Factors Influencing Secretary's Communication Ability and Efficiency in Secondary Schools in Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract: Most secondary school secretaries do management of school offices. The routine work include, arranging meeting schedules for the principal and managing school correspondences within the secondary schools. All this calls for efficiency and effectiveness in performance and to achieve so, one of the fundamental processes for almost all activities is communication. During duty performance, technologies, trainings, and appropriate communication gadgets increase the efficiency of performance of not only secondary schools staff, but achievement of school mission and plans. The objective was to establish factors that affect secondary schools secretarial staff communication ability and efficiency. The study specifically looked at how technology, school structure and channels of communication affect secretarial staff. The target population was 50 respondents and sample size of 30 secondary schools secretaries. The study used stratified random sampling and randomly picked one secretary per school by survey questionnaire. Results showed that secretarial staffs were all female, majority of them (71%) were at age between 30-55 years and (77%) of them had 6-17 years experience. Training showed that (60%) were at least college level though most of them (87%) were not trained on communication and over half (57%) of them said school needed more communication technological equipment and training for them. Communication challenges were faced by 74% with only 22% using the communication gadgets, and 80% said there were no communication policies in place. On technology, 54% have 1-3 computers in school. It was concluded that there was need to have the necessary skills and equipment for the secretarial staff to perform effectively and efficiently. It was recommended that schools buy communication technology equipment, train secretaries on them, have flexible secondary schools structure to stimulate faster flow of information and develop communication policies to guide the staff in their work.

Key words: Secretary, School, Communication, Ability, Efficiency

1. Introduction

In an office a secretary has to pass on information with purpose, pleasantness in tone which is most important in being understood by the recipient. In secondary schools, up to date information must be available all the time regarding the various aspects of that secondary school. The efficiency and success of a secondary school performance depends mainly on its communication system, structure, and

available tools and equipments of use. Poor communication may result in loss of potential secondary school customers or spoil the good image of that secondary school.

Office communication process involves two or more interacting verbally or otherwise in order to understand each other's feelings, ideas and attitudes. Here speaker and listener try to understand what the other means. Sometimes they are said to be engaged in meaning making. The subject matter may include facts, intends and the purpose of communication is said to make the receiver of communication understand what is in the mind of the sender (Graham & Bennett, 1998). Communication consists of all the processes by which information is transmitted and received. This information must be provided in time to the staff members, the customers and other interested organizations. Communication is a way to provide required information to the concerned person (Saleemi, 2008).

Improper handling of passing on information by secretarial staff in secondary school at times may lead to misunderstanding. Provisions of secondary schools office automation have also led to secretarial staff job comfortability enhancement. Most of the time secretaries are secondary schools office managers and usually team up with their seniors taking the responsibilities once served for managerial and professional staff like executive officers or executive assistants or administrators and at times bursars (Owiro, 1999). In spite of these changes, however, the responsibilities for secretarial staff are to perform coordinating secondary schools office activities like storing, retrieving and integrating information for dissemination to teaching and non-teaching staff, students and clients efficiently and effectively necessitating for this research on their communication ability and efficiency.

2. Literature Review

There are many definitions of communication put forward by different people. Take for instance some put it as processes by which information is transmitted and received. Others just call it an understanding or a change of behavior or response after receiving a signal. Effective communication can be regarded as part of a learning process. Communication is also a way to provide required information to the concerned person, (Saleemi, 2008). The subject matter may include facts, intents and the chief purpose of communication is to make the receiver of a communication understand what is in the mind of the sender.

A secondary school consists of employees, premises, equipment, materials but will not come to life unless communication effectively links all these parts together and coordinate their activities. The decisions of board of management must be made known to employees and some kind of control systems are arranged to ensure that these decisions are acted on. The decisions themselves should be based on flow of information reaching board of management from all parts of the secondary school. In large secondary schools errors and inefficiency can easily occur because an individual or a department has not informed another of its actions or has not been informed. Some disputes originate in a failure of communication misunderstanding or misinterpretation of secondary schools policy. Communication can also profoundly affect the attitudes of the employees and the degree to which they understand and support schools board of management policies. In psychology, communication has an importance which goes beyond the transmission and reception of information (Wright & Noe, 1995).

