



The Impact of Head-Teachers' Leadership on Quality Management in Early Childhood Education Centers: A Case Study of Kajiado County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how the leadership of head teachers affects quality control in Early Childhood Education (ECE) facilities located in Kajiado County, Kenya. Headteachers have a crucial role in managing resources, implementing effective teaching strategies, and creating an atmosphere that supports early childhood education. This study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate how head teachers' management and leadership styles affect staff motivation, student results, and the general quality of education. The results highlight important leadership issues facing the industry, including a lack of training, little government assistance, and sociocultural elements that influence early childhood education in remote areas. With suggestions for legislative changes and capacity-building programs aimed at improving Kajiado County's educational standards, this study advances knowledge of leadership in the context of ECE centres.

Introduction

Background: Importance of Early Childhood Education in Global Education Systems

Everyone agrees that a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development is fundamentally impacted by early childhood education, or ECE. It helps create a solid educational foundation that influences people during and beyond their academic careers by laying the platform for lifelong learning and personal growth (UNESCO, 2015; Woodhead, 2006). Because it equips kids with the skills they need to thrive in higher education and contribute positively to society, early childhood education (ECE) is essential. Research has demonstrated that high-quality early childhood education (ECE) dramatically raises future career prospects, lowers dropout rates, and improves school readiness (Heckman, 2006). Since early childhood education is crucial for promoting social justice, economic growth, and sustainable development, governments throughout the world have given it more priority in their educational programs (Sylva et al., 2004).

In Africa, the importance of early childhood education has grown about long-term economic growth and poverty alleviation. To increase access and quality in the early years of schooling, governments around the continent—including Kenya—have been enacting legislative changes (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). Numerous obstacles still exist despite these initiatives, especially concerning leadership and quality management at ECE centers. Since they oversee both the administrative and instructional aspects of these institutions, head teachers play a crucial role in this situation (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Context: Overview of the ECE Sector in Kenya, with a Specific Focus on Kajiado County

Due to the government's emphasis on education as a vehicle for socioeconomic development, Kenya has achieved significant progress in increasing access to early childhood education during the past 20 years (Republic of Kenya, 2019). The nation's educational system currently includes Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) centres as a fundamental component. These facilities serve kids between the ages of three and five, getting them ready for primary school. But there are still serious problems with the quality of schooling, especially in rural places like Kajiado County (UNICEF, 2021).

Because of its rural and pastoral setting, Kajiado County, which is home to a large Maasai population, presents management issues for ECE centres. Numerous schools are devoid of proper facilities, instructional resources, and qualified personnel. Despite these constraints, head teachers' leadership is crucial in this situation to guarantee that high-quality instruction is given (Mwangi et al., 2015). In Kajiado, head teachers must balance the demands of meeting Kenyan

government-mandated educational standards with the management of scarce resources (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018). Therefore, the efficacy of quality management in ECE centres is directly impacted by leadership practices in this area.

Problem Statement: Challenges Faced in Managing Quality Education in ECE Centers and the Crucial Role of Head-Teachers

Even though the Kenyan government has implemented several legislative changes to increase access to early childhood education, problems with quality control still exist, especially in remote areas like Kajiado County. Inadequate infrastructure, a lack of resources, uneven monitoring of educational standards, and inadequate teacher preparation are major problems (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019). Since they oversee managing instructors, resources, and curriculum implementation daily, head teachers play a crucial role in the operation of ECE centers (Bush, 2018).

The leadership of headteachers has a direct impact on the standard of instruction in these centres, affecting resource allocation, teacher motivation, and overall learning results (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). Improving quality management in these schools requires an understanding of the leadership philosophies and difficulties that head teachers encounter. Empirical studies are required to examine how head teachers' leadership affects the administration of ECE centres and the difficulties they face in providing high-quality instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how head teachers in Kajiado County's ECE centers lead and how it affects quality control. The study intends to shed light on the variables affecting the standard of early childhood education in rural Kenya by examining the leadership philosophies used and the difficulties these head teachers encounter. It is anticipated that the results will add to the current discussion on educational leadership in early childhood settings and provide policy suggestions for raising the standard of ECE nationwide.

