

**TEACHER EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT IN KENYA CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GATANGA SUB-COUNTY, KENYA**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to establish the teacher empowerment strategies and how they influence students' academic achievement in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in public secondary schools in Gatanga sub-county, Kenya. Two research objectives and two null hypotheses guided that study. The null hypotheses stated that there was no significant relationship between teachers' involvement in decision making and teachers' professional development and KCSE achievement of public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Kenya. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The sample for the study was 18 headteachers and 84 teachers. Data was collected by use of questionnaires and was analysed using inferential statistics. The analysis was done by use of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Findings revealed that there was a strong positive relationship  $p = 0.72$  between teachers' involvement in decision making and KCSE achievement. It was also revealed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' professional development and KCSE achievement as shown by the  $p = 0.63$ . Based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggested that a study on the influence of teacher characteristics and students KCSE achievement should be conducted. It was also suggested that a study on teachers' level of job satisfaction, teachers' level of motivation and teachers demographic factors on students' KCSE achievement should be conducted.

**Key words:** Empowerment strategies, academic achievement, decision making, professional development

## **1. Introduction**

Empowerment can be viewed as the urge of understanding, identifying, and describing processes through which people create alternative ways to overcome domination through both personal and organizational change (Conger & Kanungo, 2008). The idea behind the concept of empowerment involves the workforce being provided with a greater degree of flexibility and more freedom to make decisions relating to work. Through empowerment, people are encouraged to make certain decisions without consulting their superiors and to which organizational dynamics are initiated at the bottom. Empowerment includes organizational processes and structures that enhance members' involvement and improve goal achievement for the organization. In other words, empowerment can be seen as a process of boosting up the organizational outcomes and effectiveness (Perkins & Zimmerman, 2005).

Although great emphasis has been laid on research in the field of employee empowerment and organizational achievement throughout the world, there is inadequacy of literature on this subject especially in the developing countries and how organizational achievement may be influenced through empowerment practices. The available information has only focused on explaining the importance of employee empowerment in facilitating organizational achievement particularly in the developed world. Most researchers who study teacher empowerment examine the effects of variables such as headteachers' leadership style and headteachers' decision-making strategy on the contentment of teachers and the rate of teacher burnout from this occupation (Blasé, & Kirby, 2002; Silins, 1994; Koh, Steers & Terborg, 1995).

The area of teacher empowerment has not been given much weight, especially the involvement of teachers in decision making strategy and professional development of strategies. Secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-county have invested huge amounts of financial resources in strategic plans and in procurement of teaching and learning resources in order to achieve a competitive edge in the academic field. These endeavours have not borne much success and some of the schools have continued to register poor achievement for the last five years in the sub-county. For example, in the 2013 KCSE results, only thirty schools, out of fifty four which sat the examinations, scored a mean score of 4.0 and above. The rest, twenty four schools, scored below

this mean (KCSE Results Analysis, Gatanga Sub County, 2013). This study, therefore sought to investigate the teacher empowerment strategies and how they influence students' academic achievement in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in public secondary schools in Gatanga sub-county, Kenya.

### **1.1 The objectives of the study**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine the extent to which teachers' involvement in decision making influence KCSE achievement of public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Kenya.
- ii. To establish the extent to which teachers' professional development influence KCSE achievement of public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Kenya.

### **1.2 Null hypotheses**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i) There is no significant relationship between teachers' involvement in decision making and students' academic achievement in KCSE in public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Kenya.
- ii) There is not significant relationship between teachers' professional development and students' KCSE achievement in public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Kenya.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Teachers' involvement in decision making and students' academic achievement**

Rice and Schneider (2004) hypothesized that, the greater the involvement of teachers in decision-making processes, the higher their level of job satisfaction and productivity. This hypothesis is based on research on the relationship between teacher job satisfaction and involvement in decision making. In an open climate, where headteachers are perceived as democratic managers who maintain open channels of communication with the staff, teachers would be more satisfied with their job as compared to schools where headteachers exhibit a harsh and authoritative attitude (Kottkamp, Mulhern, & Hoy, 2007). This would translate to improved achievement.

