AN INVESTIGATION OF THE COLLABORATION ACTIVITIES PRACTICED BY SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF THE WESTERN REGION OF KENYA

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Abstract

Around the globe, governments are involved in educational collaboration which means engaging in an activity with shared goals and processes. In Kenya, collaboration is one of the strategies that secondary schools have adopted in order to improve academic performance. The objective of this study was to identify the collaboration activities engaged in by secondary schools which collaborate and benchmark at the time and those which only collaborate. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was 78 secondary schools from which 23 were randomly selected. Of the targeted 276 respondents, 251 responded. Data was collected using questionnaires and analysed both descriptively and inferentially. The study found that, the schools that both collaborated and benchmarked and those which only collaborated were hardly involved in the setting of joint Form I-IV and Form III-IV examinations. However, 116 (89.2%) of the respondents from collaborating and benchmarking schools and 95 (78.5%) from schools involved in only collaboration said that, they participated in the setting of joint Form IV examinations to a large extent. This showed how rigorous quizzing was carried out with the candidate class because of the desire to improve Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education results. The majority of the respondents from both categories of schools did not engage in joint curriculum delivery (72; 55.4% from collaborating and benchmarking schools and 95; 78.5% from schools that only collaborated) and joint cultural activities (64; 49.2% from collaborating and benchmarking schools and 81; 66.9% from schools that only collaborated). It was recommended that, schools should engage more in joint curriculum delivery and other teaching practices which could develop the students to realize their full academic potential instead of remaining skewed towards testing and evaluation. In addition, collaboration activities should focus on all levels of education, and not just Form IV.

Key Words: Educational collaboration, collaboration activities, curriculum delivery and cultural activities

1. Introduction

Collaboration is a process in which people work together on a practical or academic effort. According to Cook and Friend (1991), the evolution of collaborative practice in education began in the mid-seventies as a form of consultation process through which one professional would assist another in problem solving. Globally, this concept of learning from others was identified in the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme which articulates enhancement of teacher quality through networks and communities (Francis, Newham & Harkin, 2005). In Athenia, teachers felt that, they could improve learning for themselves and their students through collaborating to develop skills and content across their year 8 curriculum (Farley & Taylor, 2004). In other collaborative situations, two or more teachers met regularly to discuss issues pertaining to classroom learning activities, lesson plans, assignments, assessment, evaluation and revision (Howland & Picciotto, 2003). In Alberta, Canada, in an effort to connect schools and provide them with a global insight, many schools were engaging in international school partnerships which took various forms (Alberta Education, 2008).

Suntisukwongchote (2004) investigated collaboration via the internet among high school science teachers in which the participants were Heads of Science Departments and other science teachers in Perth, West Australia. The study was a survey carried out in 24 government secondary schools purposively sampled. The survey used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the ways in which science teachers at the selected schools used the internet. The results indicated that, the teachers in the sampled schools rarely collaborated with teachers from other schools in an electronic environment.

Another study by Legters (1999) examined collegiality among teachers in schools. It was a case study which used 24 respondents; Of these, 19 were ninth grade faculty and staff, 2 ninth grade administrators, one ninth grade principal, one school media specialist and one school principal. Focus interviews were used as well as participant observation, and data analysis was mainly by descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that, there was an increase in the levels of routine sharing and joint work, an indicator of true collaboration. Teachers also interacted with the nearest veteran teachers for content guidance. Teachers were found to collaborate about student

discipline, attendance, grading and credits, but they rarely interacted about teaching strategies or curriculum delivery.

A study by the School of Education (2008) to gather data on the extent and nature of school collaboration in Northern Ireland used a sample of 143 schools and the respondents were principals and/or vice-principals and teachers. The study revealed that, there was collaboration in staff activities, curriculum delivery, sports and cultural activities. Partnerships were selected if they had been in operation for at least six months and if they involved schools drawn from across the school sectors.

A study aimed at exploring the improvement in teachers' collaboration throughout their participation in one or two improvement projects was carried out between 2006-2009 by Sigrun (2011) using 28 Norwegian schools. The study used 243 teachers at 10 schools on the 'Handbook Project' and 657 teachers at 18 schools for the 'Respect Programme.' A web based questionnaire was administered three times to teachers before T1, one year into T2 and at the end of T3 of the intervention period. The findings revealed that, there was larger increase in collaboration for teachers participating in the 'Respect Programme' than the 'Handbook Project.' The study hardly explained how collaboration on the Handbook project and Respect Programme impacted academic performance in the 28 schools and the specific activities engaged in.

1.1 Study Hypothesis

H_{O1}: There is no significant difference in the collaboration activities practiced by secondary schools in the Western region of Kenya.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The targeted 78 schools were stratified into collaborating and benchmaking schools, (41 schools) and collaborating schools (37 schools). A total of 23 schools (12 from the collaborating and benchmarking stratum and 11 from the collaborating only stratum) were randomly selected using the rotary method. All the Principals, Directors of Studies, Academic Heads of Departments were purposively selected for the study, while five teachers randomly selected from each school participated in the study. Out of the expected 276 respondents, 251 responded.