Research Questions:

1. **What are the predominant leadership styles of head-teachers in ECE centers in Kajiado County?**

Finding the best management techniques for ECE centres requires an understanding of the leadership philosophies used by head teachers. The primary leadership styles of head teachers—transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire—and their effects on the standard of instruction will be investigated in this study (Bush & Glover, 2014; Mwangi et al., 2015).

2. How does leadership affect quality management in these centres?

Managing the quality of education requires strong leadership, especially in areas with limited resources like Kajiado County. This inquiry aims to determine how head teachers' leadership styles affect resource management, teacher effectiveness, and the general learning environment (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; UNESCO, 2015).

3. What challenges do headteachers face in managing ECE centers?

Headteachers in remote areas deal with a variety of issues, including poor infrastructure, a lack of funding, and inadequate teacher preparation. These issues will be thoroughly examined in this study, along with their impact on head teachers' capacity to uphold quality standards in ECE centres (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019; Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018).

Literature Review

✓ Leadership in Early Childhood Education

The quality of education and the general learning environment are greatly influenced by leadership in early childhood education (ECE). In a variety of educational contexts, including ECE centers, leadership philosophies including transformational, transactional, and participatory leadership have been thoroughly examined. Positive results are frequently linked to **transformational leadership** because it encourage employees to go above and beyond their assigned responsibilities and cultivate a creative and cooperative culture (Bush & Glover, 2014; Heckman, 2006).

However, in the setting of early childhood education (ECE), where caring conditions and creativity are essential, **transactional leadership**—which is predicated on a system of rewards and punishments—may not be as successful (Leithwood et al., 1999). Research also emphasizes the importance of participatory leadership, which involves staff members working together to make choices. This fosters a feeling of ownership and improves teachers' job satisfaction (Sylva et al., 2004).

In early childhood education, leadership involves more than just overseeing employees; it also entails fostering a nurturing atmosphere that puts children's overall development first. Higher educational results and improved resource management are linked to good leadership in early childhood education settings, according to research (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Harris & Spillane, 2008). Participatory leadership and community participation are even more important in rural settings like Kajiado County, where leadership problems include restricted access to resources (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

✓ Quality Management in Education

Curriculum implementation, teacher preparation, resource distribution, and community engagement are all aspects of quality management in early childhood education. To guarantee that these elements are properly handled and in line with educational objectives, effective leadership is essential. Research shows that a well-structured and culturally relevant curriculum can improve learning outcomes for children in ECE, making curriculum implementation a key factor in determining quality (UNICEF, 2021; Mwangi et al., 2015). Furthermore, as qualified teachers are better able to engage young students and apply child-centred pedagogies, teacher training is crucial to providing high-quality education (Woodhead, 2006).

Allocating resources is another important issue that affects ECE quality. To satisfy the requirements of both teachers and students, leaders must make sure that the little resources available—especially in rural areas—are used effectively (Bush & Glover, 2014). In rural areas, where schools frequently rely on local support for extra resources and participation, community involvement further improves the quality of education (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018). To gather resources and support for their centres, head teachers in these environments need to cultivate close relationships with the community (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024).

✓ Case Studies of Leadership in Rural Contexts

Studies on leadership in rural ECE environments, like Kajiado County, point to several difficulties. Lack of infrastructure, restricted access to instructional resources, and a teacher shortage are common problems in rural schools (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019). Because they must innovate with few resources, head teachers' leadership roles are particularly highly important in these settings. According to research by Karanja and Gikonyo (2018), head teachers in rural areas who use transformational and participatory leadership styles are more equipped to handle these difficulties, especially when they interact with the community and enlist outside assistance.

