

LEADERSHIP SKILLS NEEDED BY HIGH SCHOOL PREFECTS IN THE MANZINI REGION OF ESWATINI

Abstract

In schools, one form of student participation is through the school prefects. Paucity of information is available on the leadership skills needed by high school prefects in Eswatini. Therefore, this study sought to find out the leadership skills needed by prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini. The design of the study was descriptive correlational, targeting prefects from secondary schools in the Manzini region in Eswatini. One hundred prefects from 10 secondary schools were randomly sampled. A self-administered questionnaire validated by three lecturers from the Department of Agricultural Education and Extension, University of Eswatini and one teacher from Ngwane High School was used for data collection. The inter-item reliability coefficient established using Cronbach's Alpha was 0.79. Findings revealed that the leadership skills needed by prefects were: respecting other learners; ability to motivate other learners; ability to solve problems; responding to learners' concerns; ability to manage resources, among others. The study concluded that prefects should be afforded leadership skills in interpersonal relationships, management of people, problem solving, resource management, counselling and motivational skills. Therefore, the study recommended that the school prefects should be empowered in these needed leadership skills.

Introduction

Child participation in family, cultural and social life is a subject of debate among professionals and organisations working with children (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2011). Child participation is one of the keys enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 1989). Child participation means engaging children in decisions that affect their lives, their community and the larger society (Brady, 2007). In schools, one form of child participation is through the school prefects. A prefect is a student with leadership qualities; either selected by the school authority or elected by students, and given certain powers to control and guide other students (Kikuvi,

2004). Kyungu (1999) concluded that prefects, as leaders, should have some leadership qualities that enable them to be in charge of a group; and capable of showing the ways and means of reaching a particular destination or goal. Leadership skills that should be possessed by prefects include driving others to achieve their own success (Dar, 2010). Prefects, as leaders, have to find ways to pull others along with them (Fogleman, 2006). Generally, it is imperative for leaders to have a thorough understanding of their organisations, their people, and themselves (Pruitt, 2017). Leaders must possess communication skills; which include listening. An effective leader listens more than talking and probes more than pushing (Otieno, 2001). Effective leaders must be authentic; that is, they should be able to admit from their humanness and

appropriate weaknesses (Critical Success Factors for Leadership Development, 2001). Leaders should be able to solve problems and creatively resolve issues. Prefects, as leaders must be flexible with ideas; and open to a variety of solutions and viewpoints (Otieno, 2001). Therefore, a prefect is an inspired leader who should have qualities such as respect, obedience, possess positive attitudes towards his or her duty, be optimistic and inspired to lead, be visionary and responsible; brave; but not forceful (Kyungu, 1999).

In developed countries, most schools have developed their own policies that help on criteria to nominate prefect candidates. The selection procedures for each school vary; some are democratic; where prefects are nominated by fellow pupils; while in other schools the nomination is made by the staff. The head of the school, in consultation with the staff members has the final decision on students who get appointed (Kikuvi, 2004). Another alternative for selection of prefect is to involve older prefects to recommend those they think can make good prefects (Otieno, 2001). If the prefects are appointed by the head teacher, they become out-rightly unpopular with the students. In cases where the prefects are elected by students, they tend to serve the electorate and not the school administration. Therefore, whether the prefects are appointed or elected; there must be a sense of direction and checks and balances to enable them to execute their duties effectively (Kyungu, 1999).

Individuals selected as prefects should be well-rounded young people; and leaders who can contribute positively to student life and to society as a whole (Gupta, 2018). According to the United African Student Association (2018), the first thing that is generally considered when selecting prefects is outstanding academic achievements. Secondly, it is the pupil's personal skills and aptitudes. The pupils must always be self-confident and be assertive. They must also possess the ability to speak in public, to students and adults. They must display team working skills, be organised, and resourceful.

Prefect candidates are expected to be polite, honest, reliable, punctual and hardworking at all times. Another critical attribute of prefect candidates is accountability as they are ultimately responsible to the principal, deputy principal and teachers.

