

INFLUENCE OF NON-TEACHING STAFF'S IDEA SUSTAINABILITY ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF EMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study sought to examine the influence of idea sustainability by non-teaching staff on service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya. The investigation was guided by the Modified Quantitative Service Delivery Theory and addressed the persistent challenges of poor service delivery despite the critical role of non-teaching staff in school operations.

Methodology: The study used a mixed-methods cross-sectional survey targeting 2,219 participants, with 337 sampled through stratified and systematic sampling. Data were collected via questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, with validity confirmed and reliability at $\alpha = 0.895$. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and through Pearson correlation, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

Results: The findings revealed a statistically significant and moderate positive relationship between idea sustainability and service delivery ($r = .527$, $p < 0.01$). However, overall levels of idea sustainability were low, hindered by lack of managerial support, inadequate recognition, resource constraints, poor communication, and insufficient capacity building. Schools with higher levels of idea sustainability recorded better service delivery outcomes, including responsiveness to complaints, reduced sluggishness, and improved stakeholder satisfaction.

Conclusion: Sustaining viable ideas from non-teaching staff significantly improves service delivery in secondary schools but remains low due to leadership, resource, and motivation gaps.

Recommendations: Secondary schools should institutionalize inclusive leadership, establish innovation oversight structures, enhance capacity building, introduce robust recognition systems, allocate sufficient resources, and promote a culture that tolerates experimentation.

Keywords: *Idea sustainability, operational efficiency, service delivery, innovative work behaviour, non-teaching staff, secondary schools.*

INTRODUCTION

Efficient service delivery is recognized globally as a critical aspect of progress in organizations. It is determined in institutions of learning by knowledge management of human resources, less time spent in carrying a transaction, high level of responsiveness, stakeholder satisfaction, innovative work behaviour, targets realization and supportive organizational structure and culture (Hussein et al., 2022). The non-teaching staff in secondary schools not only play a fundamental role in the student's achievement but also in ensuring organizational success by facilitating the attainment of goals and objectives.

Service delivery in secondary schools refers to how services from different sections are offered to the clients. These services offered are diverse and are also provided by various offices and sections. For example, teaching services are offered by teaching while auxiliary and maintenance services are offered by non-teaching staff. Service delivery by non-teaching staff also comprises complementary roles and responsibilities undertaken to support academic achievement and the smooth running of secondary school (Kivindu, 2015). Such roles include maintaining facilities, ensuring a safe and secure environment; cooking, counselling services, and pastoral care; providing library services and financial services among other roles. Some of the support staff required in secondary schools includes; bursars, security officers, librarians, secretaries, matrons, accountants, cooks, procurement officers, storekeepers, sports coordinators, laboratory technicians, Drivers, Nurses/ Clinical Officers, Casuals, artisans, cleaners, herders, canteen operators, and messengers among others (United Kingdom Department of Education, 2021).

The innovativeness of support staff in secondary schools has been described by Hosseini and Shirazi (2021) as a significant contributor to secondary school education competitiveness, learner improvement in academic achievement, and workers' experiences and addresses staff turnover antecedents. In fostering innovativeness and creativity among support staff, researchers have identified that idea generation, creativity, innovation and knowledge management as having contributed significantly to the nature of services rendered in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Australia, Pakistan, India and United States (Martono et al., 2018).

In various African countries, including Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, and Ghana, Christopher et al. (2022) highlighted the need to improve service provision by non-teaching staff in secondary schools, citing challenges such as poor welfare and management, limited involvement in decision-making, inadequate working environments, and insufficient skills and

professional competencies. Similarly, in Kenya, support staff play a critical role in enhancing quality education, student achievement, workforce stability, and overall well-being (Onyango et al., 2022). Despite efforts to improve service delivery, Kenyan secondary schools continue to experience inefficiencies, raising concerns about the potential influence of innovative work behaviour (IWB) on service delivery—thus presenting a basis for further research.