Most senior teachers in schools have been found to make secretaries to be over worked by giving varied instructions without availing necessary communication tools of work. As has emerged effective communication is important in passing on the information within sub – systems in secondary schools to enhance work efficacy. Many Principals of secondary schools want their secretary's carry on with their duties efficiently and effectively (Eze, 2000) and have tried providing essential office gadgets. What it takes to achieve secondary schools secretary's success and be promoted as an individual, is effort. She/he who gets ahead in work and is able to communicate and make sound decision and get things done with and through people is considered a good communicator. By communicating more effectively, secondary schools secretaries improve their ability to get things done with and through people. Understanding the characteristics of communication barriers will help improve their own communication and solve communication problems with others (Nonye, 2013).

Any factor that impedes the exchange of information between a sender and receiver is a barrier in communication. This study focus on three factors that influence communication roles of secretarial staff in the secondary schools and include: Technology, Organizational structure and Channel. Such barriers are extremely common in everyday life, and they appear in an almost unlimited variety of forms. Whatever their source, barriers to effective communication interfere with the receivers understanding of the intended meaning of the senders message. A good secretary should be able to identify and understand the communication barriers that can occur in different situations. Such understanding will help understand ways of overcoming them thereby assist improve their own communication and solve communication problems with others thereby communicating effectively and efficiently (Buseni, 2013).

2.1 Technology

Office support staff including secretary in secondary schools now is accessing new or upgraded communication equipments thereby up - calling their duty outputs across the universe (Akpomi, 2003; Anyakoha, 2002). The performance results by support staff of secondary school lies on improved equipments at their disposal (Buseni, 2013). For instance in modern secondary schools there has been acceptance of such gadgets and machines enhancing these peoples results at office duties (Agomuo, 2005). The equipment used by these staff includes detectors, sensors computer communication equipment and electronic pocket organizers (Duniya, 2011). These have greatly enhanced the communication role of the secretaries (Akinyemi, 2001). There are varied advantages here for secondary school since diverse conceptions of communication like:

- Different schools head of departments, work effortlessly together through their secretaries' office to reach classroom teachers and students.
- The school can in one way or another communicate with assistance of secretary, through television or video conferencing with clients and such will improve its' performance.
- The bridging of time gap through remote communication to many places at the same time with assistance of secretary's office.

The more secondary schools secretaries use the different technologies the higher possibilities of their work succeeding (Nwosu, 2001). Nowadays people rely on various methods to pass on or share news.

The capacities for exchanging ideas across various media have broadened (Akpomi & Ordu, 2009). Such improvements also have influence on working of secondary schools than ever before and their presence or absence could affect secretaries' performance (Armah, 2015).

2.2 School Structure

A structure is an arrangement of where systems are put in place to facilitate coordination of institutions goals or objectives (Teixeria et al., 2012). In secondary schools, sub- systems assist during allocation of duties for dually achievement of results planned (Porras & Robertson, 1992). The planned arrangement of systems can assist or deter communication engagement. Heracleous and Barret (2001) found that in fewer complexes formal and centralized institutions are affected by sub – systems during flow of messages in up-down types. To correct this, systems must align itself with communication structure for effective performance (Lewis, 2011). Take for example traditional way; school management theory states that; communication generally flows along a path established by hierarchical schools structure (Ezewu, 2006). Thus a school's structure must facilitate this effective flow of communication.

Under ordinary situation, communication moves in vertical opposing direction, (Leavitt, 2005). Take for instance perpendicular communication begins at brim with board of management or principal through to lower staff. Such allows different levels of schools workforce get detailed work duties to execute schools goals and policies. Some organizational structure (e.g. Flat), having few authority lines with a board of management or principal, allow their staff easy access to them having direct communication with virtually all employees promotes a free flow of ideas and information. Some say a clear hierarchy with a direct chain of command limits confusion by knowing exactly who is in charge (Luneburg & Ornstein, 2008). At secondary schools, chain of command structure is followed when passing on instructions to staff so as to meet secondary school rules, goals and objectives.