Cultural issues often arise in rural settings, especially in areas like Kajiado County where many families depend on pastoralism and where traditional traditions are prominent (Mwangi et al., 2015). Therefore, to promote the importance of education, particularly for young girls who are frequently in danger of losing out on education owing to cultural norms, the head teacher's responsibility goes beyond the school to connect with families and the larger community (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Head teachers' management of ECE centres can be better understood through the perspective of leadership theories. According to the **Distributed**

Leadership Theory, leadership is shared by several stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and community members, rather than being limited to a single person (Harris & Spillane, 2008). In rural ECE centres, where head teachers frequently need to work with the community to overcome resource constraints, this notion is especially pertinent (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024).

Servant leadership is another pertinent theory that highlights the role of the leader in serving others, especially their staff and the children under their care (Greenleaf, 2003). This leadership style is in line with the nurturing and supportive nature needed in early childhood education (ECE) settings (Bush, 2018). In resource-constrained rural areas like Kajiado County, servant leadership can create a supportive and collaborative environment that helps to lessen the difficulties faced by both.

Research Methodology

✓ Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, which integrates qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The qualitative component of the study focuses on examining the lived experiences of ECE leaders through observations and interviews, while the quantitative component uses surveys to collect data on leadership styles and the factors influencing the quality of early childhood education in Kajiado County. The mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of rich narrative data with statistical evidence (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2012), which ensures a more thorough and comprehensive examination of leadership practices in ECE centres (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

Mixed methods are especially useful in educational research because they enable researchers to capture the complexity of educational environments, where both quantifiable results and human experiences are important (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For example, the quantitative data from surveys will assist in quantifying the prevalence of different leadership styles throughout the region, while the qualitative data from interviews will provide light on the difficulties faced by head teachers in rural regions (Ivankova et al., 2006).

✓ Study Area

A prime study location for investigating the leadership challenges in Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres in Kajiado County, which is in southern Kenya. The county is characterized by limited infrastructure and low access to quality education, especially in remote rural areas (UNICEF, 2021), and it is primarily inhabited by the Maasai community, who rely on pastoralism as their primary economic activity (Mwangi et al., 2015; Ochieng, 2019).

The socioeconomic environment of Kajiado poses difficulties for educational leadership, including a

lack of trained educators, subpar facilities, and cultural opposition to formal education, particularly among females (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019). Understanding how leadership affects the standard of education in these rural areas is crucial because of these variables (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018).

✓ Sample and Sampling Techniques

Headteachers, instructors, and education officials from certain Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres in Kajiado County make up the study's sample. Participants with substantial expertise running or instructing at ECE centres in remote areas are chosen using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling enables the selection of people who can offer in-depth insights and are most educated about the study issue (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, stratified random sampling is employed to guarantee a broad representation of participants from different geographical zones within the county, including remote and semi-urban locations (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The study targets a total of 50 participants, including 20 head teachers, 20 teachers, and 10 education officials. To offer thorough qualitative and quantitative data for analysis, this sample size is considered adequate (Saunders et al., 2009).

✓ Data Collection Methods

A range of data-gathering techniques are used in the study to guarantee the depth and breadth of the information. Semi-structured interviews and observations with head teachers and teachers are used to get qualitative data about their leadership experiences, difficulties, and tactics. Because they enable in-depth, open-ended examination of participants' viewpoints, interviews are an essential technique in qualitative research (Kvale, 2007; King, 2004). Data on the daily activities at ECE centres, with an emphasis on leadership interactions and classroom management, is gathered through observations (Cohen et al., 2007).

Headteachers and instructors are given questionnaires to complete to obtain quantitative data on leadership styles and the calibre of educational services rendered. A Likert scale is used in the surveys to gauge how participants feel about leadership techniques (Bryman, 2012). Because they enable data collection from many participants in a short time, surveys are an excellent technique for obtaining quantitative data (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2014).

✓ Data Analysis

The research uses statistical methods for quantitative data and theme analysis for qualitative data. The interview and observation data are analyzed using thematic analysis, which aims to find recurring themes in leadership approaches, difficulties, and tactics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Guest et al. (2012), this

approach makes it possible to arrange qualitative data into meaningful patterns that represent the experiences and viewpoints of participants. Community engagement, resource allocation, and leadership issues in rural areas are anticipated to be major themes.