Employers seeking to retain staff who are unique and talented, who achieve targets, must encourage participative management. The decision-making dimension of empowerment includes teachers' involvement in critical decisions that directly affect their work. Reitzug (1994) argue that the employee involvement model of workplace governance has the most beneficial impact on achievement. This implies that decentralized decisions and relaxed rules will lead to increased achievement. At the school level teachers are responsible for implementing the decisions that are made and consequently, it is beneficial to have teachers' input in the decision-making process. In this way, teachers may feel a sense of ownership and control over their work which could lead to a greater sense of responsibility for school improvement. Repeated research studies show the benefits to organizations when those implementing the decisions have input in problem-solving and decision-making.

In a study of effective headteachers, Blase and Kirby (2002) highlights several factors which effective headteachers use to positively influence teachers' attitudes to their work. These include involvement in decision-making, granting professional autonomy, defending or 'leading by standing behind them,' and praising them for their efforts. Blase and Kirby (2002) also notes that teachers reported that such strategies had many positive effects on their thinking, attitudes and their behaviour. This, they note, resulted in enhanced self-esteem and confidence, greater sensitivity to student needs, job satisfaction, commitment and loyalty among the teaching staff.

Yukl (2004) states there are four styles of decision making that most researchers agree on. The first is autocratic decision, where the manager does not consult any of the group or organization members and comes up with the final decision alone. The second is consultation, where the manager gets advice from other members but, after taking the suggestions into consideration, makes the final decision alone. The third is joint decision, where the manager discusses the problems with other members and together they come up with a final decision, in which each has had some influence and delegation, where the manager gives one or a group of members the authority to decide and the last is the "delegated" decision maker (or makers) who carry the

responsibility for the decision, even if the manager demands prior approval for it (Vroom & Yetton, 2003).

Literature supports the claim that job satisfaction is positively related to participative decision making and to transformational leadership. Overall, teachers report greater satisfaction in their work when they perceive their principal as someone who shares information with others, delegates authority, and keeps open channels of communication with the teachers. A low level of teachers' involvement in decision making is related to a low level of satisfaction with work (Imper et al., 2000; Rice & Schneider, 2004). Headteachers who are outstanding in their jobs go beyond merely involving teachers in decision-making. They implement strategies such as providing a supportive environment that encourages teachers to examine and reflect upon their teaching and on school practice. They also use specific behaviours to facilitate reflective practice and finally they make it possible for teachers to implement ideas and programs that result from reflective practice.

When teachers are actively involved in decision making relating to their work, they will become more creative and willing to take risks. They will take an active role in the implementation of the decisions. They will even try new approaches to instructions, provide more assistance to their students and be more flexible. Headteachers should grant teachers freedom to make decisions concerning their areas of operation and implement them. The idea here is that, the involvement of teachers in decision making in an atmosphere of flexibility and freedom will empower them and by so doing motivate them to work harder for improved results.

In some of the schools in Gatanga Sub-county, teachers' involvement in active decision making has been minimal. Some of the Headteachers do not convene staff meetings where teachers can discuss educational issues freely and actively. The headteachers in such schools impose policies on teachers. This brings a disconnect between the teachers and the policies, hence, making implementation impossible due to lack of ownership. This has demotivated teachers in such schools leading to poor achievement (MOEST, 2003). Some schools in the sub-county have, however, embraced participative decision making. Teachers in such schools are motivated and

feel part and parcel of the school. Implementation of school policies in such schools has been easy because teachers feel recognized and empowered by being involved in decision making. This study investigated the extent to which teachers' involvement in decision making empowers them to produce improved students' academic achievement.

## **2.2 Teachers' professional development and students' academic achievement**

Barber (2000) in his functionalist argument suggests that professionals hold rare skills and knowledge that are esoteric and powerful. The skills and knowledge earn the professional status in the society and the benefits that go with it. Further, because a profession demands collegial censorship in terms of work achievement and conduct, the status of the teaching profession will be enhanced and this may consequently encourage teachers to feel satisfied and more committed to their work. When administrators use tactics to increase teacher empowerment, teachers' morale also increases. These findings imply that when teachers are rewarded with promotions for work well done, they get motivated and become more empowered to produce better academic results.