Other forms of secondary school communication are written communication and face to face communication (Nwaokwa & Okoli, 2012). Face to face communication is a direct communication between two persons. It is in other words a dialogue or a conversation without the intervention of another person or a machine like telephone. Indeed, it is the highest, the most perfect form of communication that two persons can attain. It is more persuasive and influential than any other type of communication such as group communication or mass communication for it involves interplay of words and gestures. In secondary schools, written communication information or messages are communicated internally or externally through written media like letters, circulars memos, reports, minutes, manuals. The settings in large secondary school often make effective communication difficult. One source of this lies in the characteristic of schools structure. Effective communication complements secondary schools secretarial staff effectiveness and efficiency in organization and is a means of achieving schools objectives.

2.3 Channel

Currently most secondary schools secretarial staff works in complex office settings supporting the daily operations of a school using many medium channels of like interpersonal, print and electronic. Most of them are known as face of the secondary school as they will come into contact with a variety of people

and personalities and as such should have great communication skills (Nwanewezi & Akpomi, 2009). They perform a variety of tasks throughout the day for example may support one person in the office or a group of members that are part of the administrative staff. Secondary school secretarial staff needs skills in communication for effective implementation of decisions made by the secondary schools management. This theory has a positive view to the employees and their school heads communicating openly with staff thereby minimizing the difference between heads - staff relationship creating a comfortable environment in which secretarial staff can so develop and use their abilities. The theory has been adopted in this study to explain that the secondary schools need to operate as a system together with its sub - systems to provide quality services within the secondary school and those that they interact with by adopting structures that enhance communication.

3. Research Questions

i. Does technology affect communication ability and efficiency of secretarial staff in secondary school?
ii. Does school structure affect communication ability and efficiency of secretarial staff in secondary school?
iii. Does choice of channel affect communication ability and efficiency of secretarial staff in secondary school?

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Research model

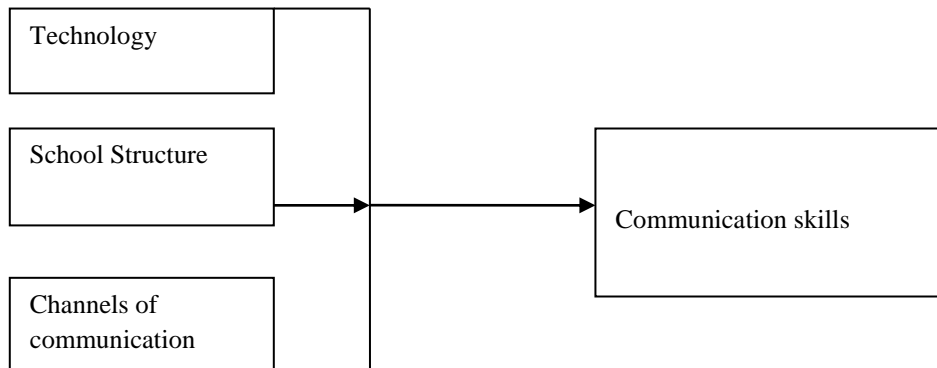Independent Variable   Dependent Variable

Figure 1: the model illustrates factors that may influence communication in a secondary school

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Rationale

Reason or idea of research was eliciting factors that affect secondary schools secretarial staff communication ability and efficiency. It has been shown that lack of good communication due to inappropriate technology, structure and ineffective channels may lead to loss of potential customers and poor image of the institution. Effective communication is an essential component for performance and success in an institution and that of its staff.

4.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The research had a population of 50 secretarial staff in 34 secondary schools. A target sample size of 30 secretarial staff in 10 secondary schools. The study used stratified random sampling, where one secretarial staff was randomly picked from each secondary school from randomly selected area schools.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection used survey questionnaires with questions based on the research topic which were delivered to 30 respondents in the secondary schools. Data was inspected, cleaned, transformed and modeled. It was then tabulated, analyzed and computed into percentage and reported.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation.

5.1. Sex of Respondents

The study found out that the secondary schools secretarial staff was all female (100%), meaning that the secretarial job in this area is dominated by women as there was no male secretary.

5.2. Age of Respondents

The age analysis shows that 17% of respondents were between twenty and thirty years, with 37% being between thirty one and forty years. Most secondary schools secretarial staff where in the middle age between thirty one and fifty years accounting for 60% of the respondents. Also the aged were 23% being between fifty one and sixty years.

5.3 Marital Status

From the analysis it emerged that most secondary schools secretarial staff were married accounting for 70% of those interviewed.