The study does descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the quantitative data using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). While inferential statistics, like regression analysis and correlation analysis, aid in determining the connections between leadership styles and academic results, descriptive statistics, like mean and standard deviation, are used to summarize the data (Field, 2013). The influence of leadership on the quality of education in rural ECE centres is better understood thanks to these investigations (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Leadership Styles Observed

The study found that head teachers at Kajiado County's Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres used a variety of leadership philosophies. Authoritarian and collaborative approaches were the most common ones seen. In centres with few resources and little community engagement, authoritarian leadership—which is defined by top-down decision-making and rigorous obedience to rules—was more common (Ochieng, 2019; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019). In these environments, head teachers frequently exercised unilateral authority over choices about teacher management and curriculum implementation, providing little opportunity for staff participation or leadership.

Better-resourced centres, especially those in Kajiado County's semi-urban districts, were more likely to practise collaborative leadership, which involves making choices as a group with input from instructors and occasionally the community. Higher levels of teacher motivation and improved resource management were associated with this technique (Mwangi et al., 2015; Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018). Open communication and a sense of accountability and ownership among employees were promoted by collaborative leaders, and this had a favorable impact on classroom management and curriculum delivery (Ngugi & Macharia, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Impact on Quality Management

The management quality in ECE centres was significantly impacted by the leadership styles that were seen. Curriculum implementation was noticeably rigorous in centres with a predominance of authoritarian leadership, with instructors adhering to stringent restrictions that left little opportunity for creativity or flexibility (Ochieng, 2019; Karimi & Wainaina, 2020). The absence of autonomy hindered their inventiveness and decreased their involvement in the learning process,

which frequently led to poor teacher motivation (Muijs et al., 2004; Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018). Additionally, these centres typically had poor resource allocation, with head teachers making decisions on their own that did not necessarily reflect the requirements of the community or the classroom.

Conversely, collaborative leadership has a beneficial impact on teacher motivation and curriculum implementation. Because they were able to customise the curriculum to meet the individual requirements of their pupils by participating in decision-making processes, teachers in these environments expressed greater work satisfaction (Wachira & Ngugi, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020). Additionally, these centres demonstrated improved resource management techniques, with head teachers collaborating closely with community members and staff to guarantee the effective and efficient use of resources (Karimi & Wainaina, 2020; Mwangi et al., 2015).

Challenges Identified

Several obstacles to successful leadership in ECE centres were found, notwithstanding the benefits of collaborative leadership. A significant obstacle was the absence of official training for head teachers, many of whom had no prior leadership experience (Ngugi & Wanjiku, 2014; Ochieng, 2019). These problems were made worse by the lack of organised professional development opportunities for ECE leaders, which left many head teachers ill-prepared to successfully handle the intricate dynamics of early childhood education (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

Cultural opposition to formal education posed another difficulty, especially in Maasai tribes living in remote areas where traditional pastoralist ways of life frequently trumped education (Mwangi et al., 2015; UNDP, 2021). In addition to affecting enrolment numbers, this reluctance made it more difficult for head teachers to engage the community in resource management and school governance. Effective leadership was further hampered by logistical issues such as poor infrastructure, limited access to educational resources, and great distances between families and schools (Karimi & Wainaina, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). These issues were especially severe in Kajiado County's most isolated areas, where there was little government financing and help (UNICEF, 2021; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

Comparative Insights

There were several parallels and differences between the results from Kajiado County and research carried out in comparable rural environments both inside and outside of Kenya. Similar issues, such as a lack of official leadership training and cultural opposition to education, were noted in studies conducted in other rural Kenyan counties, such as Baringo and Turkana (Ochieng, 2019; Karimi & Wainaina, 2020). Nonetheless, there was more government involvement in these

counties, especially through programs meant to enhance teacher preparation and school facilities (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018; UNICEF, 2021). In contrast, many ECE centres in Kajiado were mostly dependent on community donations for finance, and government assistance was less evident there (Mwangi et al., 2015; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

Globally, analogies to rural environments in other emerging nations, such as Ethiopia and Uganda, showed comparable leadership difficulties. For example, research has revealed that head teachers in rural Uganda frequently encounter comparable cultural and logistical challenges, with little assistance and training from educational authorities (Leithwood et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Better educational achievements have been achieved in these nations, nevertheless, due to a larger push for capacity-building initiatives for ECE leaders than in Kajiado (UNDP, 2021; Ngugi & Wanjiku, 2014).