Statement of the Problem

In secondary schools, the operational efficiency depends on how services are delivered to stakeholders. The nature of services offered by the non-teaching staff in secondary schools contributes significantly to school advancement. Therefore, the services provided by the non-teaching staff are expected to be sustainable and enhance customer experience continuously. This underpins the indispensable need for service innovation, hence the need to pursue innovative work behaviour of the non-teaching staff (Newman, 2014). Following the above observations, secondary school principals are expected to be on the frontline in creating conducive and enabling environment for non-teaching staff. The Ministry of Education had also mandated the School Board of Management power to recruit, promote, develop, and remunerate supportive staff, and put-up measures that ensure support staff offer efficient services to the learners and other workers. Ideally, these measures are expected to foster efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery in secondary schools. However, poor service delivery by non-teaching staff has continued to be reported in secondary schools by Arungo and Kipkebut (2021). The inefficiency is largely attributed to poor remuneration, late payments, lack of elaborate scheme of service, limited skills and competencies; unfriendly working conditions, lack of involvement in decision-making, and weak policy for non-teaching staff. The persistent decline in the efficiency of services delivered by the non-teaching staff in secondary schools raises a need to examine the effect of idea sustainability by non-teaching staff on service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya through answering the hypothesis; There is no statistically significant relationship between idea sustainability by non-teaching staff and service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Idea sustainability refers to the ability of non-teaching staff to uphold ideas and strategies to realize their goals and objectives (Eccles et al., 2020; United Nations, 2023). In a school setting, schools establish many ideas and strategies to help them run their operations and deliver services. The study was based on Modified Quantitative Service Delivery Theory developed

by Kaul and Adelabu in 2012. These theorists contend that service delivery is a crucial practice that requires not only the input of welfare services but also a high level of accountability, satisfaction and good leadership. The theorists argued that a combination of parameters such as human resources, leadership practices, physical resources in place, legislative, organizational culture, working environment and managerial accountability was needed to ensure efficient and effective services are delivered to the public (Khalil & Adelabu, 2012).

A very essential aspect of idea sustainability is job satisfaction. Job satisfaction determines how employees perform in organizations. In developed nations, satisfied employees do not only advance creative minds, but also proved beneficial towards achieving the desired objectives (Almutairi, 2020). In Africa, it was observed that despite the approach an organization uses to reward its employees, rewarding creates greater employee engagement and increases employee retention, and fosters positive attitudes toward the workplace environment (Martono et al., 2018). Locally, in Kenya, Gatuyu and Kinyua (2020) found that knowledge acquisition plays a crucial role in the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Meru County, Kenya. They found that SMEs moderately adopted knowledge acquisition strategies, which improved their employees' performance. This capacity building enhances workers' effectiveness, enabling them to innovate and sustain established innovations. Khakayi (2017) also found that career development practices improve job retention and retention for non-teaching staff in secondary schools. These studies highlight the importance of capacity building among employees in improving their ability to develop new ideas and sustain existing ones.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Embu County where the service delivery by the non-teaching staff was described as being unsatisfactory (Arungo and Kipkebut, 2021). The study adopted pragmatism paradigm following its high level of flexibility using numerous dimensions. The approach adopted in this study was a mixed-method research approach. The subjects of the study were drawn from 208 principals, 208 BoM chairs, 1803 non-teaching staff which makes up a total target population of 2226 respondents. In selecting the sampling group from the target population, proportionate simple sampling technique was applied. A sample size of 337 respondents was achieved with 10 principals selected from 5 sub-counties, 10 BoM chairs from 5 sub-counties and 317 non-teaching staff from 140 secondary schools. The study utilized questionnaire tools on the non-teaching staff, an interview guide on principals and focused

group discussions for the BoMs. A pre-testing of the research instruments was done in Tharaka Nithi County which has similar characteristics to those in Embu County. The validity of research instruments was done. The reliability in the study was determined by assessing the instruments that were pretested. The collected data was checked for completeness and keyed into SPSS, where the Cronbach alpha values for the study's independent, dependent and moderating variables were computed and evaluated. A threshold Cronbach alpha value of 0.70 is acceptable and reliable. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively (mean, standard deviation) and inferentially (correlation), while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Results were presented in table and themes.

FINDINGS

The study achieved a high participation rate, with 317 questionnaires distributed to non-teaching staff in secondary schools, of which 258 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 81.3%. Qualitative data collection recorded a 100% response rate from both principals in interviews and Board of Management (BoM) chairs in focus group discussions. Reliability analysis of the study variables, conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to assess internal consistency, yielded a value of 0.895, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming that the instrument was both acceptable and reliable for measuring the intended constructs.

Background Information of Respondents

The background information of respondents was key to this study. The study was interested on background aspects regarding gender, highest level of academic qualification, years of experience, job title, and department.

The analysis of the gender distribution of non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County revealed that 52.3% were female, while 47.7% were male. These findings indicate a relatively balanced representation of gender among non-teaching personnel. The distribution of academic qualifications among the non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County indicated that the majority of non-teaching staff in secondary schools hold a Diploma, followed by those with a Form Four Certificate, and those with a Standard Eight Certificate. This data suggests that a majority of the non-teaching workforce possess mid-level academic qualifications, with relatively few attaining higher education credentials.

