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**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TAKING PLACE AMONG
THE INTERNAL PUBLICS IN POSSS: THE CASE OF NAIROBI
COUNTY, KENYA.**

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TAKING PLACE AMONG THE INTERNAL PUBLICS IN POSSS: THE CASE OF NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA.

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to analyze effective communication taking place among the internal publics in POSSS: the case of Nairobi County, Kenya.

Methodology: The study used a descriptive research design engaging both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. A sample size of 18 schools with a total of 162 individuals was selected consisting School Managers (SMs), Heads of Departments (HODs) and Presidents of the Students' Councils (POSCO) - categories using stratified and purposive sampling methods. The preferred data collection tools were questionnaires and an interview guide. Data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics

Results: Effective feedback mechanisms were lacking in POSSs since some school managers failed to encourage direct communication between themselves and the student body. This was perceived as a potential problem which was likely to cause tension or disruption, especially when students feel they have been left out of the decision making processes affecting them. Effective communication can be enhanced in schools by putting in place both formal and informal feedback mechanisms to establish how the messages flowing in the schools are interpreted by the student body thus encouraging free flow of communication from all directions

Policy recommendation: The study recommended that future studies can then investigate whether this status quo had changed. In addition, the study had contributed to communication audit methodology because of its rigorous and methodical approach in verifying the existence and effectiveness of communication in POSS promote idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspiration motivation and individualized consideration as they influence performance positively.

Keywords: *communication channels, Communication Audit, Internal Publics*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Communication audits are necessary in establishing, fostering and developing an institution's growth and stability. In a time when the education sector has been commercialized (Patel, 1989) it is important that such audits be carried out regularly. Education industry has many resources which include the management, buildings and teachers which are considered as the factors of production. Students on the other hand are the raw materials and the public are seen as the market for education services (Carlsmith & Railback, 2001); all must be maximized to ensure all internal publics speak effectively in order to ensure symbiotic relationships in the institution. In this perspective, secondary schools must devise all the available means to communicate effectively to the internal publics because communication is of indispensable significance to relationships in any organization.

There has been a tremendous increase in both the number of secondary schools and the student intake enrolment in response to the rapidly growing number of primary school graduates seeking entry to secondary school level (Aron, 1989). Only about 50% of the pupils that sit the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) get places in public secondary schools (Aron, 1989). This has led to the necessity to increase the establishment of POSSs to help absorb the students who are not successful in securing placement in public secondary schools (PSSs) (Aron, 1989).

The emergence of POSSs in Kenya has helped to ease pressure on the rising population of students needing form one placement. The Ominde Report (1964) had recognized the growth of educational institutions at all levels. The report recommended that private schools be allowed to continue for parents who prefer such schools and are able to meet the cost. The Kamunge Report (1988) recommended the need for the government to acknowledge, accommodate and support the role of other education providers such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religious organizations and private school developers in its effort to "reach all unreached". More recently after President Kibaki launched the Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003, the government drafted Sessional Paper No. One (2005) as a roadmap to achieving the goal of Education for all by 2015. But after a thorough analysis of the required resources to accomplish the objective the government realised that that it was unable to foot the bill required. "In view of the heavy public support required, there is need for increased participation by the private sector in the provision and expansion of education", it noted. The government then moved to encourage investment from the private sector to sustain expansion and gave incentives to private developers to make private education more attractive. As a result the number of privately owned schools grew exponentially. In spite of this recommendation, the MOE does not recognise POSSs in its organisational structure (*cf.* Appendix E).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The importance of proper communication in facilitating the development of the education system in Kenya cannot be overemphasized. A report from the Task Force Report on the Discipline and Unrest in Secondary Schools in Kenya (2001) points towards a growing need to address the lack of clear established channels of communication and blockages in the freedom to express opinion by teachers and students which eventually result in system failure. Another research by the Higher Education Board (2008) notes that public secondary schools were the most affected by strikes and this was a sign which heralded the existence of communication gaps in those schools.

One way of gauging the nature of communication in an organization is through a communication audit. Any organization is keen in making sure that its internal publics receive adequate information, promptly and through appropriate channels, in order to enable them execute their responsibilities effectively. To facilitate this, the right channels ought to be availed by the organization. It is therefore, necessary to audit the communication channels used by internal publics of POSSs using a communication audit methodology to establish what is working and what is not; and that there is no gap in the communication process. The measurement of an internal audit would create allowance for school managers to obtain feedback from their internal publics by collecting information from fundamental areas of internal communication in order to make a distinction between the actual situations against that which management perceives to be the situation.

The months of June and July 2008 saw a spiral of unrests in many public secondary schools (Daily Nation 24, July 2008). Reports from the local media indicated that Form 4 students were not willing to take up Trial Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (TKCSE) as is the norm in most secondary schools during second term. The matter was further discussed in parliament and Members of Parliament called for dialogue between the teachers and their students (Behaviour- Online, 2008). Most schools that suffered the unrests were public secondary schools; (Afrol News Staff Writer, 2008). However, Afrol News Staff Writer reported that a few privately owned secondary schools got caught up in the disturbances some of which included Sunshine Secondary School, whose students were sent home three times. This was an indicator that the problem of unrest in schools also affected private schools, thanks to a report by (Muindi & Ngirachu, 2008) aiming to prove that POSSs had potential to explode when communication bottlenecks arise.