Prefects should also be disciplined and observe school rules (Kyungu, 1999). They should have the ability to establish and nurture collaborative work and relationships with the staff and administration; have good interpersonal and communication skills; be self-confident; articulate; patient and empathetic; able to establish positive relationships; and create productive rapport with students (Gupta, 2018). Being elected a prefect gives young people the opportunities and support to find their voices, to participate in decision-making, and understand their rights and responsibilities as active citizens (Yusuph & Obich, 2017).

The roles of prefects involve actively seeking the views of all students under their charge, reporting back students concerns, suggestions and ideas (Gupta, 2018). Thus, prefects should provide the link between the administration and students (Wambulwa, 2004). Prefects also lead by organising assemblies; setting an example; helping new students settle in; acting as mentors to those who need support; encouraging students to participate in school events, competitions and fundraising; and helping to create greater links with the community at large (Hui, 2008). The prefects are entrusted with organising and running of co-curricular activities (Gupta, 2018; Otieno, 2001). Prefects ensure that daily routines are adhered to, order is maintained in the halls of residence, dining hall and in the field during co-curricular activities (Kikuvi, 2004). Kyungu (1999) further opined that the prefects perform the following functions: giving directions to the students they lead; setting the pace of activities for other students every day; motivating and inspiring them; developing other students and themselves; and representing the students in areas of concern. Wambulwa (2004) concluded that the

involvement of learners in the school governing body and co-operation in decision-making can result into school improvement.

Prefects face many challenges as they execute their duties. Prefects are involved in assisting the administration in disciplinary issues; and giving information about the welfare (Hui, 2008); which sets them against the students (Kyungu, 1999). Kibe (2005) noted that prefects become enemies; very unpopular, and are even called spies. Among indiscipline students, prefects are "enemies", but to the disciplined and focused ones, they are people who sacrifice their time to serve others without expecting a reward. Kirera (2015) found that prefects were involved in resolving conflicts and promoting cohesion among students, to ensure a peaceful learning environment. Gupta (2018) argued that prefects should detect any bullying alongside other small crimes which make them unpopular. Furthermore, Kikuvi (2004) found that sometimes the prefects were used by the headteachers to spy on teachers; and played the roles of teachers such as giving examinations to fellow students. Kikuvi further noted that prefects were sometimes referred to as "Directors", because of the powers they had amassed, such as punishing their colleagues. At one point in time, prefects were so powerful that they overshadowed teachers and could even report teachers to the principal.

Furthermore, Kosgey (2009) observed that prefects need to understand the challenges faced by all sorts of students, such as teen mothers. Prefects need to provide support to drug and substance abusers (The National Agency for the Campaign against Drug Abuse [NACADA], 2008). They need to support pupils who have experienced rape (NACADA, 2008). They are a target in student riot (Mutio, 2013). Prefects' lives are endangered when carrying out their duties because they are empowered to administer punishments to their colleagues (Yusuph & Obich, 2004). The duties of being a prefect is an added load on the personal and academic roles every prefect carries (William Edwards School, 2017). They suffer a negative students' attitude towards learning, inadequate time

for reading, heavy reading load, and lack of learning materials, yet they are expected to be role models (Okumbe, 2007). In spite of these, prefects were not capacitated to discharge their duties (Kirera, 2015). Also, there is very little written on the vital topic of leadership by prefects (Otieno, 2001).

In Eswatini, the 'Guide to school regulations and procedures' document stipulates that the School Prefects' Committee should be one of the Consultative and Advisory Bodies in the schools (Ministry of Education, 1978). Teachers are mandated to choose class prefects for each class in every school in Eswatini. There is no clear policy that explains the criteria for nominating a prefect. Paucity of information is available on the leadership skills needed by high school prefects in Eswatini. Therefore, this study sought to find out the leadership skills needed by prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini.

The purpose of the study was to find out the leadership skills needed by high school prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini. The objectives of the study were to;

1. describe the prefects by their demographic characteristics and background information
2. identify leadership skills needed by high school prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini.
3. identify roles of prefects in high schools of the Manzini region of Eswatini.
4. identify challenges encountered by high school prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini.
5. describe the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables.
6. identify predictor and explanatory variables for prefect leadership in the Manzini region of Eswatini.