2.2 Instrument

All the participants filled a questionnaire indicating the extent to which their schools collaborated in the given activities. That is whether they did this to a large extend, small extent or whether they did not collaborate at all in a given activity.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done at the level of the respondents from the two school categories that were involved in collaboration. The responses were tabulated and the difference in the main collaboration activities of the different categories of schools was established using the chi square (α=0.05) because of the categorical nature of the data.

3. Results

The table shows the number of respondents and the percentage to one decimal place right below the number

Collaboration activities practiced by secondary schools.

Collaboration activity	Collaborating& benchmarking(N=130)			Collaborating only (N=121)			x^2	df	sig
	LE %	SE %	NA%	LE%	SE%	NA%			
Setting joint FI-IV exams	20 (15.4)	41 (31.5)	69 (53.1)	12 (9.9)	45 (37.2)	64 (52.9)	2.054	2	0.358
Setting joint FIII-IV exams	27 (20.8)	53 (40.8)	50 (38.5)	37 (30.6)	59 (48.8)	25 (20.7)	2.021	2	0.364
Setting joint FIV exams only	116 (89.2)	14 (10.8)	-	95 (78.5)	26 (21.5)	-	5.374	1	0.020*
Setting and marking joint F IV exams	94 (72.3)	30 (23.1)	6 (4.6)	69 (57.0)	45 (37.2)	7 (5.8)	6.597	2	0.037*
Setting/marking/joint revision of F IV exams	59 (45.4)	34 (26.2)	37 (28.5)	22 (18.2)	56 (46.3)	43 (35.5)	22.435	2	0.001*
Joint curr. delivery with partner schools	8 (6.2)	50 (38.5)	72 (55.4)	6 (5.0)	18 (14.9)	95 (78.5)	17.927	2	0.001*
Joint cultural activities	42 (32.3)	24 (18.5)	64 (49.2)	6 (5.0)	34 (28.1)	81 (66.9)	30.434	2	0.001*

Note: % = Percentage; N = 251 Legend: LE=Large Extent; SE =Small Extent; NA=Nott At All; *The difference is significant at α<0.05

Source: Field Data

Findings on collaboration in setting of joint Form I-IV examinations showed that, both categories of schools (those which collaborated and benchmarked, and those which collaborated only), were hardly involved in this activity. This was shown by the fact 69 (53.1%) of the respondents from schools which collaborated and benchmarked, and 64 (52.9%) from schools which only collaborated said that, they did not participate in this activity. A fairly uniform number from both categories (41 from collaborating and benchmarking; 45 from collaborating only) said that they did this to a small extent. Only 20 (15.4%) of the respondents from collaborating and benchmarking schools, and 12 (9.9%) from collaborating schools said that they participated to a large extent. As a result, the chi-square value of 2.055 was less than chi-critical value of 5.99 ($p=0.358$). Similarly, 53 (40.8%) of the respondents from collaborating and benchmarking schools, and 59 (48.8%) from collaborating schools said they did not participate in the setting of joint Form III-IV examinations at all. Again, the chi-square value of 2.021 ($p=0.364$) was less than chi critical of 5.99. The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected as far as these two factors were concerned. The fact that $p>0.05$ in both cases showed that, schools involved in collaboration and benchmarking, and those that only collaborated were not very keen on setting joint examinations for the whole school. Neither were they keen on joint evaluation for Forms III and IV. The two categories of schools therefore had a similar level of disinterest in joint school assessment as well as joint assessment for senior classes as was shown by responses.

Findings also showed that 116 (89.2%) of the respondents from collaborating and benchmarking schools, and 95 (78.5%) from schools involved in collaboration only said that, they participated in the setting of joint Form IV examinations only. However, a significant number of respondents (26; 21.5%) from the collaborating only category said they did this to a small extent as compared to only 14 (10.8%) from schools that collaborated and benchmarked. The chi-square value of 5.374 ($p=0.020$) was greater than the chi-critical value of 3.84 showing that there was a significant difference in the practice of this activity by the two categories of schools. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings meant that, setting of joint Form IV examinations was a key collaboration activity that both categories of schools were preoccupied with although schools that collaborated and benchmarked did this to a greater degree compared

to those that collaborated only. Almost all the respondents from schools involved in collaboration and benchmarking took part in the setting of Form IV examinations while a few respondents from schools involved in collaboration only indicated that, they did this to a small extent.

The majority of respondents 94 (72.3%) from schools which collaborated and benchmarked, compared to 69 (57.0%) from schools which only collaborated said that, they collaborated in setting and marking of joint Form IV examinations. A small number of respondents from either category said that, they did not take part in this activity. The chi-square value of 6.597 (p=0.037) was greater than the chi-critical value of 5.99 showing that there was a significant difference in the practice of this activity by the two categories of schools. Setting, marking and joint revision of Form IV examinations was a preserve of schools that collaborated and benchmarked as shown by 59 (45.4%) of the respondents who said that, they did this to a large extent as compared to only 22 (18.2) from schools that only collaborated. The chi-square value of 22.435 (p=0.001) was greater than the chi-critical value of 5.99 showing that there was a significant difference in the practice of this activity by the two categories of schools. Again, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that, there was a lot of emphasis placed on examinations at the form four level of education in schools engaged in both collaboration and benchmarking that resulted in intensive quizzing compared to schools that only collaborated.

