School Principals and Job Stress: The Silent Dismissal Agent and Forgotten Pill in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4[*]

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The quest to ensure the provision of quality education in schools has taken a global dimension with the introduction of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by the United Nations. Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs titled "quality education" seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. Consequently, the notion that leadership in schools is gradually being established as a complex enterprise to work as school principals are continually battling with the demands the job makes on them had been strengthen. Unfortunately, strategies designed to ensure the achievement of this goal regrettably was silent on the issue of job stress among the main policy implementers at the school level—the school principal. This paper, therefore, attempts to critically examine the issue of job stress among school principal and offer some recommendations to reduce the phenomenon. It is guided by the following research questions: 1. What are the sources of job stress among school principals? 2. What is the effect of job stress on the performance of school principals? and 3. What new steps could be taken to reduce job? In conclusion, the paper recognized that work load, lack of resources, and support rated higher on the scale of stressors and so recommended the reduction in the work load of school principals and part shared among deputies and delegated staff in the school. The paper thus disapproves of the job stress avoiding strategies being used by the principals—changing job, refusing to take up the position, and quitting the job. In the future, the paper suggested further investigation into school principals' roles, practices, effect of work conditions, and resilience.

Keywords: school principal, job stress, causes of job stress, effects of job stress, impact on school principal

Introduction

Education remains the cornerstone on which the development of human society is laid. As a result, government all over the world set up training institutions in the form of schools to educate the citizenry to fit well into society and to live meaningful lives. Education is seen as an important tool for the optimum development of a nation's manpower resources, which contributes largely to the nation's social and economic growth.

As a result at the global level, the United Nations (UN) begun the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs is to address issues in education effective 2015 (United

Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). Under the heading quality education, the goal is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In achieving these, seven targets which are the expected outcomes by 2030 and three means of achieving these targets were outlined. The seven targets are: universal primary and secondary education, early childhood development and universal pre-primary education, equal access to technical/vocational and higher education, relevant skills for decent work, gender equality and inclusion; universal youth literacy, and education for sustainable development and global citizenship and the means are provision of effective learning environments, scholarships and teachers and educators (UNESCO, n.d.).

Literature Review

Provision of formal education occurs in an institution. Consequently, given the global and national quest to ensure quality education, it would be understatement to note that Management capacity at the school level is crucial (Bruns & Mingat, 2003, as cited in International Labour Organization, 2012), thereby making the school principal a paramount position. The principal is responsible for creating, harnessing, and sustaining the relevant human resources for the provision of this quality education that the whole world is envisaging. Further, in the assessment of educational systems, it is the principal that ensures and enhances the provision of quality teaching and learning (Huber, 2010). This is demonstrated in the improvement of learning outcomes of students and the strengthening of professional community among teachers (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). The principal is also seen as the vision driver of a school. They have the task of shaping the vision of academic success for all students, promoting high standards, and creating a conducive and hospitable climate for academic exercise to progress in order and in safety, which results in the development of cooperative spirit prevailing among teachers for fruitful interaction (Wallace Foundation, 2011). So, school principals are considered major stakeholders in ensuring the provision of highquality educationof children (Kukemelk & Ginter, 2016) and for the general success of schools (Bush & Jackson, 2003; Simkins, 2005). The school principal has a valuable place in the educational set up.

However, a critical examination of the three means of implementing the SDG 4 did not consider (or envisage) the challenges (for that matter the working conditions) of the school principal, the chief policy implementer at the school level. The policy on the contrary considers the provision of effective learning environment, scholarships, and increasing the number of qualified teachers and educators by 2030 as means of achieving SDG 4 which seeks to increase quality education, relegating factors relating to the school principal's conditions and health to the background. Specifically, challenges of work load resulting into job stress regrettably have not been considered.

Stress is a situation, in which a person feels tense, restless, nervous, or anxious or is unable to sleep, because his/her mind is troubled all the time. In other words, it is described as any force that pushes psychological or physical factors beyond its range of stability within the individual (Friedman, 2000). Further, in the description of Sánchez-Rinza and Peralta (2013), stress is a state of tension within an organism which pushes it to put into action all their defenses, to cope with a situation of functional imbalance. On the other hand, job stress is a situation where a person perceives the work environment in such a way that his or her reaction involves feeling of an inability to cope with the job (World Health Organization, 2004).

Interestingly, the phenomenon of stress has long been conceived since the seventeenth century. The works of Selye (1976) and the postulation of theories, like the Job Demands-Control-Support model (Karasek, 1979),

Person-Environment Fit model (Lewin, 1935), and Transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) among others explained the concept of stress; and since then, there has been some studies measuring the concept in different contexts.

