Mentoring as a Process of Developing Effective School Leaders in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Learning is a fundamental determinant of success in virtually all sectors of life including school leadership. Literature in the field of education management explains that with increased leadership development of head- teachers, there is bound to be change in the effectiveness and efficiency of schooling (Hallinger and Snidvongs, 2008). The foregoing is however untrue concerning Kenya given the many pitfalls that bedevil school leadership, some of which include strikes, truancy, teenage pregnancies, arson and drop out among others.

The dismal performance of head-teachers attest to the fact school leaders are unable to effectively deal with contemporary challenges that spring from Kenya's diverse socio-cultural, economic and political environments. Measures to address this leadership dysfunction through in-service courses, conferences and seminars have not yielded much because they are often ad-hoc, ill-funded and devoid of participants' input and support. Lack of specific and focused preparation and leadership development programs for heads of schools points to the urgent need to institute a mechanism for guiding both novice and practicing head-teachers for effective school leadership in the 21th century.

This paper roots for mentoring as the only panacea to deficiencies in school leadership in Kenya. This is because mentoring has the capacity to enable head-teachers share their success secrets, build mutual relationships and impact positively on their wide base of constituents.

Key Words: learning, leadership development, effectiveness, efficiency, mentoring.

Introduction: Globally, school leadership in the 21th century is characterized by a complicated mix of challenges and opportunities. According to Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002), challenges include accountability, diverse learner populations, mounting budget pressures, safety and security issues and intense stakeholder demands that learners be equipped with skills befitting the contemporary society. Conversely, opportunities comprise the ever increasing demands for techno-savvy and learner friendly schools together with their commensurate resources and personnel. Lashway (2003) cited in Holoway (on-line) in a research review, points out that new school administrators encounter intense stressful times in their leadership roles. The study has revealed that such stress emanates from personal feelings of inadequacy; need to command technical skills, teacher supervision, fast moving environment and feelings of isolation in their new roles. More and Thomas cited in Tucker and Codding (2002) conducted research on work of school principals and reported that regardless of year appointed principals have been trained and certified as administrators through programs largely irrelevant and grossly inadequate for the work responsibilities found in the school principal-ship. Atieno and Simatwa (2012) cited in Shun-wing and Sing-ying (2015) in their study found out that

newly appointed principals (NAPs) in public secondary schools encountered a plethora of challenges in relation to finances, teaching and support staff and students. The study further details such challenges to include threats, dropout, indiscipline, budgeting, incompetent staff and non-payment of school levies among others. Comparatively, developed countries, unlike their developing counterparts have not only realized the importance of mentoring but have embraced the same for enhanced school management. Duke cited in Ajowi et al (2011) lauds the importance of induction and acclimatization programs for novice teachers (read head-teachers) because besides recognizing the special developmental needs of these teachers, the programs also offer them specialized training and emotional support. Ajowi et al (2011) affirm that these programs are functional in developed countries such as Japan, Newzealand and Australia where they have resulted in tremendous educational outcomes. In the United States of America (USA) for example it is indicated that both mentoring and induction programs benefit from substantial sponsorship from Best Practices Research according to Ajowi et al (2011). Here, (USA) it obtains that mentoring and induction programs have direct impact on the performance of both novice and experienced teachers. The programs are officially endorsed by concerned agencies.

In Africa, head-teacher mentoring seems not to have gained sufficient ground. This has greatly affected the development and implementation of mentoring programs in the education sector. A study conducted by Kamwengo in Zambia cited in Ajowi et al (2011) reveals that school managers failed to organize induction programs for newly posted teachers in their schools because these school managers themselves lacked various managerial skills and knowledge. Namangale cited in Ajowi et al (2011) conducted a study in Malawi and found out that performance of head-teachers is unsatisfactory to their staff primarily because the head-teachers lack knowledge and skills to perform their work. The study further reveals that majority of these head-teachers got headship appointment through political patronage devoid of induction and mentorship prior to taking their new roles. The foregoing paints a grim picture of the status of school leadership in Africa necessitating the need for fast response to address this anomaly.

