

## THE EFFECT OF MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS IN NAKASONGOLA DISTRICT -UGANDA

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### **Abstract**

*The current study set out to examine the influence of Management Development (MD) on the performance of public primary school headteachers in Nakasongola district. This was premised on the belief that for managers to perform their roles effectively, they had to be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills in management. The study focused on two specific objectives thus; (i) To examine the influence of Peer Group Meetings (PGMs) on headteachers' communication capability (ii) To examine the influence of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) on headteachers' personnel management capability. The study employed a survey design using a mixed-methods approach. The target population included headteachers and Cluster Centre Tutors (CCTs) in Nakasongola district. A sample of 108 participants including 103 headteachers and 5 CCTs was selected for the study. Results of the study showed that through PGMs and CPD, headteachers were able to improve their managerial capabilities using the skills attained in communication and personnel management. However, several challenges were identified including; irregular attendance of PGMs by the headteacher, poor attitude towards change, language barrier and inadequate resources.*

### **Introduction**

The current study sought to examine the effect of Management Development (MD) on the performance of primary school headteachers in Nakasongola district. This focus is premised on the belief that for school managers to perform their roles efficiently and effectively, they need to be equipped with the requisite managerial knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies and capabilities (McHugh & McMullan, 1995; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991; Carnoy, 1999). This is important because through MD both the individual and the organization become more productive and efficient.

The concepts of Management Development and training are often used interchangeably (Milhem, Abushamsieh, Arostegeni & Nieves, 2014). While MD is a gradual process of developing managerial skills, training is short

term and aims to develop technical skills in the current job (Robotham, 2003). For that reason, both MD and training practitioners have always adopted similar methods to deliver knowledge and skills. It is postulated that for a school to perform well, it must have a competent head teacher (Pierson, 2014). This implies that school managers have to be exposed to a continuous process of MD in order to acquire the requisite skills and knowledge needed to perform managerial tasks effectively.

In Uganda, under the Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS), a significant number of primary school headteachers in Nakasongola district attended training in managerial skills and were awarded certificates in school management. The TDMS in-service training programme was a donor funded intervention which was conducted at Nakaseke Core PTC between 1995 and 2003 to enhance headteachers' managerial skills so that their performance could be improved. When the programme phased out its activities in 2003 its structures were taken over by the Government of Uganda through Kyambogo University under the Core PTC network. In the subsequent years, the Cluster Centre Tutors continued with the Cluster Centre-based training of headteachers in managerial skills. This was done in conjunction with the District Local Government of Nakasongola through Peer Group Meetings (PGMs), Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops, support supervision activities and seminars. It was expected that by equipping headteachers with the requisite managerial skills, their managerial performance in schools would improve. Unfortunately, there have been continuous overtones of ineffective management of primary schools in the district. Given this background, no study has been conducted in Nakasongola district to verify this claim. The current study therefore, set out to bridge the aforementioned gap.

### **Literature Review**

It is opined that in preparing managers, there are key issues that should be emphasised thus –raising employee efficiency (Richard, et al, 2009) and improving organizational performance by building both the organizational and individual competence (Cummings & Woley, 2005). Other studies posit that managers need to build competitive advantage through training competencies such as creativity and discernment so as to maintain as well as advance their positions in their respective work places (McClelland, 1994)

through human resources capital differentiation (D'Natto et al, 2008). Furthermore, it is argued that manager preparation should focus on innovation (De jong & Hartog, 2007) and the most essential requirement for innovative behaviour in a work place is the development of skilled and competent human resource (Edralin, 2007). Other scholars have linked MD activities to skills and knowledge development (Swap, Leonard, Shields & Abrams, 2001) as well as knowledge sharing (Kullman, 1998; Edralin, 2007; Stagler, 2009). Given the above debate, the role of Management Development (MD) in enhancing the performance of primary school headteachers is not stated. This study aims to bridge that gap by analyzing the effect of MD on the performance of public primary school headteachers in Nakasongola district.

Studies also maintain that MD enhances the ability of an organization to be knowledge intensive and at the same time enables employees to take up new jobs or tasks efficiently (Karthilleyan, Karttu & Graf, 2010). This implies that MD offers an organization the opportunity to improve efficiency both in the long and short term (Forsyth, 2001; Brinkerhoff, 2005). However, it is also posited that maintaining improved efficiency is a function of having the right skills (Giovani, 2011). Other studies consistently opine that improved efficiency in an organization can only be meaningful if it has the potential to enhance the ability of employees to make maximum use of the organisation's resources (Ukenna, Jeoma, Anionwu & Olise, 2010). While this debate provides a wider perspective into the justification of MD in an organization, this study seeks to investigate whether the perceived efficiency brought about by MD translates into improved management of public primary schools by the headteachers.