Methodology

The design of the study was a descriptive correlational targeting school prefects from secondary schools

secondary schools (18%) were randomly sampled. According to Van Dalen (1979) the sample size is acceptable when it is 10-20% of the target population. Ten school prefects were randomly sampled from each school and a total of 100 school prefects participated in the study. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire in February 2018. A six point Likert-type scale was used to measure the variables in the study. The scale had the following options: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= slightly disagree, 4= slightly agree, 5= agree, and 6= strongly agree.

Two educators from the Department of Agricultural Education and Extension at University of Eswatini and one teacher at Ngwane High School validated the questionnaire. The questionnaire was compiled in a booklet format (Dillman, 1978), and the researchers inserted an appropriate picture on the front page to ensure face validity. Thirty prefects from schools not selected to participate in this study, were used for pilot-testing, to establish inter-item reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient was 0.79, which indicated that the instrument was 79% reliable. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (such as mean, standard deviation and percentages); correlational statistics (such as Pearson product moment) and multiple regressions in SPSS version 20. Ethical issues were addressed by getting permission from the respondents through a consent form; and the participants were assured of confidentiality. The data were accessible to the researchers and were presented collectively.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic characteristics and background information. Table 1 depicts that the respondents were mainly females (51%). Seventy-four percent of the respondents were aged between 16-20 years. Fifty-three percent of the prefects had previous leadership experience; that is, they had been prefects

in the previous academic year(s). Most of the prefects were doing Form 5 (28%). A majority of the prefects were staying in rural areas (65%). Also, a majority of the prefects received training on the duties of being a prefect (60%). However, the prefects indicated that they still needed guidance in executing their duties (69%), and some of the duties of the prefects were disciplining the other pupils (55%) and holding meetings (97%). Seventy-five percent reported that they encountered challenges in executing the duties of being school prefects. They stated that some pupils were defiant.

Leadership skills needed by high school prefects in the Manzini region. Table 2 reveals that the school prefects need leadership skills ($M=4.96$, $SD=1.09$). The most critical leadership skills needed by the high school prefects were: respecting other learners ($M=5.70$, $SD=0.78$); ability to manage people ($M=5.27$, $SD=1.05$); ability to motivate other learners ($M=5.26$, $SD=1.02$); ability to solve problems ($M=5.17$, $SD=1.07$); responding to learners' concerns ($M=5.13$, $SD=1.09$); ability to manage resources ($M=4.99$, $SD=1.11$) and so on. Similarly, the findings on the leadership skills needed by prefects are consistent with existing literature. Prefects needed the following leadership skills: communication and listening skills (Otieno, 2001); authenticity (Critical Success Factors for Leadership Development, 2001); and problem-solving skills (Otieno, 2001).

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics and background information of the respondents.

Characteristics	f	(%)
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	49	49
Female	51	51
<i>Age</i>		
13 - 15	21	21
16 - 20	74	74
21 - 25	5	5
<i>Previous prefect leadership experience</i>		
Yes	53	53
No	47	47
<i>Class</i>		
Form 1	9	9
Form 2	16	16
Form 3	26	26
Form 4	21	21
Form 5	28	28
<i>Location of school</i>		
Rural	35	35
Urban	65	65
<i>Received training as prefect</i>		
Yes	60	60
No	40	40
<i>Need more knowledge and guidance to perform well as a prefect</i>		
Yes	69	69
No	31	31
<i>Discipline students</i>		
Yes	55	55
No	45	45
<i>Hold prefects' meetings</i>		
Yes	97	97
No	3	3

Table 2.

Leadership skills needed by high school prefects.

Leadership skills	M	SD
Respecting other learners	5.70	.78
Ability to manage people	5.27	1.05
Ability to motivate other learners	5.26	1.02
Ability to solve problems	5.17	1.07
Responsive to learner concerns	5.13	1.09
Ability to manage resources	4.99	1.11
Ability to immediately address problems	4.94	.99
Having insight to see the bigger picture in every situation	4.90	1.10
Work hard to find consensus in conflict situations	4.83	1.22
Have insight on how learners respond to new ideas	4.67	.88
Marshalling resources needed for learning	4.58	1.29
Sensitivity to emotional undercurrents in the group	4.04	1.46
Overall mean	4.96	1.09