In matters school leadership, the scenario in Kenya is not different from the experiences on the African continent discussed above. Republic of Kenya (2012) reveals that structures put in place to enhance school administration in Kenyan schools are either defective or simply inappropriate to produce expected education outcomes. Nandwah (2011) in his study on how principals are prepared and developed in Kenya faults training programs that heads of schools are exposed to prior to their taking up leadership positions in schools and even while in service. Such programs include in-service courses, conferences and personal initiatives which are reckoned to be deficient because they are quite often ad-hoc and cash-strapped. This finding suggests the need to find a better mechanism to entrench head-teachers in their leadership roles. The need to institute viable leadership programs is echoed by Wechenje et al cited in Ntheya (2012) who posits that the job of a head of institution is challenging and consequently urges the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Teachers Service Commission (TSC) to develop workable strategies and mechanisms to motivate and anchor these teachers in their work. In addition, Hale and Hunter cited in Kin'gori (2012) observe that school heads experience problems associated with instructional programs, students, community relations and financial resources. The study further reports that stop-gap measures such as seminars and workshops have not availed much. Consequently, Kin'gori (2012) asserts based on his study findings, that heads of schools especially newly appointed ones ought to be attached to experienced principals in their neighborhood for appropriate induction and mentoring. Indoshi (2003) in his study on induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in Kenya arrived at a conclusion that

induction programs are haphazard and seldom benefit intended beneficiaries. Indoshi (2003) further suggests that well designed induction programs need not only to be instituted but also tailored to beginning teachers' (read head-teachers) unique needs, which needs emanate from challenges that characterize the new schools that teachers and by extension head-teachers are posted. Based on the foregoing, it is the position of this paper that there is need to put in place more workable and result oriented leadership development strategies like mentoring in order to enhance education management Kenya.

This paper is divided into three sections namely, the historical development of mentoring, mentoring typologies and how they apply in the realm of school leadership and lastly benefits of the mentoring process in to school leaders (both mentors and mentees) and the wider school stakeholders.

Historical antecedents of mentoring: There are minimal recorded accounts about mentoring and mentoring relationships dating back to antiquity. However, propositional literature reveals traces of mentorship relationships in ancient Greece and the Far East especially in socio-religious spheres of life. As a concept, mentoring springs forth in near mythical encounters of Greek Odysseus who when embarking on a long journey (odyssey) entrusted his infant son Telemachos in the care of presumably dependable companion called Mentor. Given the nature of the responsibility and degree of trust, Mentor who is older and therefore more experienced becomes the custodian of wisdom and support to the above infant. In the Far East mentorship systems thrived leading to the development of the guru-disciple relationship entrenched in Hinduism and Buddhism. Discipleship system connoting 'shepherd-sheep' relationship was practiced by Rabbinical Judaism and the Early Christian Church. Also in the medieval guild system a kind of mentoring program was nurtured in the name of apprenticeship.

In the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century, in the United States of America, key mentoring terms such as 'mentor', 'mentee' and 'protégé' found application in the work place. From mid 1990's, other terms associated with mentorship such as networking and role model began to gain universal application. In Africa and by extension Kenya, one of the most popular methods of transmitting indigenous education to the young was through apprenticeship which contained many features which are akin to mentorship. In this traditional context, the elders were entrusted with impartation of skills, knowledge and societal norms to the young. Today, mentorship relationships prevail in many circles including religion, education and business among others. The fact that mentoring occupies an integral part in education especially in the area of school leadership makes it a centre of discussion in this paper.

Mentoring typology and benefits in the context of school leadership:

Typology: Mentoring is a powerful process that involves enabling others to develop and improve their personal and professional potential irrespective of their field of operation. In the arena of educational leadership, Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) have observed that mentoring is vital in helping young incoming heads of schools to learn, grow and become more effective in their job.

There are two main types and several other kinds of mentoring relationships namely formal and informal. A discussion of the latter type together with techniques of mentoring would be beyond the scope of this paper. The sub-types in the formal domain which are relevant to this paper are discussed below. Orora (1997) in his discussion of socialization strategies for in-coming teachers (read head-teachers) in learning organizations unveils five such strategies which include training,

formal apprenticeship, informal apprenticeship, debasement experiences and lastly co-optation. They are discussed briefly as follows:

- **Training:** This entails mounting orientation programs, assigning tasks, providing guidance and counseling and in-service sessions for intended recipients. An exposure of this nature is intended to inculcate into beginning teachers policies, goals, knowledge and skills which they will need to perform managerial responsibilities.

- **Formal apprenticeship:** Here, the role of the socialize is spelled out to include; setting for beginning teachers challenging tasks, keeping such teachers continuously and clearly informed, appraising the teachers regularly and lastly preparing the teachers for higher responsibilities. For effective application of formal apprenticeship there is need for close guidance and counseling in real work situations. This closeness between the two parties guarantees maintenance of continuity and stability while enabling novice teachers to understand their new situations.

- **Informal apprenticeship:** This involves careful selection of 'insider' teachers to informally assist novice teachers in understanding and interpreting the many events and surprises that emerge the initial socialization phase.

- **Debasement experiences:** Novice teachers are detached from their previously lofty perceptions and attitudes culminating in inculcation of down to earth self perception which easily allows application of school influence.