The emphasis on the institutional heads as the agents of change has been increasing and the need for professional development of educational leaders has gained worldwide popularity (Fullan, 1991). Nevertheless, it is noted that the reason why educational changes are often perceived as problematic is not the nature of change itself but the nature of knowledge, skills and attitudes of those involved and the way they are exposed in action (Burnham, 1994). The debate intensifies with views on the complex management contexts of educational institutions which require a sustained development other than "a short term patching up operation" (Brew, 1995) as

opposed to perceptions of training and development as a means of rectifying deficiencies (Middlehurst, 1995). However, there is need to link MD to the performance of primary school headteachers –an issue that makes this study relevant and timely.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To examine the influence of Peer Group Meetings (PGMs) on the headteachers' communication tasks.
2. To examine the influence of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops on the headteachers' personnel management tasks.

### **Methodology**

The study employed a mixed-methods design because of the need to relate evidence from qualitative and quantitative methods (Donald, Chaser & Sorensen, 2010). Quantitatively, the study used statistical procedures to generate conclusions whereas the qualitative approach sought to understand the problem on the basis of reported words by giving detailed views of informants.

The target population comprised of headteachers from the 144 public primary schools in Nakasongola district and Cluster Centre Tutors (CCTs) from the five Cluster Centres in the district. Using Krejcie and Morgan table as cited in Amin (2005) a sample size of 108 respondents was selected for the study out of which 103 were headteachers and 5 respondents were Cluster Centre Tutors. The 103 headteachers were selected using convenience sampling while the CCTs were purposively selected.

The headteachers filled the questionnaire at their own convenient time after which the completed schedule was delivered individually or in groups as recommended by (Kothary, 2004). The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items which used a five-point Likert scale to generate quantitative data. It is recommended that a closed-ended questionnaire should consist of questions which are accompanied by a list of possible alternatives from which respondents select answers that best suit their situations (Amin, 2005). The structure of the closed-ended questionnaire was in such a way that they were arranged into content sub-sections. Each question was introduced using a short statement reflecting its content and purpose. The purpose of the short statement was to help the respondent comprehend

what the question was about without spending much time as suggested by (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Quantitatively, data was analyzed using descriptive statistics whereas qualitative data was analyzed by carefully organizing the data through generating themes categories and patterns. The factual code helped to identify facts, attitudes and feelings of the interviewees. This helped to evaluate and critically analyse data to establish the adequacy, usefulness and consistency of the information.

### Results

The findings of the study were presented on the basis of the two research objectives. To get quantitative data from the headteachers, a closed-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used. The headteachers were required to indicate their opinions using Strongly Disagreed (SA), Disagreed (D) Neutral (N), strongly agreed (SA) or Agreed (A). To give a summarized rating of the strength of respondents' views, the responses under SD and D were presented and discussed under the category of Disagree while those with SA and A were placed under the category of an interview guide was used to solicit views from the headteachers regarding the two research objectives.

#### *Findings on research objective1*

The first objective sought to examine the influence of Peer Group Meetings (PGMs) on headteachers' communication effectiveness at school.

*Table 1: Responses on the Influence of PGMs on Headteachers' Communication tasks*

<b>The Influence of PGMs on Headteachers' Communication tasks</b>			
	<b>DA</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>
1. Through PGMs, I attained skills in report writing	37%	1%	62%
2. Through PGMs I attained interpersonal skills for effective management	47%	1%	52%
3. Through PGMs I attained verbal communication skills	25%	1%	74%
4. Through PGMs I attained presentation skills	43%	02%	55%

In table I above, headteachers were asked to give their views using Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree under

various statements regarding the influence of PGMs on their communication effectiveness and the results showed that through PGMs, majority (62%) of them attained reporting skills. It was noted that one of the key roles of primary school headteachers was to report on different issues affecting their schools as often as possible depending on the situation at hand. Through interviews with CCTs, it was noted that it required headteachers to possess relevant reporting skills such as collecting, analyzing, interpret in grand assembling information so as to prepare quality reports. During the PGMs, the headteachers practiced the skills, evaluated each other and shared ideas on how to improve the quality of their reports. An analysis of annual reports submitted by the headteachers to the District Education Officer (DEO) showed significant improvement in the originality of information, succinctness, clarity, preciseness and language quality. This notwithstanding, the CCTs reported that on average, in every PGM held at the Coordinating Centres, at least three headteachers did not attend – implying that the trainings conducted did not benefit them.

The study also revealed that through PGMs, headteachers acquired interpersonal skills–this was affirmed by the majority (52%) who agreed. Nonetheless, a significant number (47%) disagreed. Through interviews with the CCTs, it was reported that during the PGMs, headteachers shared a lot of ideas and acquired a variety of interpersonal skills such as negotiation, problem solving, decision making and emotional intelligence which helped them to make informed decisions and perform their duties effectively. However, the CCTs explained that given their experience in conducting PGMs, atleast 45% of the headteachers in the district had difficulties in adapting to new ideas. This implied that such officers were always opposed to change –this in turn affected their performance levels and the overall quality of service delivery in their respective schools.

Regarding whether through PGMs headteachers attained verbal communication skills, majority (74%) agreed. However, a significant number (25%) indicated that the PGMs did not help them to develop their verbal communication skills. It was established through interviews with CCTs that effective verbal communication entailed being an effective listener, talking with confidence, being authentic to oneself, being friendly, being sensitive to one's body language and being concise. The CCTs added that the

headteachers acquired these skills practically as they often made presentations and contributed ideas during the PGMs. However, it was observed that language barrier was a big challenge for those headteachers who were not familiar with the languages used by the natives of Nakasongola. As a result, some of them had difficulties in communicating to parents especially during meetings and school open days.