5.4. Experience

From the analysis it was observed that those with 6-11 years in service were the highest number being 44%. While those with 12-17 years experience and those with over 18 years experience each had same percentage (33%).

5.5 Level of Education

The results of education level of the respondents showed that 60% were trained up to the college level, while 33% were university graduates and 7% were holders of masters' degree. It was evident that very few secondary school secretarial staff has advanced their level of education.

5.6 Role of Secretarial Staff

From analysis it showed that slightly below half of respondents (47%) indicated that they bring letters to

the attention of their senior officers. But only 16% of the responses indicated that secretarial staff access and print out all messages in computer mail box, while 37 % receive calls and take down information and make sure it reaches the relevant officers.

5.7 Effective Communication

The analysis showed that over half (55%) of the responses were effective as a result of being provided with the necessary equipment like having in every section a telephone extension. While 25 % of the responses received were as a result of the ministry of education through their respective secondary schools facilitating full understanding of their schools and ministry's role and objectives and therefore able to give feedback when required. Only 20% of the responses indicated that they have not attended communication skills course. This means that most of secondary schools through the ministry of education have the necessary communication equipment.

5.8 Use of Technology

On use of technology in communication, 35% of the respondents stated that technology enabled the secondary schools secretarial staff to reach their senior officers, while away from the office, 47 % said that technology enabled quick access to information and communication when required and only 18% respondents stated that it enables information to be relayed faster. This shows that most secondary schools have embraced modern technology to facilitate faster communication.

5.9 Training in Communication

On the training of respondents, analysis showed that 13% had undergone training, while 87% had not undergone any training. These responses received show that majority of the secondary schools secretarial staff have not attended any training in communication.

5.10 School Structure

On school structure, analysis showed that 57% believed that there was slow communication from the ministry of education headquarters, county, to sub-county to schools. While so, 14 % said that it does not promote free communication and 29% believe that the organizational structure is rigid such that it hinders communication. This means that although communication flows through the secondary schools structure this slows communication in the ministry of education to county and ward as a whole.

5.11 Internal Communication

The analysis internal communication showed that 50% believe that the meetings held regularly are used to pass information and 50% believe that memos are issued to pass information to staff. This shows that meeting and memos are main means of internal communication to staff.

5.12 Channel of Communicating

As regarding upward communication, analysis showed that 43% believed that the Ministry of education

takes long to act on staff requests and 57% said there was no direct communication from juniors to senior staff in secondary schools. The responses then show staff has no direct communication to headquarters but communication flows through the formal lines of authority or chain of command.

5.13 Challenges Faced in Communication

From analysis 42% of respondents experienced challenges of the rigid Ministry of education structure that hinders faster flow of communication. Analysis also showed 31% believe that staffs have not been sensitized on the need of timely communication. Whereas 27% said they lacked cooperation from other staff members to ensure faster communication showing that Ministry of education structures are rigid and hinder communication.

5.14 Use of Computers

It emerged from analysis that 45% respondents used computers for administrative purposes, whereas 22% respondents indicated that computers were used for communication purposes. Likewise 33% said computers were used by the senior school staff for other uses other than communication. This means that in most of the offices the computers available are not used for communication purposes meaning that they are not maximally used as they were used for other purposes other than for communication purposes.

5.15 Communication Policy

From the analysis 80% said that there was no communication policy, while 20% indicated presence of communication policy in the Ministry of education only. This shows that in most of the secondary schools there is no communication policy which is important in guiding staff in the communication process.

5.16. Number of Computers

It emerged from the secondary schools secretarial staff that 54% of the secondary schools had 1-3 computers, while 20% had 4-6 Computers and both 7-10 computers and over 11 Computers had 13% each. This shows that most of the secondary schools had few Computers and they need to embrace technology as it greatly enhances work in the office as most of the office work is now computerized.

6. Conclusion

The secondary schools secretarial staff plays a vital role in the communication process as she/he receives and passes information to the relevant people and therefore needs to have the necessary skills and equipment so as to perform effectively. As communication is the most important aspect of a secondary schools management, there has to be a structure enhancing attainment of its goals. From the findings it is concluded that effective communication dictates or boosts success in any secondary schools secretarial staff as it is affected by the means used and the level of inter personal communication skills within the organization.

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