This paper focuses on job stress of school principals in general. The methodology adopted is to examine literature on the sources of job stress and its effect on school principals to present a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in educational context in the light of achieving SDG 4. In sum, the paper addresses three issues: highlight the sources of job stress for principals; discuss the effect of these stressful situations or events on school principals; and offer some recommendations to inform policy.

School Principal and Sources of Job Stress

School principals are major stakeholders in shaping a school climate that promotes and supports students and teachers (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The role of school principals over the years is becoming more complex and with new responsibilities (Blasé, Blasé, & Philips, 2010). In addition to the different jobs which include instructional duties, administrative and managerial, and the daily issues in school (Fink & Resnick, 2001), the school principals are now performing roles in the community to meet the needs of other stakeholders (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Providing leadership is stressful (Steward, 2014) and being a school principal is no exception (Barkhuizen & Rothman, 2011; Yambo, 2012). Principalship is a challenging job with most reporting increasing pressure as a result of the job demands (J. Queen & P. Queen, 2005) and especially as the pace of development has increased, the phenomenon of job stress has become common among leaders (Wadesango, Gudyanga, & Mberewere, 2015). It is therefore, not out of context when the teaching profession and role of principals are described as highly stressful (Juma & Simatwa, 2016).

In everyday life, some stressors have been identified. They are present in the form of self-centeredness, hate, worry, guilt feelings, envy, over sensitivity, sorrow, resentment, jealousy, fear, frustration, and desire for approval among others (Willis, 2005).

However, in education and more specifically, regarding the occupation of a school principal, the job stressor variables look different in nature and context. Researchers in varying situations have identified sources of job stress among principals. In a study by Kendi (2012), the role as management and finance officer, responsibility towards stakeholders (students, community, politicians, and Ministry of Education); the environment (physical) and families (children, spouse, and other family members) were identified. Further, supervision of teaching staff, hosting visitors, monitoring school's health record, and handling of school funds were identified as stressors by Wadesango et al. (2015). Regarding the day-to-day operations of the school principal, workload, lack of resources, and social support had been identified as stressors, Cooper and Kelly (1993), decades ago reported workload as one source of job stress for principals. And recently, Juma and Simatwa (2016) also identified limited opportunities for professional development, tight time deadlines for tasks, delayed disbursement of school funds, interpersonal relations, social support, and lack of expert assistance among others.

Next, Göker (2012) identified personal factors as stressor among school principals. The limited ability of school principals to vary their work assignments, lack of opportunities for personal development and advancement, bureaucracy, lack of support, the amount of paper work, and lack of resources, all accounted for job stress among principals.

Contrary to Göker (2012), Wadesango et al. (2015), in part found that teachers contribute to increase the stress level of school principals. Teacher's unprofessional behavior, such as reporting daily to school late; lack of seriousness towards work; ineffective teaching; having illicit relationship with students; coming to school drunk; and abuse of privileges were identified. It is, however, worthy to note that the demonstration of effective professional standard by some teachers and their desire to change and develop their ability to make independent decisions accounted for moderate level job stress among the supervisors (Göker, 2012).

In sum, over the past the 20 years, the office of school principal has been associated with higher levels of exhaustion and stress (Brock & Grady, 2002; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). Some researchers even predicted there will be shortage of school leaders in the next decade and that the future looks bleak as more qualified individuals do not want to become school principals as result of the related job stress which exposed them to serious health concern (J. A. Queen & P. S. Queen, 2005). It, therefore, appears that principals are under more pressure (Boyland, 2011) due to several changes in recent years that have increased the variety, scope, and demands of the position resulting in many principals considering leaving the profession (Mitchell, 2010) or unwilling to accept position as principals (Darmody & Smyth, 2016).

School Principals and Effect of Job stress

Referring to the person—environment fit theory (Brewer & McMahan, 2004), job stress is linked with one's interaction with the work environment. Consequently, if the needs of the work are more than what the individual's ability can contain, then job stress is likely to result. The resultant job stress which is demonstrated visibly in the form of unpleasant negative emotions (anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression) (Kyriacou, 2001), have impact on the individual's work performance (Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Mbibi, Oluchi, & Nwamuo, 2013). In the long term, the inability of the individual's capacity (competency or skills) to match the demand of the job give rise to job burnout, and according to Brock and Grady (2002), the symptoms of burnout are shown as physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual.

The impact of this is demonstrated in the low level of job satisfaction (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013), the unwillingness of other teachers to take up the responsibility of a school principal (Darmody & Smyth, 2016), developing less interest in the job (Mbibi et al., 2013) and the readiness to change job (Yambo, Kindiki, & Tuitoek, 2012).