On joint curriculum delivery with partner schools, Only 8 (6.2%) of the respondents from collaborating and benchmarking schools; and 6 (5.0%) from schools involved in collaboration only were involved to a large extent. A total of 50 (38.5%) of the respondents from collaborating and benchmarking schools did this to a small extent as compared to 18 (14.9%) from schools that only collaborated. The majority of the respondents 95 (78.5%) from schools that collaborated only and 72 (55.4%) from those that collaborated and benchmarked did not engage in this practice. The chi-square value of 17.927 (p=0.001) was greater than the chi-critical value of 5.99 showing that there was a significant difference in the practice of this activity by the two categories of schools. Similarly, the majority of respondents 81 (66.9%) from schools which collaborated only did not take part in joint cultural activities compared to 64 (49.2%) from schools involved in both collaboration and benchmarking. A total of 42 (32.3%)

from schools which collaborated and benchmarked said that, they did this to a large extent compared to only 6(5.0%) from schools that only collaborated. The chi-square value of 30.434 (p=0.001) was greater than the chi-critical value of 5.99 showing that there was a significant difference in the practice of this activity by the two categories of schools. The null hypothesis was again rejected as far as the above two factors were concerned. This implied that, schools that collaborated and benchmarked created some time for very minimal collaboration in joint curriculum delivery by having teachers from their partner schools teach particular concepts to their students compared to schools which only collaborated which hardly allowed this to happen in their schools. Similarly, while a number of schools that collaborated and benchmarked exposed their students to joint cultural activities to a large extent, this was hardly done by schools that only collaborated.

4. Discussion

The findings on the collaboration activities practiced by secondary schools revealed significant differences on five out of the seven activities. Those on the benchmarking showed significant differences in five out of the eight activities. Consequently, this led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, "There is no significant difference in the collaboration activities practiced by secondary schools in the Western region." This implied that, schools' collaboration and benchmarking activities were determined by the particular interests and while in some cases the interests were similar, the degree of involvement in indicated activities still differed. Schools involved in both collaboration and benchmarking were keen on practices that resulted in immediate improvement compared to those that were engaged in only one of the practices.

The findings of the current study on collaboration activities agreed to some extent with those of Howland & Picciotto (2003). The similarity was in teachers meeting regularly to discuss issues pertaining to assessment, evaluation and revision because in the current study, teachers collaborated to a large extent in joint evaluation of candidates. The difference was that, in the report by Howland & Picciotto, the teachers also discussed classroom learning activities, lesson plans and assignments but the findings of the current study showed a lot of emphasis on collaboration was mainly on assessment and evaluation. Probably, this was because the

education system in Kenya has been examination oriented all along. Teachers were therefore more preoccupied with preparing students to pass examinations.

The findings of this study differed from those of Suntisukwongchote (2004) whose results indicated that, the teachers in the sampled schools rarely collaborated with teachers from other schools in an electronic environment. The findings of the current study, which was not restricted to science teachers, indicated that teachers collaborated in a non electronic environment. This could be due to the fact that, the current study was carried out in a region where teachers found it easier to have face to face meetings and organize joint programmes. In addition, electronic collaboration required internet connectivity which is unlikely to be available in secondary schools.

The findings of the current study are also similar to those of Legters (1999) who found that, teachers rarely interacted about teaching strategies or curriculum delivery. In the current study, teachers hardly collaborated in curriculum delivery and joint cultural activities because of the time element and the fact that, there might be no immediate academic impact.

5. Conclusion

Findings on collaboration activities revealed that, schools collaborated to a large extent in the setting of joint Form IV examinations only but they hardly collaborated in joint curriculum delivery and cultural activities. This led to the conclusion that, most of the collaboration activities were actually examination oriented with little room for any activity that had no immediate impact on the examination output.

It was concluded that, schools were interested in activities that had immediate impact on KCSE results because schools were ranked according to the performance index, and there was the desire to be ranked among the top in the league tables. The performance index was based on academic performance of the students therefore activities geared towards academic performance took precedence over any other activities.

6. Recommendations

i. Schools should engage more in joint curriculum delivery and other teaching practices which could develop the students to realize their full academic potential instead of remaining skewed towards testing and evaluation.

ii. Collaboration activities should focus on all levels of education, and not just Form IV.

iii. The Ministry of Education should scale down the cut-throat competitive spirit among schools by introducing formative evaluation at all school levels. This would shift the focus of collaboration activities from the Form IV level of education to other levels. It would also lead to diversification of collaboration and benchmarking activities beyond examination orientation.

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