The one sure way of keeping a school relatively free of students' unrests is to keep communication channels open for them to inquire and to be given the right response by school managers. A good internal communication system is crucial to a school because it ensures proper messages flow to its publics. Schools have a hierarchical nature and the hierarchy is divided into classes, departments and the management that communicate all the time through various communication channels.

It is against this back-drop that the study seeks to establish the style of communication existing in POSSs. However, to achieve this requires a communication audit of the internal publics of the POSSs. It is therefore, necessary to audit communication channels used by the internal publics of POSSs and establish any gaps in the communication processes with an aim of using the findings as a reference point to other schools and also to facilitate improvement of the existing communication systems in POSSs.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate whether effective communication took place among the internal publics in POSSs.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical Review

According to Robbins & Judge (2001), an organization is a consciously co-ordinate social unit composed of two or more people that function on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals. Communication is the cement of an organization's activities. According to Mbiti (2009), communication is the lifeblood of any organization. It permeates all aspects of social life and promotes interaction between individuals and groups (Robbins & Judge, 2007). In the school context, it is unimaginable to run any of the activities therein without a proper communication system (Mbiti, 2009). Communication can make or break any human organization. It has an intricate nature and structure which can be quite demanding but useful in the context of institution administration. According to Deetz (1992), we participate in organizations in almost every aspect of our lives. Further, he states that we are born in organizations, educated by organizations, and spend much of our lives working for organizations i.e. from birth to death; organizations impact every aspect of our lives. The cord that binds together all organizational activities is effective communication. This is in agreement with Robbins & Judge (2007) who states that we organize together what we cannot accomplish individually, and organizing happens through effective communication. Many institutions perpetually take deliberate efforts to ensure effective communication as a means of strengthening their production.

Organizational communication is related to several concepts and tasks, such as trust or understanding, and communication skills like holding meetings and listening. Communication is the thread that holds the various interdependent parts of an organization together. The functions of planning, coordination, and control are very important processes. If communication were somehow removed from industry, it would collapse instantly (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976).

According to Hoy and Miskel (1982) a school is defined as a formal organization which has been deliberately established for a specific purpose. Davies (1970) argues that "we lack anything like an adequate sociology of the school, and that one aspect of that lack is in terms of our knowledge of school as an organization" (P.250). As formal organizations, schools have goals, rules, regulations, structures and division of labour; all consciously designed to guide the activities of its members.

Schools communicate with their internal publics in diverse ways. Communication in a school is important for the purpose of management and planning. There is no doubt that communication is the lifeblood of a school community. All the internal publics who constitute the school community; be they students, teachers or the management, all need to be kept informed of what is happening within their organization. While much of this communication is about imparting essential knowledge, the national project indicates the importance that students attach to being able to explore issues that affect them, or have the potential to do so. The field of education is experiencing a paradigm shift from providing isolated services for students with special needs to collaborating within schools to include all students. Simultaneously, teaching is evolving from an isolated act to one requiring increased interaction (Walther-Thomas *et al.*, 2000). To achieve this, effective communication must be applied. According to Marie-Therese-Jensen, (2003) effective

communication starts with effective skills in listening, speaking, questioning and sharing feedback.

Organizational study shows that organizations consist of paths through which communication travels (Perrigo & Gaut, 1982). These paths are categorized into two sections: formal and informal. According to Myers and Myers (1982), messages do not just sit around waiting to be discovered, nor do they float around randomly to be picked up by some lucky accidents. Messages are crafted by a sender, sent through a vehicle then received by a receiver. Communication in schools is sent through various directions using the formal and informal channels while taking vertical or horizontal directions in both channels. Hierarchy is a crucial aspect to consider when examining organizational communication.

In a school hierarchy, messages are transmitted formally through vertical (top-down and down-up), lateral (horizontal) flows and through the informal grapevine. The formal downward has dominated the process of communication in schools (Canary, 2001). It is used by school managers to direct and influence the activities of those who occupy the lower hierarchical levels. School managers convey their messages downward to the staff and students through memos, policies, instructions, directives, speeches, notice boards, newsletters, manuals, and oral media among many others. It is mostly done for information dissemination. Patton and Griffin (1974) explain that “formal channels influence the nature of messages in several important ways. Organizations tend to specify the nature of the messages that flow through formal channels” (PP.299-300). According to Katz and Khan (1998) goals of this type of communication are expected to achieve: implementation of goals, job instructions, procedures, performance feedback and socialization. However, Tourish (2010) criticizes this flow and argues that messages can be distorted if they travel a great distance from their sender to the ultimate receiver down through the formal school organization hierarchy.