The length work experience of non-teaching staff in secondary school was also ascertained. The data reveals that the largest group of non-teaching staff, 46.1%, have been working in secondary schools for between 1 and 5 years. This shows that the majority of the non-teaching staff have less than 10 years of experience in secondary schools. The department where non-teaching staff works in secondary schools was also of interest in this study indicating that the most populated departments among non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County were Catering/Kitchen/Cafeteria (20%), Security (12%), Administration (12%), Farm (10%), Account/Finance (9%), and Library (8%).

Idea Sustainability by Non-Teaching Staff and Service Delivery in Secondary Schools

The question in this objective used a five-point Likert scale relating to the main variable. It had choices whose rating scale was Strongly Disagree (SD)=1, Disagree (D)=2, Neutral (N)=3, Agree (A)=4, and Strongly Agree (SA)=5. For interpretative purposes, responses categorized as " Agree" and " Strongly Agree " were combined to indicate a high level of agreement, while those rated as " Disagree" and " Strongly Disagree" were combined to denote a low level of disagreement. " Neutral" ratings were analyzed independently. Key findings and interpretations are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 : Idea Sustainability by Non-Teaching Staff regarding Service Delivery in Secondary Schools in Embu County

Statements on idea sustainability (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	Std. Dev
a. The non-teaching staff are regularly trained and equipped through capacity building programs to remain relevant, creative and innovative as we perform our jobs	66(25.6%)	52(20.2%)	44(17.1%)	75(29.1%)	18(7.0%)	3(1.2%)	1.75	1.358
b. I have been rewarded for introducing a service, product, solving a problem or introducing a good practice in our school	75(29.1%)	59(22.9%)	59(22.9%)	43(16.7%)	20(7.8%)	2(0.8%)	1.53	1.315
c. We have a well-functioning innovation and creativity overseeing body that monitors the maintenance and continuity of implemented ideas in our school	59(22.9%)	57(22.1%)	55(21.3%)	68(26.4%)	15(5.8%)	4(1.6%)	1.75	1.309
d. The school leadership make me feel like I have a stake of ownership of our school	25(9.7%)	69(26.7%)	63(24.4%)	81(31.4%)	17(6.6%)	3(1.2%)	2.02	1.158
e. The school leadership tolerates failure even if a new idea did not work as expected	20(7.8%)	96(37.2%)	65(25.2%)	49(19.0%)	27(10.5%)	1(0.4%)	1.88	1.148
f. There are established measures, procedures and practices to ensure sustainability of implemented projects, policies, ideas, practices and services	30(11.6%)	72(27.9%)	76(29.5%)	61(23.6%)	17(6.6%)	2(0.8%)	1.88	1.142

Statements on idea sustainability (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	Std. Dev
g. There are empowerment programs that ensure non-teaching staff have adequate skills and competencies and avenues to remain innovative	58(22.5%)	60(23.3%)	58(22.5%)	58(22.5%)	23(8.9%)	1(0.4%)	1.73	1.297
h. There are sufficient resources, infrastructure and facilities to encourage creativity and innovation among non-teaching staff	28(10.9%)	88(34.1%)	60(23.3%)	63(24.4%)	16(6.2%)	3(1.2%)	1.84	1.163
i. Our school presents a conducive working atmosphere which ensures innovative ideas are embraced	26(10.1%)	58(22.5%)	74(28.7%)	62(24.0%)	32(12.4%)	6(2.3%)	2.13	1.250
j. There are sufficient incentives to encourage creativity and innovation among non-teaching staff	35(13.6%)	62(24.0%)	63(24.4%)	63(24.4%)	25(9.7%)	10(3.9%)	2.04	1.330
k. The non-teaching have considerable autonomy in implementing new ideas/ processes/ procedures/ approaches	24(9.3%)	61(23.6%)	83(32.2%)	67(26.0%)	21(8.1%)	2(0.8%)	2.02	1.126
l. There is a lot of collaboration among non-teaching staff at our school	18(7.0%)	47(18.2%)	55(21.3%)	59(22.9%)	71(27.5%)	8(3.1%)	2.55	1.332
m. The school management cherishes employee for little achievements accomplished at the work place by recognizing, recommending, acknowledging and rewarding creative staff	16(6.2%)	62(24.0%)	73(28.3%)	66(25.6%)	32(12.4%)	9(3.5%)	2.24	1.225

The findings from Table 1 reveal generally low levels of idea sustainability among non-teaching staff in secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya. One of the most striking findings is the lack of recognition and reward for innovation. This item recorded the lowest mean score of 1.53 (SD = 1.315), suggesting strong consensus among respondents and minimal variability in perceptions. The low mean indicates a systemic absence of incentive structures that motivate creativity, potentially demoralizing non-teaching staff and curtailing innovative behavior. This aligns with recent research by Kiveu and Kirongo (2020), who emphasized that reward systems significantly influence staff motivation and innovation capacity.

