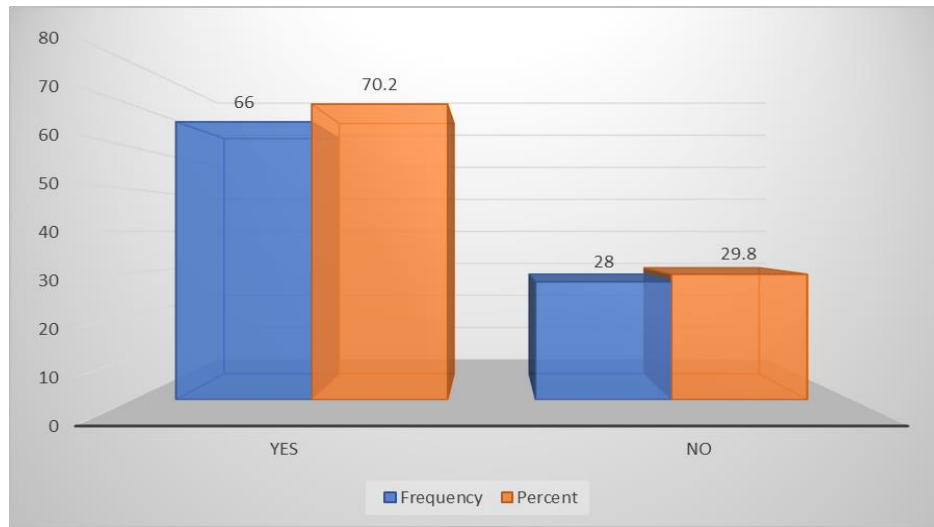


Figure 1: The school head encourages teachers to work as a team (n=94)

Source: Field data 2023

Further, the study sought to identify the strategies employed by head teachers to communicate information to teachers, other staff and students. A sample of 94 teachers were asked to respond to the statements given by putting a tick against a statement on a five point-point rating scale ranging from “1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly Agree”. The statements from which respondents were required to select their responses were listed one after another in the first column of Table 1. Table 1 below shows the statements and responses from the respondents:

Results from Table 1 indicated that respondents agreed the following to be strategies head teachers can use to communicate information to teachers, staff and pupils: the use of appropriate language in communication (72.3 percent); solving problems among teachers (70.2 percent); Head teachers’ fair treatment to all teachers (Agree=53.2 percent) and provision of motivation to teachers (Agree=51). However, 88 percent of the respondents rejected the statement about head teachers’ provision of mentorship on teachers to improve performance.

Table 1: Strategies head teachers use to communicate information to teachers, other staff and pupils (n = 94)

Statements	SD (1)	D (2)	U (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F(%)	F (%)
Use of appropriate language to communicate information 32(34.0)	12(12.8)	14(14.9)	0	0	36(38.3)
Solving problems among teachers	11(11.7)	14(14.9)	3(3.2)	30(31.9)	36(38.3)
Head teachers' fair treatment to all teachers	22(23.4)	15(16.0)	7(7.4)	23(24.5)	27(28.7)
Provision of motivation to teachers	25(26.6)	17(18.1)	4(4.3)	20(21.3)	28(29.7)
Head teachers' mentorship on teachers to improve their performance	43(45.7)	40(42.6)	2(2.1)	6(6.4)	3(3.2)

Source: Field Data 2023

When asked to state their opinions about strategies head teachers use to communicate information to teachers, other staff and pupils, the ten respondents had the following to say during the interview: “majority of head teachers use respectful language whenever they have something to communicate to teachers”, “I respect my fellow teachers and use a good language in communicating information to teachers, other staff and pupils”, “I communicate using a very polite language”, “majority of head teachers in this district solve conflicts in their schools when they arise”, “many head teachers treat teachers in their schools fairly although there are those who treat teachers differently and thus creating groups of those who belong to the head of school and those he/she sees as enemies”, “I sometimes provide motivation to teachers but sometimes not because of the absence of financial resources”, “at my school we used to provide motivation but last year we did not because of the absence of financial resources”, “the problem is time, ...which makes majority of us to miss time to meet with teachers for provision of mentorship or help”, “majority of the head teachers do not implement the responsibility of observing teachers and providing them with mentorship to help them improve.” These agreed with teachers’ responses to the similar question. These responses get support from Katz Theory of Managerial Skills, which guided this study that head teachers as leaders should develop good relationships among teachers, use motivation procedures, communication skills and work with fellow teachers effectively as one of them. For the head teacher to develop relationships among teachers and work with fellow teachers as one of them he or she must