2.2 Theoretical review

This study shall be modelled on the Two-way symmetric model of Public Relations. It was developed by Grunig and Grunig (1992) through four categories of relationships: - press agency, public information model, one-way asymmetrical and the two-way symmetrical model. The press agency model thrived on manipulation, public information model on press releases, the one-way asymmetrical model on persuasion and manipulation, and the two-way symmetrical model on communication and negotiation with publics to promote mutual understanding (Theaker, 2004). The Two-way symmetric model introduces the idea of feedback. According to Theaker (2004) communication in this model is fully reciprocal and power relationships are balanced. Windhal *et al.* (1992) in Theaker (2004) argues that the terms ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ are not applicable in such a communication process where the goal is mutual understanding.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design engaging both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. A sample size of 18 schools with a total of 162 individuals was selected consisting School Managers (SMs), Heads of Departments (HODs) and Presidents of the Students’ Councils (POSCO) - categories using stratified and purposive sampling methods. The preferred data collection tools were questionnaires and an interview guide. Data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics

4.0 RESULTS FINDINGS

4.1 Response Rate

Out of anticipated 162 responses, the study successfully received back 100. This represented an overall response rate of 61.7%. This response rate was considered sufficient to provide adequate data for analysis and generalization. This is supported by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) who assert that a response rate of 50% is appropriate in guaranteeing accuracy and minimizing bias. Response distribution of the respondents' target groups are presented in Table 4.1 below. The number of schools that responded was 18.

Table 1: Response Rate

Category	Count	Percent
HOD	80	80
POSCO	10	10
School Managers	10	10
Total	100	100

Communication Audit Key Communication Indicators

A communication audit methodology was used in line with what is propagated by Coffman (2008) that in conducting a CA, information flow and the relationship through which information is exchanged should be examined. The study sought to examine the communication indicators in POSSs. The findings are presented in Table 4.7 below;

Table 2: Key Communication Indicators

	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
An organization chart exists.	49%	26%	17.5%	7.5%
Written down communication plan exists.	61%	18%	14%	8%
There is clarity of reporting responsibilities and lines of communication.	74%	10%	10%	6%
The school have a whistle blower policy	35%	34%	26%	5%
Whistle blower policy displayed in the most visible place	30%	39%	26%	5%
students and staff aware of the whistle blower policy	33%	34%	28%	5%

From the findings, 49% of the schools audited had an organization chart. Further, it was confirmed that there were written organizational plans, clarity of responsibilities and lines of communication, each with a response rate of 61% and 74% of the cases respectively. This shows that there were some schools which did not have some of the indicators as presented in the table above. The institutions without these indicators imply a likelihood of ineffective communication. These findings are consistent with those of Steinberg (2005) who highlights the importance of

organization charts, communication plans, clarity of responsibilities and reporting lines in facilitating effective communication. According to Steinberg (2005), hierarchy is a crucial phenomenon when examining organizational communication because the quality of messages in an organization is controlled by a hierarchical structure. This is consistent with Birgen (2009), who holds that schools have a hierarchical system which directly affects the transmission of information at all levels and it is related to the chain of command system because it follows the super-ordinate-sub-ordinate structure (*cf.* Appendix G). The above findings are consistent with Ravi-prakash's (2004) suggestion that a system of communication in schools is essential in order to have an efficiently run organization and that communication in schools is embedded in a school structure. Raviprakash acknowledges that school structures contribute significantly to the way communication in the school flows because they are structurally transmitted. Ravi-prakash's findings compare well with those of Hall (2002) who reports that the very establishment of an organizational structure is a sign that communication is supposed to follow a particular path. Thus, the findings imply a major gap/shortfall in communication amongst the internal publics of POSSs.

This study further sought to find out whether the audited schools had whistle blowing policies. From the findings presented in Table 4.12, 35% of the cases had whistle blowing policies while 34% did not have. Further, this study established that whistle blowing policies were displayed in visible places in 30% of the cases. Another 33% of the respondents indicated that in the POSSs from which the respondents were drawn, students and teachers were aware of the whistle blowing policy. These findings indicate that only a few respondents knew of the whistle blowing policies and may imply communication challenges.

Inventory Analysis

Inventory analysis is an important step in conducting a communication audit as it highlights the inconsistency of messages sent to internal publics. The findings are presented in Table 4.8:

Table 3: Inventory Analysis

	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
Obtain letter heads, business cards, fact sheets, brochures, magazines and publications, audiovisuals, Web material, and any other collateral materials used by the organization.	70%	12%	15%	3%
Do the pieces look similar?	54%	22%	16%	8%
Do they look like they came from the same organization?	65%	15%	15%	5%
Do they use the same basic design elements: type fonts, type size, colors, layout, use of pictures, graphics, and illustrations?	39%	44%	13%	4%
Do we have pieces that are very dramatic?	32%	36%	24%	8%
Do we have pieces that seem lackluster or dull?	45%	29%	21%	5%
Do the pieces carry the same basic information about the organization: mission statement, vision, 25-word organization description, and descriptions of programs and services?	40%	29%	19%	12%

Are there pictures, graphics, and illustrations?	45%	26%	21%	8%
Are these used in a consistent manner?	50%	23%	23%	4%
Is there anything missing in pictures, graphics, and illustrations?	38%	30%	28%	4%
Does the organization have a style manual for its publications?	50%	30%	12%	8%
Is it routinely followed in the communication practices of the organization?	48%	33%	16%	3%

The findings on inventory analysis show that 70% of the cases studied, there were letter heads, business cards, fact sheets, brochures, magazines and publications, audiovisuals, Web material, and any other collateral materials used by the organization out of which 54% were similar while 65% looked like they came from the same institutions. Further, the findings revealed that material used had the same basic design elements such type fonts, type size, colors, layout, use of pictures, graphics, and illustrations reported by 39% of the respondents. However, 33% of the inventory materials were dramatic while 45% were dull or lackluster as reported by 45% of the respondents. Another 40% of the cases indicated that they all carried similar basic information about the organization such as mission statement, vision, 25-word organization description, and descriptions of programs and services with 45% having pictures, graphics, and illustrations while 50% had pictures, graphics, and illustrations used consistently. However, among 38% of the cases, gaps in the pictures, graphics, and illustrations were noted. The study further found out that 50% of the POSSs had a style manual for their publications. Also, amongst the 48% cases communication practices of the organization were routinely followed. From the above findings it can be concluded that a gap in communication efficacy among internal publics of POSSs exist. This is in tandem with what Gregory, (2000) and Balasen, (2008) found out that the inconsistency in the messages carried on different communication materials/tools signals inefficiency in communication flow which may result in communication anxiety.