- **Co-optation:** This functions well when new teachers join a school singly and not as a group. The teachers are then gradually co-opted in attractive school activities such as games, music festivals, seminars and membership in committees where they (teachers) provide representation for the school.

Out of the five types above, formal apprenticeship seems to be closely related to the kind of mentoring discussed in this paper as illustrated hereunder. Formal apprenticeship comprises both the socializer and the socialized. Similarly, in mentoring there is the mentor and mentee, one with more knowledge and experience, sometimes even a little older in age and the other, inexperienced and sometimes younger in age respectively. Orora (1997) stresses that the socializer in formal apprenticeship ought to be efficient, experienced and a loyal old-time member of the organization. That the socializer's roles in an educational context include setting challenging tasks for beginning teachers, providing such teachers with clear information on a continuous basis, appraising the teachers regularly and preparing teachers for higher responsibilities. In addition, Orora (1997) reiterates that effective formal apprenticeship is achieved through close relationship in real work situations thus enabling new teachers understand their new situations.

Benefits: The mentoring process comprises both mentee (also known as mentoree, protégé, student) and mentor. The latter is usually considered to be more knowledgeable, wiser and sometimes even older thus more experienced than the latter. The formal development, adoption and execution of mentoring programs for school leaders in Kenya would certainly culminate in enormous benefits that would assume a three-prong dimension as examined below.

- **Mentee benefits:** As noted elsewhere in this paper, heads of schools encounter very stressful moments in the course of their work. Kin'gori (2012) offers that the many challenges that school heads face can be countered by mentoring whereby newly appointed

heads can be attached to experienced and successful principals in close proximity for appropriate induction and mentoring. In order to realize a successful and result oriented mentoring an environment of mutualness and trust must prevail. Mentoring helps cultivate a sense of collaboration and a feeling of worthiness among employees thereby reducing resentment to new ideas and unhealthy competition among peers. Okumbe (1998) approves of mentoring as a key socializing mechanism in the workplace. He observes that new employees become integrated as soon as possible functionally and socially into the organization. Through the mentoring process therefore, head-teachers would not only be enabled to discharge their duties with ease but also find social acceptance among their colleagues. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) opine that mentoring plays a foundational role in school leadership by providing new head-teachers (mentees) a fast start in principal-ship. New heads of schools therefore manage to settle quickly in their leadership posts. Consequently, these leaders are able to build confidence and find motivation towards their new roles. Tahir el al (2015) examined the benefits of headship mentoring in Malaysian schools and obtained positive reports from head-teachers. The latter indicated that mentoring enhanced their professional values as leaders and increased their knowledge base through sharing. Rebore (1991) observes that mentoring aids in acquainting newly employed individuals with a sense of community and collegiality. He states further that induction and mentorship programs could lead to employee retention and enhanced job performance

From the above, it becomes more or less unanimous that head-teacher mentoring is a necessary process for all heads of schools as they stand to gain immensely at both personal and professional levels.

- **Mentor benefits:** A closer examination of the work of mentors reveals that they too benefit from mentorship encounters. A joint survey conducted by USAID (on-line) on mentoring in pre-service teacher training reveals that mentors expressed delight and satisfaction by the fact that mentoring offered them an opportunity to develop professionally. Furthermore, mentors also hinted that they got chance to be more reflective and as well bolster their knowledge, skills and confidences in the course of rendering advice to mentees. Lastly, the study by USAID (on-line) offers that mentors found fulfillment that they could provide professional in-put which eventually led to someone's development.

- **Stakeholder benefits:** This paper roots for installation of mentoring programs for school leaders in the hope that accrued benefits discussed above would not stop in the backyard of mentees and their mentors but that they would spill over to the larger clientele base including learners, teachers, parents, community, well wishers and school sponsors among others.

Conclusion: This paper has attempted to examine mentoring as an enviable process for developing successful and effective school leaders for the 21ˢᵗ century. It has been emphasized elsewhere in the paper that head-teachers are instrumental in ensuring effective educative process at all levels of learning. Their influence has indelible effects upon the lives of learners as well as institutions they lead. However, it has been noted with a lot of concern that no viable strategies are in the offing to mentor not only newly appointed head-teachers into their leadership roles, but as well support currently practicing head-teachers to be able to contend with the daily challenges in their work. It could not be more opportune that concerned agencies in the area of education champion the

formation of strong mentoring programs for school leaders in order to alleviate management anomalies and enhance achievement of education goals at both national and global levels. Finally, Shun-wing and Sing-ying (2015), in their study seem to corroborate the standpoint of this paper in the conclusion section by emphasizing that it is not enough to design a programme to address learning needs of head-teachers, but also to put in place both formal and informal supports for principals from mentors and peers in order to execute what is learnt at the workplace.

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