Capacity-building programs also appear insufficient. Another notable area of concern is the absence of structures to support innovation sustainability. Only 7.4% (n = 19) acknowledged the existence of a functioning body to monitor innovation implementation, while 45.0% (n = 116) rejected this claim. A substantial 26.4% (n = 68) were neutral, suggesting uncertainty about such mechanisms. The mean score was again low at 1.75 (SD = 1.309), indicating broad dissatisfaction and a need for more formalized structures. Without institutional oversight, innovative efforts risk being sporadic and unsustainable (Omondi et al., 2022).

The findings further show that school leadership does not foster a strong sense of ownership among non-teaching staff. Likewise, only 10.9% (n = 28) of participants agreed or strongly

agreed that the school environment tolerates failure in case of unanticipated outcomes. This signals a punitive culture that discourages experimentation, a sentiment echoed by Maina and Waiganjo (2020), who reported that organizational tolerance for failure is essential for fostering innovative thinking.

These findings indicate that secondary schools in Embu County lack comprehensive mechanisms to support innovation and sustain ideas generated by non-teaching staff. The low mean scores across most indicators suggest institutional inertia, poor leadership engagement, and inadequate support structures. To foster a culture of innovation, schools must implement reward systems, invest in capacity building, establish oversight bodies for idea continuity, and create psychologically safe environments where staff feel empowered to experiment and collaborate (Githui & Muathe, 2021).

Qualitative findings on idea sustainability was attained through asking both the non-teaching staff and secondary school principals to state what they thought hinders idea sustainability of non-teaching staff in school. Five themes emerged regarding the factors hindering idea sustainability among non-teaching staff. These themes include lack of managerial support and follow-up, inadequate motivation and recognition, resource constraints, communication and coordination gaps, and insufficient skills and capacity building. To address these challenges, the respondents noted that involving non-teaching staff in change implementation and ensuring their ideas are considered through frequent meetings (Gichohi, 2014).

The Focus Group Discussion with BoM chairpersons suggested several others measures that can be implemented for sustaining creativity and innovation among non-teaching staff in secondary schools. These include motivation, inclusivity, structured communication, capacity building, governance, idea protection, and team cohesion. Recognizing and rewarding staff efforts fosters a positive work environment, encouraging continued engagement (Jandy & Eugenio, 2020; Mwangi & Kosgei, 2020).

Service Delivery by Non-Teaching Staff in Secondary Schools, Embu County

The first question in this objective used a five-point Likert scale relating to the main variable. It had choices whose rating scale was Strongly Disagree (SD)=1, Disagree (D)=2, Neutral (N)=3, Agree (A)=4, and Strongly Agree (SA)=5. Key findings and interpretations are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Service Delivery by Non-Teaching Staff in Secondary Schools in Embu County

Statements on service delivery in secondary schools (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	Std. Dev
a. The working environment at our school is conducive for non-teaching staff to perform better	6(2.3%)	39(15.1%)	75(29.1%)	88(34.1%)	41(15.9%)	9(3.5%)	2.57	1.104
b. The set mechanisms, structures and systems encourage effective service delivery in our school	11(4.3%)	52(20.2%)	74(28.7%)	69(26.7%)	45(17.4%)	7(2.7%)	2.41	1.191
c. The school leadership inspire non-teaching staff to look for ways to improve	16(6.2%)	63(24.4%)	62(24.0%)	76(29.5%)	34(13.2%)	7(2.7%)	2.27	1.221
d. Employee empowerment has improved service performance in our school	18(7.0%)	58(22.5%)	55(21.3%)	82(31.8%)	31(12.0%)	14(5.4%)	2.36	1.292
e. The principal usually challenges non-teaching staff to come up with ideas for improving services delivery at our school	21(8.1%)	52(20.2%)	72(27.9%)	68(26.4%)	28(10.9%)	17(6.6%)	2.31	1.314
f. There is no sluggishness in the way services are offered by the non-teaching staff at our school	19(7.4%)	31(12.0%)	54(20.9%)	69(26.7%)	62(24.0%)	23(8.9%)	2.75	1.376
g. Stakeholders have not been complaining of dissatisfaction with the services offered by the non-teaching staff at our school	13(5.0%)	35(13.6%)	58(22.5%)	61(23.6%)	43(16.7%)	48(18.6%)	2.89	1.459
h. The school management usually allocated sufficient financial resources to support service delivery in the school	15(5.8%)	52(20.2%)	61(23.6%)	60(23.3%)	49(19.0%)	21(8.1%)	2.54	1.370
i. The school management avails infrastructure, equipment and facilities required to improve the delivery of services	10(3.9%)	60(23.3%)	57(22.1%)	88(34.1%)	25(9.7%)	18(7.0%)	2.43	1.250
j. The school management takes customer complaints very seriously	4(1.6%)	18(7.0%)	43(16.7%)	67(26.0%)	89(34.5%)	37(14.3%)	3.28	1.196
k. The school management avails resources required to improve the delivery of services	9(3.5%)	23(8.9%)	69(26.7%)	90(34.9%)	52(20.2%)	15(5.8%)	2.77	1.150
l. The school management emphasizes on prompt responsiveness to issues identified	6(2.3%)	27(10.5%)	67(26.0%)	84(32.6%)	58(22.5%)	16(6.2%)	2.81	1.153