Web Usability

Websites is an internet technology based communication whose invention has revolutionized the way entities communicate. The study sought to find out whether POSSs were using websites to communicate and whether those websites were user friendly. The findings are presented in Table 4

Table 4. Web Usability

	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
Does the school have a website?	53%	31%	8.5%	7.5%
From a content perspective, does it present all of the organization's essential information in a manner that quickly meets needs of the user, and, at the same time, invites users to browse and learn more about the school and its services?	53%	25%	19.50%	2.5%
Is the Web site easy to maintain and update?	43%	28%	24.50%	4.50%
Does the Web site permit visitors to do what they want with little	28%	40%	29.50%	2.50%

 or no assistance?

Does the Website accommodate additional content areas and allow new functionalities to be added without major restructuring?	45%	23%	23.0%	9.0%
Is it a good platform that integrates several communication functions (i.e., e-newsletters, videos, chat rooms, etc.)?	43%	29%	25.5%	2.5%
Is it interactive and able to promote automated services, such as online registration for workshops?	45%	19%	33.50%	2.50%
Does it encourage users to share and exchange experiences, ideas, and knowledge?	43%	21%	28.50%	7.50%

From the findings, the majority of the respondents (53%) indicated that their school had a website. Further, 53% of the respondents further reported that their websites presented all the organization's essential information in a manner that quickly met user needs and attracted users to browse and learn more about the school and its services while to 28% of the respondents, the websites could be used by the browsers with little or no assistance. The study further assessed the usability of the website by asking the respondents whether their websites were interactive and able to promote automated services, such as online registration for workshops. The findings show that 45% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

Another 43% of the respondents reported that their websites were easy to update. The findings also show that 45% of the respondents indicated that the websites could accommodate additional content areas and allow new functionalities to be added without major restructuring. The findings further revealed that website use was a good platform that integrated several communication functions and encouraged users to share and exchange experiences, ideas and knowledge each reported by 43% of the respondents. From the findings it is clear that not all the POSSs used websites to communicate. Further, not all the websites were user-friendly according to 55% of the users. This shows that the POSSs do not reap the full benefits of website communication. According to Gregory (2000) and Belasen (2008), one of the objectives of CA is to identify the appropriate communication channels. In this context, website is viewed as one of the channels through which the POSSs can convey information to its internal publics although it is scarcely used.

Email Use and Etiquette

Perrigo and Gaut (1982) argue that people tend to view email as an informal written message. The study sought to find out whether email was used in POSSs. The findings are presented in Table 5

Table 5.: Email Use and Etiquette

	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
Is there a written email policy?	34.0%	39.0%	24.5%	2.5%
Are the staff and students aware about it?	30%	35%	32.5%	2.5%

Does the email policy prohibit sharing of pass words?	43%	24%	30.5%	2.5%
Does the email policy prohibit writing in capital letters (shouting)?	39%	36%	20%	5%
Does the email policy prohibit sharing of confidential information with competitors?	38%	29%	30.5%	2.5%

From the findings, 39% of the respondents reported that there was no written email policy while 34% of the respondents reported that there was a written email policy. Further, 30% of the respondents were aware of the email policy while 35% were not. This means that there was a written email policy it was known to some staff and students. This study further found out that the written email policy prohibited sharing of passwords, use of capital letters also referred to as shouting and sharing of confidential information with competitors reported by 43%, 39%, and 38% of the respondents respectively. On the contrary, 24%, 36% and 29% of the respondents reported that the written email policy did not prohibit sharing of passwords, writing in capital letters and sharing confidential information with competitors. The findings imply that there existed very many loopholes in the email etiquette and hence email as a communication tool may not be effective. This conclusion is based on the premise that the security of individual students and staff email addresses was not guaranteed and POSSs’ confidentiality in terms of security of information may not be guarded. These findings are consistent with Perrigo and Gaut’s (1982) argument that, although people tend to view email as an informal written message, it is important to formalize written email in the school setting. Further, Perrigo and Gaut posit that all schools should develop and communicate a sound email policy to communicate proper usage of the school email system to the internal publics.

Analytical Reviews

In-depth analytical reviews are important as they highlight areas that were not covered in a general audit. This study sought to find out if it was necessary to carry out in-depth analytical reviews on the communication systems of the schools. The findings are represented in Figur1.