use an appropriate language when communicating with them in matters related to the school (Ahmadi, 2011; Katz, 1991; Katz, 1955; Mirsepassi 1991 and Robbins & Decenzo, 1998) as cited in Peterson and Fleet (2004) and Seyedinejat et al. (2014) and Godvin et al., (2019) as cited in Laghari et al., (2021) who note the head teacher should be such innovative and creative that the subject content and pedagogical skills he/she possesses must be used for training the teaching staff in respect to all affairs concerning teaching and learning in order to enhance their teaching skills. This implies that head teachers do not use technical skills, the skills head teachers could use for providing advice and mentorship to teachers so that they can improve their performance.

Again, the research findings concurred with Manafa (2018) who notes that in the management of schools, effective communication skills are in essence and Catchillar's (2015) unveils that good leadership is all about ensuring unity and cohesions when making decisions up and down the line.

This implies that some of the head teachers use human relations competencies in managing schools and thus enabling teachers to work as a team while some of the head teachers lack human relations competencies. Those who lack human relations competencies divide their staff leading to ineffective school performance. This concurs with Akpan (2016) and Gamala and Marpa (2022) who reports that head teachers should possess other leadership competencies related to human relation skills, competencies which involve the ability to work with others cooperatively including creating motivation, communicating effectively, resolving conflicts and encouraging team work without which performance of the school can lag behind.

Again, this indicates that teachers who treat all teachers fairly show that they use conceptual skills competencies which involve paying respect to teachers and guided by moral principles which enable teachers to work as a team while those who treat some of the teachers unfairly, those who run schools basing on favouritism do not. This agrees with Fullan (1993, 2001) as cited in Ramalepe (2015) who views moral principles, he refers to as moral purpose, to be one of the vital components of leadership. He perceives moral purpose as the basis for establishing relationships. For him, in order to challenge one to do better, you should build a relationship first. This is supported by Ramalepe who agrees that there should be fair treatment of people whether students, teachers, parents and the community in general.

Conclusion

Basing on the findings of this study, it is concluded that public primary school head teachers use various leadership competencies in managing schools in Ilemela District. These leadership competencies are human relations competencies which include communication skills, an understanding on how to motivate fellow teachers,

communicating in a way which encourages teachers, resolving conflicts and working with other teachers effectively and conceptual skills which enable public primary school head teachers to establish good relationship among school subject departments and between schools and stakeholders outside the school such as parents, the community and politicians. These help head teachers to manage schools effectively although motivation to teachers has not been appropriately implemented.

Further, it can be concluded that public primary school head teachers have not been able to use technical competencies effectively. Competencies which involve head teachers use of their knowledge on subject content, methods, processes and techniques of teaching to manage, supervise and provide constructive advice for teachers to improve. Failure of head teachers to use these competences has been a hindrance for teachers to improve their performance.

Recommendations

On the basis of the summary and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that school owners, regional education officers, district education officers should think on how to keep on shaping the managerial abilities of head teachers in order to enable them to manage schools effectively using leadership competencies. School head teachers should improve their managerial abilities by joining various programmes for professional development. This can develop their abilities in school management and thus find themselves in a position to apply leadership competencies effectively in managing their schools.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should improve the course on educational management and leadership to ensure that students complete their diploma and degrees in education with enough competencies on school management. The policy makers, education planners and education managers should think of how to improve the curriculum for diploma and degrees in education to enable teachers to be thoroughly competent in school leadership and management. Policy makers can also think on of how to add training courses, seminars and workshops to be provided to public primary school head teachers in order to improve their ability in using leadership competencies in managing schools.

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