Empowerment translates into teacher leadership and exemplifies a paradigm shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top of the pyramid. It is natural that the principal should be the leader in implementing and supporting empowerment and teacher leadership. Throughout the educational institutions across America, principal leadership is being scrutinized by the people who are being led, the teachers. Traditionally principal leadership has been looked upon as being authoritarian. It has evolved into a type of leadership described as being coercive, manipulative, and controlling. These negative tactics have proven counter-productive (MOEST, 2003). The empowerment research agrees that, the conditions under which teachers work are often set up in such a way as to deny them a sense of efficacy, success, and self-worth. There is often too much isolation and surviving on ones' own. Paramount is the role a principal plays in faculty empowerment and teacher leadership. It is essential that a principal create an environment conducive to empowerment,

demonstrates empowerment ideals, encourages all endeavours toward empowerment, and applauds all empowerment successes.

Research shows that when administrators use tactics to increase teacher empowerment, teachers' morale also increases. For example, Firestone and Pennell (1993) revealed that, in schools where teachers are empowered to be leaders, the focus of control changes from the principal to the teachers. In the *Journey to Teacher Empowerment* (2009) the authors share that, when teachers' confidence increases and when they feel competent in their abilities, classroom instruction will improve. Rinehart and Short (1994) on the other hand states that administration should encourage other teachers to seize opportunities to share their strengths with other members of the staff. By providing opportunities, teachers are accepting leadership roles. Furthermore, participating teachers learn new skills to increase students' learning.

As teachers improve together as a staff, individual and school morale can increase. This is reinforced in the theory of collective efficacy. By providing experiences for teachers to grow, teachers become more committed to the school's mission. When given the opportunity to lead, teachers are vested and want to see their work being successful. As the administration relinquishes control to the teacher and shows trust, teachers become more creative and willing to take risks. The classroom teacher will try new approaches to instruction, provide more assistance to their students, and be more flexible.

When teachers are granted more freedom and independence, they are more likely to have buy-in to the school's mission. This idea is backed up by Reitzug (1994) when he opines that, headteachers should allow their teachers the freedom to be creative and take risks. To enhance these experiences, administrators need to recognize teachers and their accomplishments. With the opportunity to grow as a professional and be recognized for their efforts, teachers will become more empowered and willing to explore future experiences leading to continued growth.

Successful schools will be the ones where leaders are best able to apply the creative energy of teachers toward constant improvement. An effective approach to adopt constant improvement as

a way of life is through empowerment and teacher leadership. Teachers can be uplifted through empowerment. This encouragement will allow them to flex those muscles that have been allowed to atrophy (MOEST, 2003). Empowering teachers as leaders was seen as a way to put teachers at the centre of the reform movement, to keep good teachers in education, to entice new teachers into the profession, and to reverse a general trend toward treating them as employees who do specific tasks planned in detail by other people. By introducing these new paradigms, the teaching profession will become a truly rewarding experience. With the importance of empowerment some teachers, it is essential that teachers experience the same opportunities that other teachers have experienced first-hand the growth and development empowerment provides (Erlandson & Bifano, 2007).

In surveys taken across America concerning the non managerial work force, Blase, (1990); Vroom and Yetton (1973) revealed a considerable gap that exists between number of hours people are paid for working versus the number of actual hours spend productively. Approximately 75% surveyed admitted that they could be significantly more effective. The lack of leadership empowering the work force has been cited as the number one reason for this crisis (Blase, 1990). Similar leadership problems plague the educational system. Since present methods of educational leadership have been considered ineffective Vroom and Yetton (1973) teacher empowerment resulting in teacher leadership is among the numerous proposals for restructuring schools in the next century. According to *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (2006), the principal is referred to as the one who must draw on the strengths of teachers if such changes are to prevail. The principal is described as the leader who will foster an atmosphere that encourages teachers to take risks to meet the needs of students. In addition, teachers will be called upon to provide the leadership essential to the success of reform.