Statements on service delivery in secondary schools (N = 258)	This has never happened (0)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	Std. Dev
m. News ideas embraced and implemented have helped non-teaching staff to improve service in our school	16(6.2%)	27(10.5%)	47(18.2%)	94(36.4%)	55(21.3%)	19(7.4%)	2.78	1.275

The analysis of Table 2 provides descriptive statistics on the perceptions of non-teaching staff regarding service delivery in secondary schools in Embu County. One of the most positive findings is that school management appears responsive to customer complaints. This item recorded the highest mean of $M = 3.28$ ($SD = 1.20$), indicating generally favourable perceptions with a relatively low variation. Similarly, the results indicated there was no sluggishness in the way services were offered by non-teaching staff. Efficient service delivery is essential for the smooth running of schools, and these findings align with Njoroge and Gikonyo (2023), who note that workforce agility is a key determinant of school effectiveness.

However, the study revealed notable areas of concern. Leadership culture recorded the lowest among all items at $M = 2.27$ ($SD = 1.22$), reflecting a weak leadership culture in motivating innovation. This suggests a gap in transformational leadership practices, as highlighted by Ochieng and Kiragu (2020), who found that inspirational leadership is critical in fostering innovation and service excellence. Another weak area was the perception of the presence of supportive systems and structures for service delivery. Similarly, the results indicated that availability of infrastructure and facilities in service delivery was wanting. This could significantly hamper the productivity of non-teaching staff.

Qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions, interviews and focused group discussion were provided. All respondents were required to state the barriers to effective service delivery by non-teaching staff in secondary schools. The responses noted major challenges including resources and financial constraints, poor staff motivation and recognition, insufficient training and poor communication.

Testing of Hypothesis

The study tested the null hypothesis (H_{01}) that there is no statistically significant relationship between idea generation by non-teaching staff and service delivery. The correlation results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations Analysis Between Idea Promotion and Service Delivery In Secondary Schools In Embu County

		Y	X1
Y	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N		
X1	Pearson Correlation	.528	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.027**	
	N	258	258

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results in Table 3 a Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant, moderate positive relationship between idea sustainability (X₂) and service delivery (Y), $r = .527$, $p < .001$, $n = 258$. Since the p -value is less than the 0.01 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that sustaining ideas generated by non-teaching staff is positively associated with improved service delivery outcomes in secondary schools.

The findings imply that sustaining useful ideas initiated by non-teaching staff contributes meaningfully to service quality in schools. This is consistent with the work of Kariuki and Kinyua (2022), who found that the sustainability of innovative practices among school staff led to consistent improvements in administrative efficiency and resource use.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the sustainability of ideas generated by non-teaching staff in secondary schools is low and is critically influenced by a combination of leadership practices, motivation, inclusive participation, communication, training, and resource allocation. The statistically significant positive relationship between idea sustainability by non-teaching staff and service delivery indicates a need for inclusive leadership and structured support systems that empower non-teaching staff through recognition, capacity building, and responsive governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that secondary school management (principals) in collaboration with Boards of Management (BoMs) and the Ministry of Education, institutionalize inclusive leadership practices that actively involve non-teaching staff in decision-making and idea

implementation. School principals should prioritize structured training programs, regular meetings, and performance appraisal systems to build capacity and reinforce accountability to boost sustainability of ideas from non-teaching staff. Furthermore, motivation through recognition, promotions, and rewards should be enhanced, while BoMs should allocate sufficient financial and material resources to support the operationalization of innovative ideas.

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