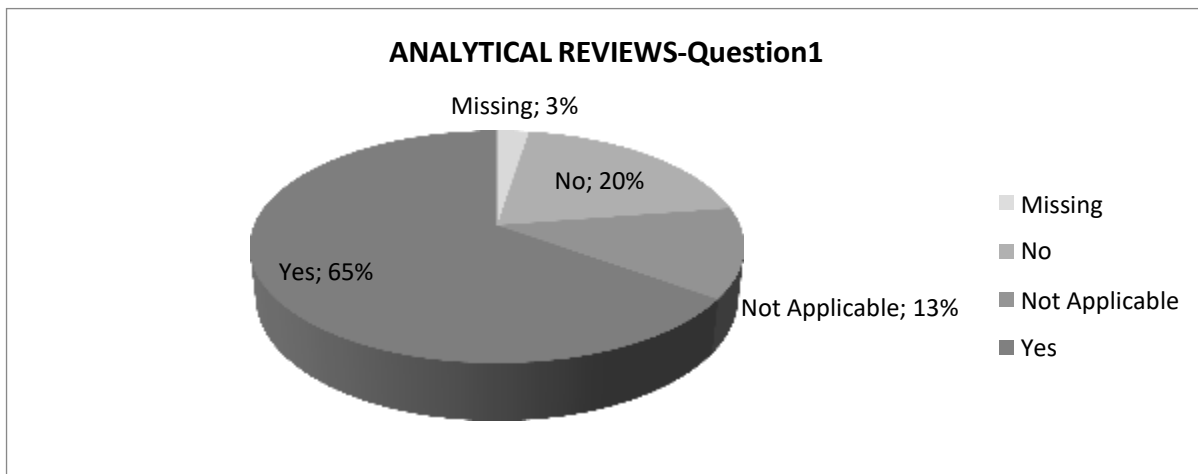


Figure 1: Analytical Reviews

The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents(65%) confirmed that it was necessary to do further analytical reviews on the POSSs communication systems. This further implies that an indepth communication audit for every school is necessary. The findings are consistent with those of Muka (2005) who conducted a study on Communication Barriers in School Management in Starehe Division and recommended that communication systems used in schools should be regularly evaluated.

The findings in Figure 4.13 show that 80% of the respondents confirmed that they had been misunderstood before when they communicated some message.

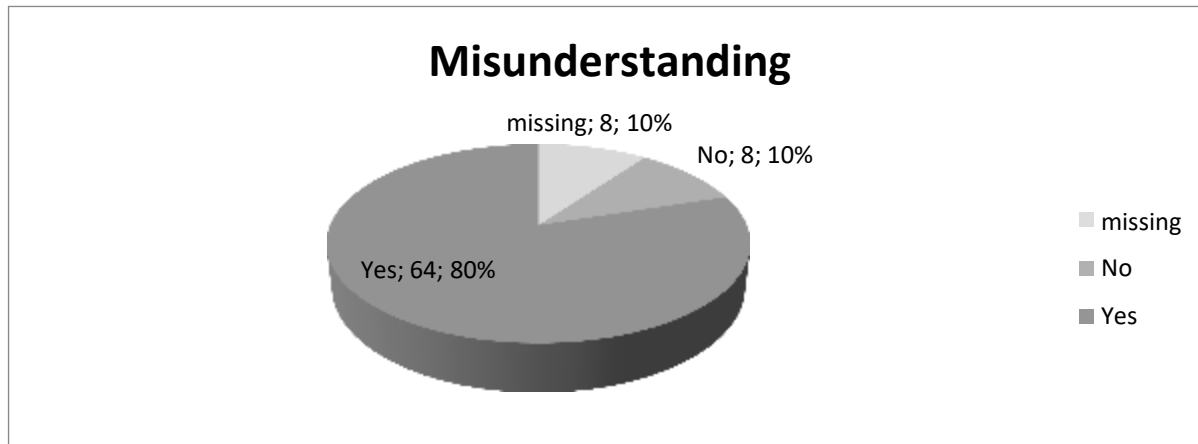


Figure 2: Miscommunication/Misunderstanding

This study sought to find out the causes of misunderstanding. The findings presented in Figure 2 show that the respondents indicated that the main cause of misunderstanding was as a result of conflicting duties and resistance to new ideas reported by 24% of the respondents, attitudes had a response of 13%, wrong mode of communication had 13%, maintaining discipline had 8%, while personal characteristics of recipient and sender such as age and intelligence had a response of 8%. Ambiguous questions and instructions was reported by 5% of the respondents while ensuring performance among staff and negotiations for better salary were each reported by 5% and 3% of the respondents respectively. These findings were in agreement with the findings of the studies by Muka (2005) which showed that some of the challenges of effective internal communication in schools are a lack of clear communication channels, and school managers not acting on feedback.

These results are also in line with Baran's (2010) explanation that some of the barriers to effective communication include frame of reference where people involved in the process of communication may elucidate the same message differently or filtering where information transmitted from sender to receiver in either direction is manipulated to a favourable way to suit the receiver. It could also be due to information over-load where the person involved in the communication process is frequently over-loaded with information than they can effectively handle or semantics where misinterpretation of words can be a barrier because meanings are not in the words but in the minds of the people who receive those words, and status differences

where the higher one's status in the school, the less likely the person will have effective communication with personnel a few levels removed.

Also, Asugo (2006) in a study on communication strategies used by head teachers in management of secondary schools in Nyamira District found out that school administrators did not properly address their students' grievances due to lack of clear communication channels. Some respondents cited distortion of the message as it passed from one person to another since most of the information was said to be relayed. Filtration of messages was rampant since the information conveyed would be manipulated and omission of parts of the intended message was noted due to fear of retributive consequences.