In Gatanga Sub-county, promotion of teachers has contributed to improvement in academic achievement of students. After a teacher earns promotion due to production of good results, either by being promoted to the position of a deputy principal internally or externally, this motivates the other teachers in the school to work harder for improved results hoping to be promoted like their colleague. They become empowered to work harder. The promoted teacher is even more motivated and empowered and will work even harder for further promotion.

Professional development as a form of teacher empowerment is a motivating factor for improved students' achievement. This study therefore sought to investigate the extent to which professional development influences students' academic achievement (Reitzug, 1994).

### 3. Research methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used in this study and it is a strategy that involves interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. The sample was 18 headteachers and 84 teachers. Data was collected by use of questionnaires. Data was analysed by use of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

### 4. Results and discussions

#### 4.1 Teachers' involvement in decision making strategy on students' KCSE achievement

To establish the influence of teachers' involvement in decision making strategy on students academic achievement of secondary schools, the researcher posed items to headteachers and teachers to determine the how the teachers were involved in decision making Teachers in the study were asked whether they were involved in directing functions Table 1 presents the headteachers' and teachers' responses on whether teachers were involved in directing function which meant among other issues clarify uncertainties and risk, providing knowledge, experience and judgment.

**Table 1 Responses on whether teachers were involved in directing function**

Respondents	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Headteachers	18	100.0	0	0.0
Teachers	67	85.9	11	14.1

Table 1 shows that, 18(100.0%) of the headteachers indicated that they involved teachers in directing function; (clarify uncertainties and risk, providing knowledge, experience and judgment) while majority of the teachers, 67(85.9%), indicated that they were involved by their

headteachers in directing function; (clarify uncertainties and risk; providing knowledge, experience and judgment). The idea behind teachers' involvement in decision making was to provide them with a greater degree of flexibility and more freedom to make decisions relating to work.

The researcher further sought to establish the frequency at which teachers were involved in decision making in the school. Table 2 presents the findings.

**Table 2 Frequency of teacher involvement in decision making**

Respondents	Frequently		Rarely		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Headteachers	18	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Teachers	58	74.4	18	23.1	2	2.6

Finding shows that, 18(100.0%) headteachers frequently involved teachers in decision making in the school. 58(74.4%) of the teachers, forming the majority, further indicated that they were frequently involved in decision making in the school by the headteachers. Through frequent involvement, teachers were encouraged to make certain decisions without consulting their superiors. The study further sought to establish the frequency at which headteachers invited teachers to deliberate on school matters. Table 3 tabulates the responses.

**Table 3 Responses on the frequency at which principal invited teachers to deliberate on school matters.**

Respondents	Frequently		Rarely		Never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Headteachers	18	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Teachers	51	65.4	25	32.1	2	2.6

Data shows in Table 3 shows that, 18(100.0%) of the headteachers frequently invited teachers to deliberate on school matters while majority of teachers, 51(65.4%), indicated that they were frequently invited to deliberate on school matters by their headteachers.

To test the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between teachers’ involvement in decision making and KCSE achievement of public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Kenya, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The data is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4 Pearson’s Correlation of teachers’ involvement in decision making and KCSE achievement**

		Teachers’ involvement in decision making	KCSE achievement
Pearson	Teachers’ involvement in decision making	1.000	0.72
Sig 1 - tailed	KCSE achievement	0.72	1.000
N	78	78	

The data shows that there was a strong positive relationship  $p = 0.72$  between teachers’ involvement in decision making and KCSE achievement. This conclusion was based on the fact that the  $p$  was strongly tending towards 1 which is the strongest relationship. This implies that, empowering teachers leads to improvement in KCSE achievement.

#### **4.2 Teachers’ professional development strategy and students KCSE achievement**

The study sought to establish the influence of teachers’ professional development strategy on academic achievement of secondary schools. Teachers and headteachers were posed with questions that sought to determine how teachers’ professional development and academic achievement of secondary schools. In a statement that professional development of the teachers influences academic achievement, majority of the headteachers, 76(97.4%) and all (100%) teachers responded to the affirmative with only 2(2.6%) headteachers stating that professional development of the teachers did not influence academic achievement.