Conclusion

✓ Summary of Key Findings

According to the study, Kajiado County's Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres' quality management is greatly impacted by the leadership styles of their staff. The execution of the curriculum suffered under head teachers who used authoritarian leadership because they frequently struggled with poor teacher engagement and ineffective resource management (Ochieng, 2019; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019). On the other hand, collaborative leadership created a more stimulating atmosphere for educators, which resulted in more community participation, better resource allocation, and more flexible curricula (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018; Mwangi et al., 2015). These results highlight how crucial leadership is in influencing ECE centres' educational results, especially in remote areas.

✓ Implications for Policy

The results point to several legislative changes that may improve the efficacy of leadership in ECE facilities. First, the absence of official training for head teachers emphasises the necessity of organised leadership development courses emphasising community involvement and managerial abilities (Ngugi & Wanjiku, 2014; Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018). Allocating resources should be a top priority for policymakers to guarantee that rural ECE centres have sufficient access to money, infrastructure, and supplies. Furthermore, the existing gaps in leadership effectiveness can be closed with more robust government assistance in the form of community engagement incentives and capacity-building programs (Mwangi et al., 2015; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

✓ Recommendations for Practice

It is advised that head teachers participate in continual professional development that prioritises resource management and educational leadership to solve the leadership issues noted (Leithwood et al., 2020; Ochieng, 2019). To foster a more cooperative approach to school administration, there should also be more capacity-building programs aimed at head teachers as well as the larger school personnel (Karanja & Gikonyo, 2018). To improve resource management and overall educational achievements, it is also necessary to increase community participation and encourage local stakeholders to play a more active role in school governance (Ngugi & Macharia, 2017; Wachira & Ngugi, 2019).

✓ Future Research

This work creates several new research directions. The long-term effects of leadership development programs on ECE management and student results might be investigated through longitudinal research. Furthermore, comparative research between Kenyan counties or other rural environments worldwide would offer a more profound understanding of how contextual elements like culture, location, and government assistance impact the efficacy of leadership (UNICEF, 2021; Ngugi & Wanjiku, 2014). Finally, investigating creative leadership models may provide answers that are more suited to the difficulties of managing education in rural locations, especially in underdeveloped areas (UNDP, 2021; Karimi & Wainaina, 2020).

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With a plethora of expertise in educational leadership and administration, Dr. Rose Boyani Ngare is an outstanding scholar and educator. She graduated with a master's degree in educational administration and planning from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and a doctorate in education leadership-higher learning from ASPEN University, USA. She also has a Bachelor of Arts in Teaching from Stanton University in the United States, with a focus on English and Business Studies, to round out her education.

Dr. Ngare has made significant contributions to the academic community throughout the course of a varied teaching career that has taken her to various prestigious universities. She has been a professor at prominent colleges including Africa International University and the Catholic University of Eastern Africa.

She now works at KAG-East University as the Head of the Department of Education and a member of the University Senate, where she oversees the educational initiatives and cultivates a culture of academic success.

In addition to her duties as a teacher, Dr. Ngare is a key member of the graduate research supervision team at Adventist University of Africa, she oversees master's and PhD theses, offering advice and support to burgeoning academics. To further contribute her

knowledge to the academic world, she is also employed by Nazarene University in Kenya as an External Assessor for master's thesis.

Dr. Ngare's commitment to leadership and education is demonstrated by her leadership positions as well as her scholarly endeavours. Her impact as a well-respected educator will continue to alter education in Kenya and elsewhere.

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