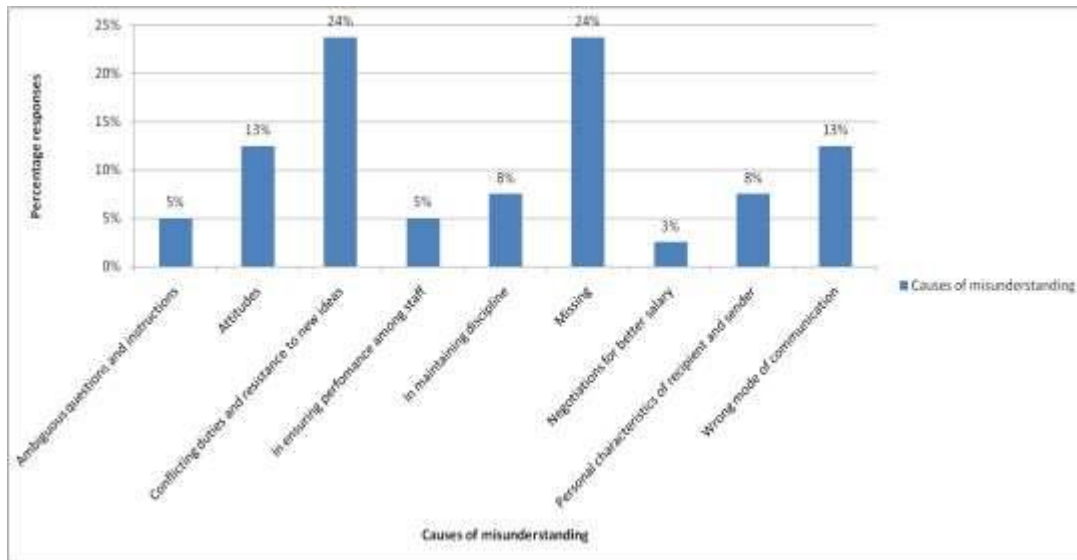


Figure 3: Causes of Misunderstanding

Suggestions for Improving Communication

The study sought to find out if there were any suggestions for improving communication in POSSs. The findings are presented in Table 4.11

Table 4: Suggestions for Improving Communication

Grouped responses question 20	Count	Ways of improving communication
No response	41	51%
use of organization charts, Sacking of teacher be well agreed upon e.g. contract letter	2	3%
clear speech	2	3%
employ face to face discussion in resolving department matters, memos, documentation of information	9	11%
school to use suggestion boxes confidentiality	2	3%

Document the information wherever communication takes place so that reference of it can be made	6	8%
Increase the use of emails since it is fast in communication	4	5%
Team work , learning from others, learning how to listen	4	5%
Through telephone calls and sometimes writing letters	2	3%
talking to them directly discussing over all relevant issues	2	3%
Need to update the website, introduce Email policy and increase the number of computers	4	5%
Open discussion with colleagues and students on matters concern them	2	3%
Total	80	100%

Respondents in the HOD category recommended that the school management should employ face to face discussion in resolving departmental matters; and use of internal memos and documentation of information should be increased. From the findings 11% of the respondents felt that there should be an introduction of the use of email as a communication channel since it is fast while 5% suggested that the existing websites be updated and an introduction of email policy put in place. This calls for the need to invest in ICT infrastructure and increase the number of computers with internet connectivity in the POSSs. Another 5% of the respondents suggested that the use of the suggestion box be introduced to cater for confidentially for those members of staff who might fear being perceived as outspoken or “whistle blowers”. More open discussions with colleagues and students were reported by 3% of the respondents. This implies the need for a feedback mechanism and encouraging the upward, downward and horizontal communication as echoed by Gartside (1986).

POSCO Responses Gender of POSCO respondents

This study sought to find out the gender composition of POSCO respondents. The findings are presented in Figure 5.

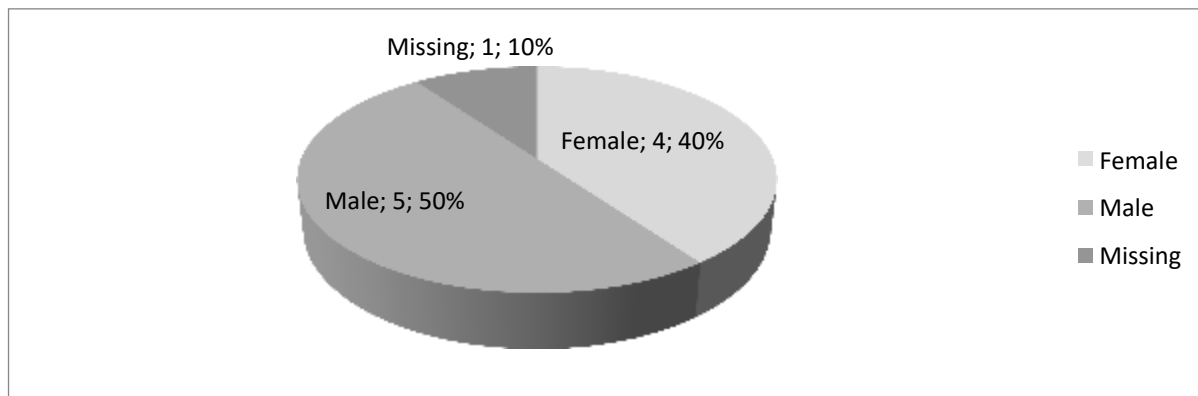


Figure 5: POSCO Gender Response

From the findings, 50% of the respondents in the POSCO category were male while female respondents were 40%. These findings show that there were more males than females in POSCO.