The headteachers and teachers were asked to indicate whether they had an opportunity to utilize their skills and talents. In this item, majority of the teachers, 76(97.4%), indicated that they had an opportunity to utilize their skills and talents. Opportunities to utilize skills lead to professional challenges and professional autonomy which result to improved students' KCSE achievement. Half the number of the teachers (50(64.1%)) indicated that they were rewarded with promotions for work well done. All the headteachers revealed that they rewarded teachers with promotions for work well done.

All the headteachers agreed that they encouraged teachers to pursue on further studies. The same number agreed that, they supported teachers for career development. This had a mean of 1.50 and Standard Deviation of 0.51. The same number of headteachers agreed that district workshops and seminars are organized, teacher empowerment increases teachers' morale and that professional development help teachers to become empowered to work harder. The respondents also agreed that professional development is a form of teacher empowerment which had mean of 1.22 and Standard Deviation of 0.43. This implied that teachers had opportunities for advancement since schools provided opportunities for teachers' career development. Teachers' opportunity for career development provided teachers with career advancement which resulted to improved academic achievement. This item had an average mean of 1.49 and Standard Deviation of 0.63 where on the overall, 16(97.1%) of the headteachers agreed that teachers' professional development influenced academic achievement of secondary schools with and 4.2% of headteachers disagreeing.

Data further shows that, 77(98.7%) of the teachers agreed that teacher empowerment increases teachers' morale with a mean of 1.52 and Standard Deviation of 0.52. A further 76(97.5%) of them agreed that promotion of teachers contributes to improvement in academic achievement of students with a mean of 1.56 and Standard Deviation of 0.54 while 100.0% of teachers agreed that professional development was a form of teacher empowerment. On the overall, 64(85.3%) of the teachers agreed, 2(1.5%) were undecided while 4(4.9%) of them disagreed that teachers' professional development influenced students' academic achievement in secondary schools. The

statement had an average mean of 1.74 and Standard Deviation of 0.74. This implies that rewarding teachers with promotion contributed to students' improved academic achievement.

In the second hypothesis, that stated that there is no significant relationship between teachers' professional development and KCSE achievement of public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, the results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5 Pearson's' Correlations of teachers' professional development and KCSE achievement**

		<b>Teachers' professional development</b>	<b>KCSE achievement</b>
Pearson	Teachers' professional development	1.000	0.63
Si 1 - tailed	KCSE achievement	0.63	1.000
N	78	78	

The results of the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient indicated that there was a significant relationship between teachers' professional development and KCSE achievement. This was shown by the  $p = 0.63$ . The data implied that teachers' professional development was likely to influence students' achievement in KCSE. The results implied that when teachers are rewarded with promotions, they are empowered to work harder for better KCSE achievement.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

The study concluded that headteachers involved teachers in decision making. Decisions on various activities in the schools were made after communication, consultation and discussion with the teachers. The study also concluded that involvement of teachers in decision making empowered teachers and lead to work hard for improvement in KCSE achievement in secondary schools. The study concluded that professional development of teachers influences academic achievement of students and leads to improved KCSE results. Teachers had an opportunity to utilize their skills and talents learned during the professional development. Teachers were rewarded with promotions for work well done and they were motivated to work harder for good achievement of the students. Professional development was a form of teacher empowerment and

that headteachers and teachers had attended a workshop, seminar or in-service training in the last five years. Headteachers gave encouragement and assistance to the teachers to participate in in-service courses and seminars. The study further concluded that teachers' professional development influences KCSE achievement in public secondary school in Gatanga sub-county, Kenya.

Based on the findings of the study, the following were the recommendations:

- i. The that school headteachers should enhance teachers' involvement in decision making since more involvement of the teachers in decision making had a positive influence of students KCSE achievement.
- ii. Since teachers' professional development had an influence on students' KCSE achievement, it is necessary that school headteachers facilitate teachers' professional development.

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