The concept job satisfaction refers to an individual's attitude towards work. It is described as a pleasurable emotional state resulting from positive assessment of one's job (Thiagaraj & Thangaswamy, 2017). Consequently, when the result of the personal appraisal is negative, then there is low job satisfaction. Regarding the job of a school principal, the increase in responsibilities has made the job more stressful, and thus, having negative impact on their well-being (Chaplain, 2001) and health (Irish Primary Principals' Network [IPPN], 2014), whereby lowing the levels of job satisfaction (Markow et al., 2013). The association between school principals' job stress and job satisfaction has long been found to be negative with workload, inadequate resources, lack of support, and work conditions as the contributing factors (Borg & Riding, 1993). For example, in schools which are increasingly accountable for results, work related stress was found higher among managers than across all other industries (Phillips & Sen, 2011) giving rise to low level of job satisfaction.

Avoiding the job of a school principal is another effect of job stress. The impact of job stress on the operations among school principal has gain policy relevance such that it is becoming difficult to fill vacant positions for principals as many teachers are discouraged from taking up the job (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner,

2002; National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2003). The reasons accounting for this apparent lack of interest are the factors identified as the school principals' job stressors (as mentioned in IPPN, 2010; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; etc. above). The presence of these factors have stifled natural efforts towards building stronger human resource which is invaluable for the development and maintenance of quality educational outcomes, thereby rendering education systems all the world ineffective in addressing the matter of school principals' job stress and burnout especially at the secondary school levels (World Bank, 1999).

It has also been noted that school principals are developing low interest in the job. As tasks, structures, and the education system in most countries are changing (Huber & Hiltmann, 2011) with new responsibilities emerging, school principals are developing low interest in the job (Mbibi et al., 2013). In a study on perception of stress and stress management, it was found that the presence of job stress have effect on the time management of the principals, and to some extent, resulting in reduction in effectiveness, lack of interest in the job and lack of concentration on the job.

Strategies Directed at Policy to Reduce Job Stress

Synthesising the causes of job stress among school principals, there is enough evidence to suggest that it is as result of work overload and non-supportive working environment. Consequently, strategies to reduce the phenomenon of job stress should be directed at reducing the work load and the provision of the necessary logistics and support. Unfortunately, policy-makers have not taken the bold step to address this situation. The increasing responsibilities of principals to ensure quality teaching and learning in schools, and their development have long been known by educational policy makers but, efforts to develop school leaders to match up to the task has not received the needed urgent attention (Huber, 2010). Therefore, principals prefer changing or quitting the job as the best option (Yambo, Odhiambo, & Odera, 2014), while others resign to seek employment in other sectors (Yambo, Kindiki, & Tuitoek, 2012). Further, many principals quit the job to avoid other medical conditions, such as hypertension and hormonal imbalance, which may directly and indirectly contribute to depression that could lead to death (Koome, 2007; Yambo et al., 2012).

In the opinion of this paper, the role of the school principal in ensuring improvement in quality teaching and learning and above all in achieving the SDG 4 is non-negotiable. And as increasing job demands are a threat to the attainment of this mandate; efforts need to be put in place to reduce this danger. Consequently, the attention of policy makers should be focused on reducing the work load and providing logistics to make them more effective and efficient than to compound the existing duties of principals (adding implementation of SDG 4, for example).

The principal's role should be reduced to mobilization of human and material resources, supervision of learning and teaching, handling stakeholders, and ensuring the general tone of the school. Responsibilities as such, finance management, teaching, dealing with issues regarding discipline (teachers and students) and other school improvement related functions should be distributed among deputies and selected teachers to whom power is delegated. The principal will therefore, have a good work-life balance to enjoy the necessary social support from the family (Kendi, 2012).

Conclusion

In sum, it is worth to note that job stress could have positive impact on the individual (Juma & Simatwa, 2016). However, excessive unmanaged job stress has been linked to a long list of physical and mental health

problems (Colbert, 2008). This paper discussed sources of job stress for school principals and its impact on performance. The investigation revealed that work load has negative impact on job satisfaction, interest in the job by potential principals, and increasing the desire to quit.

Given the goals of SDG 4 with the agenda of improving quality education, policy makers need to take a second look at the position of the school principal. In the view of this paper, steps should be taken to reduce the work load of the principal to free some time to perform task directly related to improving quality in schools. Other responsibilities should be distributed among deputies and to delegated staff.

Lastly, given the value of education and the fact stress is common in every human endeavour, continuous study of the phenomenon is proper. It is therefore, important to further investigate job preferences, strains, and practices of school principals with the aim to gain empirical insights into how school leaders' functions, practices, and work conditions affect their health in general and resilience in particular. This is to make the principals build resilience, stay on the job and not quit because of job stress for a successful achievement of SDG 4.

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