Age of POSCO

The study sought to find out the age distribution of POSCO respondents. The findings are presented in Figure 6.

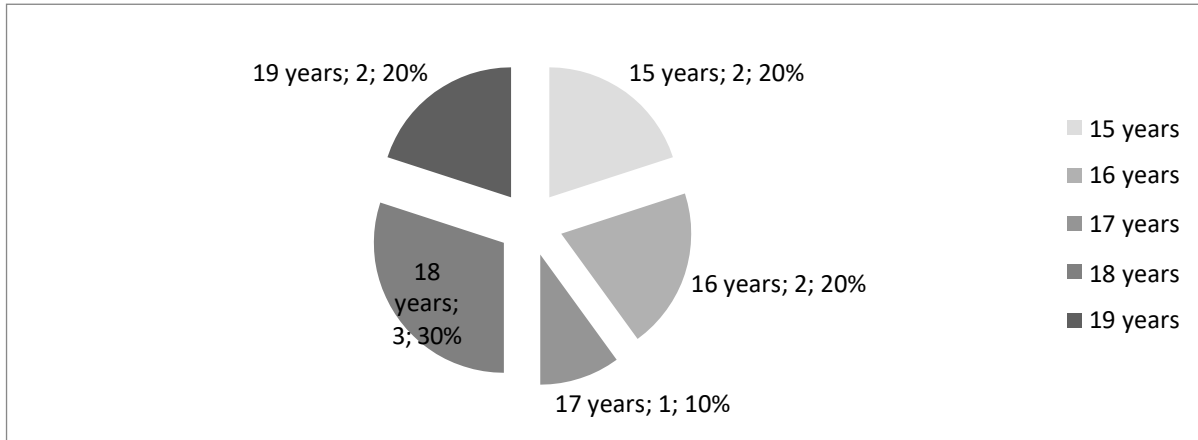


Figure 1: Age of POSCO Respondents

The findings show that less than half of the respondents (30%) were aged 18 years, respondents aged 19, 16 and 15 years each had a 20% response while 10% of the respondents in the POSCO category was aged 17 years. This indicates that about 50% were aged between 16 years and 19 years implying that they were considered responsible enough to be entrusted with the leadership role in their schools. They were also considered mature enough to offer their views on communication flow in their respective schools.

Class

The findings presented in Figure 4.17 show that 60% of the respondents in the POSCO category were in Form 4 while 40% were in Form 3. This means that POSCO had been in their respective schools long enough and understood the communication patterns in their respective institutions.

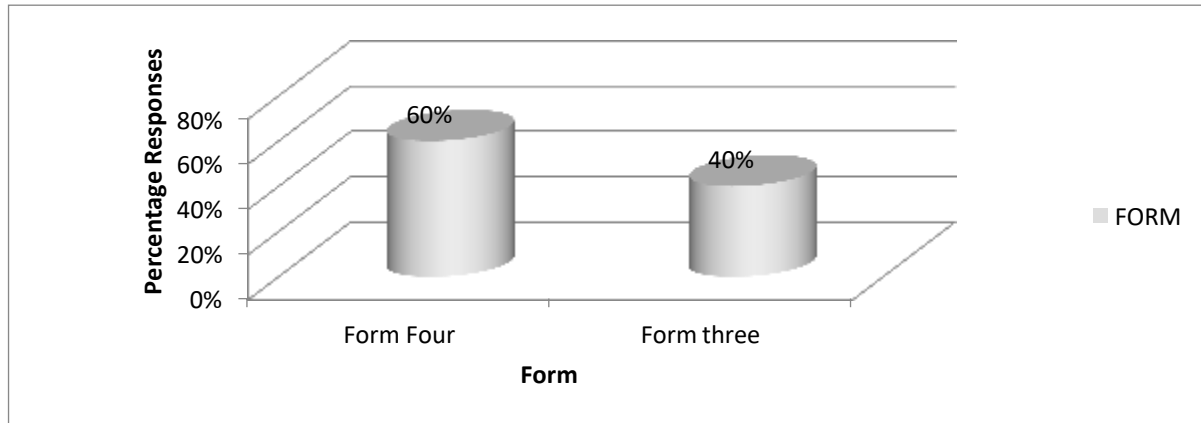


Figure 7: Form

Knowledge about the School

The study sought to find out how the POSCO respondents knew about the school. The findings are presented in Figure 4.18.