The study further revealed that majority (55%) of the headteachers agreed that they attained presentation skills through PGMs while 43% disagreed. This was attributed to the fact that during the PGMs, all headteachers were required to make presentations about the best practices and challenges in their schools. This helped the headteachers to consolidate on the already acquired skills in the previous presentations and to identify the existing challenges. However, through document review it was noted that 50% of headteachers across the five Coordinating Centres in Nakasongola district still lacked adequate skills of preparing quality presentations. Recommendations by the CCTs showed that the headteachers needed more time to focus on the organizational, analytical and information gathering skills in order to prepare better presentations in future.

**Findings on Research Objective 2:**

*Table 2: The influence of Continuous Professional Development on Headteachers' personnel management tasks*

The influence of CPD on Headteachers' personnel Management Tasks	Disagree		Agree
	Neutral		
1. Through CPD I acquired skills in resolving staff conflicts	45%	4%	51%
2. Through CPD I acquired skills in staff motivation	32%	1%	67%
3. Through CPD I acquired skills in training and development of staff	43%	3%	54%
4. Through CPD I acquired skills in guiding and counseling staff	32%	3%	65%

According to table 2 above, majority of respondents (51%) agreed that through Continuous Professional Development (CPD), they attained skills in resolving staff conflicts while a considerable number (47%) disagreed. This was attributed to the fact that conflict management was a key area where a lot of emphasis was placed during CPD sessions. This was due to the fact that workplace conflicts had been cited by the CCTs as one of those vices that hindered the performance of teachers in Nakasongola. The CCTs explained that conflict resolution skills that headteachers attained included; being calm, being respectful to reactions, being ready to forgive and forget, ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing, being able to control emotions and paying attention to the feelings being expressed. While this intervention was at first seen as an uphill task, the CCTs reported that it had helped to enhance stability among staff in 75% of the schools where misunderstandings had been cited.

As to whether the CPDs had helped headteachers to attain skills in staff motivation, 67% of the respondents agreed while 32% disagreed. This level of attainment by the headteachers was mainly due to the availability of the CCTs at the various Cluster Centres and their ability to conduct the CPDs in a consistent manner. Through interviews, all the CCTs reported that they regularly encouraged headteachers to find ways of motivating their staffs in order to expect maximum performance from them. Deplorably, the CCTs reported that due to limited resources, the headteachers mostly used invisible rewards to motivate their staffs because the schools lacked funds to procure physical rewards to appreciate the efforts of specific staffs who displayed outstanding performance.

The current study also showed that majority (54%) of respondents agreed that through CPD workshops they were able to acquire skills in the training and development of staff while 43% disagreed. The strong emphasis placed on staff development during the CPD sessions explains this phenomenon. Through interviews, CCTs reported that during the CPD workshops which were conducted in 2015/2016, the topics that were tackled included; the importance of training and development of staff, identification of staff training needs, preparation of training materials and approaches/ methods of training and development. Nonetheless, it was also argued that although such trainings were perceived as being vital, headteachers did not have



adequate funds to effectively roll out the trainings at the school level on regular basis. This had resulted into substandard school-based training activities in Nakasongola district.

Results also showed that majority (65%) of respondents agreed that through CPDs, they attained guidance and counseling skills which helped them in handling psychosocial issues that affected their staffs. While this achievement was attributed to increased awareness about counseling services, it was reported by the CCTs that a significant number of teaching staffs in Nakasongola did not appreciate the value of such services. Despite the aforementioned challenges, there was need to attract and retain the best staff in public the primary schools in Nakasongola district. This meant that guidance and counseling were necessary in schools for purposes of managing stress and depression that resulted from anxiety related issues like managing deadlines, meeting targets and lack of time to fulfill personal and family commitments. It was nevertheless realised that with the limited resources, atleast 70% of the headteachers had managed to maintain stability amongst their staffs. This was achieved amidst the numerous challenges as stated in the status reports submitted to the DEOs office by the headteachers. The challenges ranged from negative attitude amongst staff to lack of facilities needed in effecting counseling services in schools.

### **Conclusions**

The study findings indicated that although Peer Group Meetings (PGMs) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops had helped to enhance headteachers capabilities in performing their communication and personnel management tasks respectively, there were still numerous inadequacies that needed to be addressed. These included but not limited to; irregular attendance of PGMs by some headteachers, poor attitude of headteachers towards change, language barrier among some headteachers who were not familiar with native languages and inadequate resources.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are suggested;

- i. The office of the District Education Officer (DEO) should develop a monitoring mechanism to ensure that headteachers attend Peer group Meetings (PGMs) regularly.

- ii. There is need for the office of the DEO in conjunction with the Cluster Centre Tutors (CCTs) to carry out effective Training Needs Assessment (TNA) to ascertain the critical gaps in the performance of primary school headteachers so as to address issues of poor attitude towards change.
- iii. There is also need for School Governance bodies to diversify income sources so as to overcome the challenge of inadequate funding in schools.

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