Roles of prefects in high schools. Table 3 indicates that all the items were roles of prefects in high schools of the Manzini region of Eswatini ($M=4.20$, $SD=1.24$). Roles prefects rated high were: reporting to the teachers those who misbehave ($M=5.18$, $SD=0.96$); making announcements in class/dorm/parade ($M=4.87$, $SD=1.17$); supervising other students ($M=4.87$, $SD=1.19$); marking late comers ($M=4.83$, $SD=1.27$); guiding other students ($M=4.81$, $SD=1.09$); marking noise makers ($M=4.72$, $SD=1.20$); and so on. The findings of the study on the roles of school prefects reiterate findings from previous research. School prefects provide the opportunities for students to participate in decision-making (Yusuph & Obich, 2017); link students and the school administration (Gupta, 2018); assist the administration in discipline issues and giving information about the welfare of students in the dormitories (Hui, 2008); and ensuring that daily routines are adhered to (Kikuvu, 2004; Otieno, 2001).

Challenges faced by high school prefects in the Manzini region. Table 4 reveals that generally, the

school prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini face challenges as they execute their duties ($M=3.74$, $SD=1.62$). The most critical challenges encountered by the prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini were: having enemies ($M=5.18$, $SD=1.48$); stress exerted by extra responsibilities of being a prefect ($M=4.09$, $SD=1.54$); increased work load ($M=4.06$, $SD=1.55$); missing classes due to prefect responsibilities ($M=3.72$, $SD=1.89$); and causing other pupils to miss classes serving punishment ($M=3.52$, $SD=1.53$). Existing literature indicate that prefects face challenges in schools. These challenges include enmity with the pupils (Kibe, 2005); getting unpopular (Kibe, 2005); having an added load on the personal and academic roles (Kikuvu, 2004; Gupta, 2018; Otieno, 2001); suffering a negative students' attitude towards learning (Okumbe, 2007); inadequate time for reading (Okumbe, 2007); heavy reading load (Okumbe, 2007); lack of learning materials (Okumbe, 2007); and being incapacitated to discharge their duties (Kirera, 2015).

Table 3.
Roles of high school prefects in Manzini region.

Roles of prefects	M	SD
Reporting to the teachers those who misbehave	5.18	0.96
Making announcements in class/dorm/parade	4.87	1.17
Supervising other students	4.87	1.19
Marking late comers	4.83	1.27
Guiding other students	4.81	1.09
Marking noise makers	4.72	1.20
Taking roll calls in classrooms or dormitories	4.59	1.34
Counselling other students	4.51	1.35
Disciplining those who break school rules	4.29	1.63
Overall mean	4.20	1.24

Table 4..
Challenges faced by prefects

Challenges faced by prefects	M	SD
Prefect may have enemies because they report misbehaving students	5.18	1.48
Extra responsibilities exert stress on prefects	4.09	1.54
Increases work-load	4.06	1.55
Classes continue while prefects are performing leadership work	3.72	1.89
Leads to pupils missing classes	3.52	1.53
Miss quizzes given in their absence	3.20	1.59
Spending more time on leadership work than studying	3.07	1.70
Causes prefects to think they are better than other learners because of their position	3.05	1.66
Overall mean	3.74	1.62

Relationship between dependent variable and independent variables were negligible. Table 5 shows that there was positive moderate relationship between leadership skills needed by prefects and their age ($r=.47$). This correlation suggests that as the prefects grow, they tend to need more leadership skills than their young counterparts. Further research needs to be conducted to explain the findings. Otherwise, all the relationships between leadership skills needed by prefects and the other independent variables

Table 5.
Independent variables

Independent variable	Correlation coefficient (r)
Sex	.18
Age	.47
Leadership experience	.00
Experience	.03
Class	-.10
Location	-.06
Training received	.15
Extra knowledge	.03
Disciplining students	-.07
Prefects meeting	-.07
Meeting frequency	-.06
Problems	-.04

Predictor and explanatory variables for prefect leadership. Table 6 indicates that predictor and explanatory variables for effective prefects leadership was the major role of prefects ($t=5.73$, $p=.00$). The model explained 25% of the variance on effective prefect leadership.

Table 6.
Independent variables

	R	R ²	R ² change	B	Beta	t	p
Leadership role	0.50	0.25	0.25	0.46	0.50	5.73	0.00
Constant= 2.92		SD. Error= 0.37		Adjusted R ² = 0.25			

Conclusions and Implications

School prefects in the Manzini region of Eswatini were responsible for linking the administration and the students; and managing the other pupils. School prefects needed interpersonal, management of people, problem-solving, resource management,

counselling and motivational skills for them to effectively discharge their duties. The study also concluded that the school prefects in the Manzini region faced challenges ranging from broken relations with their colleagues to personal and academic challenges, such as stress, workload, and missing classes. Old prefects needed more leadership

skills than young prefects. Further study must be conducted to explain why older prefects need more leadership skills than young prefects. Effectiveness of the leadership of school prefects can be determined by the roles the school assigns to the prefects.

The implications of the findings are that school prefects play a vital role in ensuring that the operations of the school run smoothly. The findings imply that all stakeholders involved, such as the administration, teachers and students should work collaboratively in supporting the school prefects. Also, the findings of the study imply that schools should also consider establishing appropriate procedures for selecting prefects; as it has a bearing on their effectiveness in executing their daily operations. Otherwise, the contribution of the prefects cannot be realised. The roles played by prefects was articulated by Gupta (2018), that they are actively seeking the views of all students under their charge, reporting back students' concerns, making suggestions and ideas to the administration. Prefects provide a link between the administration and students (Wambulwa, 2004).

The findings from the study imply that school policies must be established to protect the prefects from being attacked by students and getting exploited by the administration and teachers. Kibe (2005) observed that prefects become enemies; very unpopular and even called spies by the students; thus, need protection from the school authorities. Sometimes, the prefects were used by the headteachers to spy on teachers, discipline students, and invigilate examinations for fellow students (Kikvi, 2004; Yusuph & Obich, 2004). Thus, causing enmity between the students and prefects, and the exploitation of prefects by the school administration and teachers must be curtailed.

The findings of the study also imply that the leadership skills possessed by the students before election to be a prefect must be considered. In addition, it is imperative that the prefects be provided with regular workshops to capacitate and support them execute their duties. The administration, teachers and prefects should always remember that they

are students first, and then prefects. This literary implies that the student's academic work should be prioritized by these groups. Even the prefect candidates should be individuals who can cope with the academic work and the prefect responsibilities. Kyungu (1999) reported that prefects, as leaders, should have leadership qualities that enable them to be in charge of a group and capable of showing the ways and means of reaching a particular destination or goal. Also, individuals selected as prefects must be generally outstanding academic achievers (United African Student Association, 2018).

There are very few studies that have been conducted on the prefects. This is consistent with the findings by Otieno (2001). Otieno concluded that there was very little written on the vital topic of leadership by prefects. This effectively means that schools around the world must collaborate in studying the work of prefects. Wambulwa (2004) found that the involvement of learners in school administration and operations results into school improvement. Since the study was limited to 10 schools in the Manzini region of Eswatini; a study that will cover all the regions in Eswatini is necessary.

Recommendations

1. School prefects need training in the following areas; for them to effectively discharge their duties: interpersonal skills, management of people, problem-solving, resource management, counselling and motivational skills.
2. School prefects need protection from the other pupils who are defiant, and tend to be their enemies. The entire student body should be taught on the important role played by the prefects as a bidirectional conduit between the school administration and the student body.
3. Schools should make sure that prefects do not get affected academically because of the student affairs office. The school must ensure that prefects are able to attend classes, and are not heavily loaded with the duties of being a prefect.

This can be done by monitoring their academic performance so that assistance can be provided timeously.

4. Prefects should be provided with therapeutic sessions, where they are counselled and motivated on their duties.
5. Prefects must be rewarded (through certificates and other incentives); periodically, for the role they play in representing the students.
6. The school administration should carefully consider the roles given to the prefects as they determine their effectiveness in executing the leadership duties in the schools.
7. Further research must be conducted on the factors influencing the effectiveness of school prefects in Eswatini and the world over. Another study must be conducted on the attitudes of students towards school prefects in Eswatini and internationally. Finally, further study must be conducted to establish why older prefects need more leadership skills than the young prefects.

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