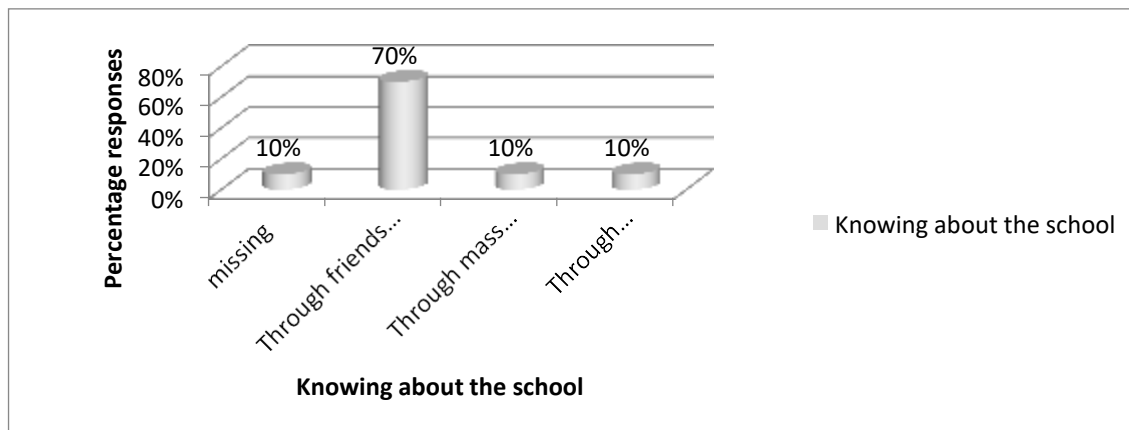


Figure 8: Source of Information about the School

The majority of the respondents (70%) knew about the school through friends who were either current students or had attended the same school earlier. The finding implies that private secondary schools rarely advertise through the mass media and rely heavily on word of mouth.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

Effectiveness of communication and existence of communication gaps

The findings on the effectiveness of communication among internal publics in POSSs showed communication gaps and potential areas where new communication channels could be introduced. The study revealed that there existed communication gaps in the area of key communication indicators. This observation is supported by 26% of the respondents who indicated that an organisation chart, communication plan, clarity of responsibilities and communicating lines did not exist. Lack of an organization chart and clear communicating lines

implies that there is a possibility of misunderstanding and misdirection of communication. Steinberg (2005) highlights the importance of organization charts, communication plans, clarity of responsibilities and reporting lines in facilitating effective communication. According to Steinberg (2005), hierarchy is a crucial phenomenon when examining organizational communication because the quality of messages in an organization is controlled by hierarchical structure. Schools have a hierarchical system which directly affects the transmission of information at all levels. It is related to the chain of command system because it follows the super-ordinate-sub-ordinate structure (Birgen, 2009).

In addition, results revealed that 13% of the respondents indicated that communication materials such as letter heads, business cards, fact sheets, brochures, magazines and publications, audiovisuals, web material, and any other collateral materials were not obtained. These findings imply that some schools were behind in effective communication as there was no evidence of inventory such as letterheads, magazines and publications. Further, 23% of the respondents reported that the communication pieces were not uniform. Another 15% of the respondents indicated that communication pieces did not look like they came from the same school. These findings show that the communication tools may be sending conflicting messages to internal publics. The results imply that the communication inventory such as letterheads, magazines and publications may have information conveying different messages.

From the findings, 44% of the respondents reported that the communication tools did not use the same basic design elements: font type, size, colors, layout, and use of pictures, graphics, and illustrations. The results imply that having different basic design elements may convey different messages. Another 36% of the respondents revealed that some communication pieces were dramatic, while others looked lackluster or dull, and that the communication pieces did not carry the same basic information about the organization's mission statement, vision, the 25-word organization description, and descriptions of programs and services. The communication tools did not have pictures, graphics, and illustrations, an indication that the pictures, graphics, and illustrations were inconsistently used. There were some characteristics missing in pictures, graphics, and illustrations, Some did not have a style manual for their publications, and the style was not routinely followed in all the communication tools observed. All these findings point to a gap in communication and imply some level of communication ineffectiveness.

The findings also show that 19% of the respondents reported that their school did not have a website. This means that schools under study could be missing a huge opportunity in employing a cost effective way of communication. The findings on the content perspective revealed that website did not present all of the organization's essential information in a manner that quickly meets needs of the user, and invite users to browse and learn more about the school and its services as reported by 25% of the respondents. Another 19% of the respondents indicated that websites were not easy to maintain and update, that the websites did not permit visitors to do what they wanted with little or no assistance, that the websites did not accommodate additional content areas and allow new functionalities to be added without major restructuring. Further, websites were not considered to be a good platform that integrated several communication functions. They were not interactive and able to promote automated services, such as online registration. Also, websites did not encourage users to share and exchange experiences, ideas, and knowledge respectively. These results imply that most of the websites were not user friendly

and this may have a negative implication on communication. These findings further imply that website as a communication tool was not effectively used.

Communication gaps in email use

Results from the study indicate that 39 % of the respondents reported that there was no written email policy. Staff and students were neither aware of the email policy nor the email policy prohibiting sharing of pass words. Also there was no policy against writing in capital letters (shouting), and sharing of confidential information with competitors respectively. The findings imply that there existed loopholes in the email policy and hence email as a communication tool was not as effective. The findings are consistent with those of Perrigo and Gant (1982), who argue that although people tend to view email as an informal written message, it is important to formalize written email in the school setting. In, the event that a school has adopted the use of email then it would be prudent to borrow from Perrigo and Gant (1982) who posit that all schools should develop and communicate a sound email policy to communicate proper usage of the school email system to the internal publics.

Conclusions

This study concludes that oral channels such as face to face meetings, telephone communication, written channels such as memos and letters, and electronic channels such as emails, websites, were used. Schools use all the channels (oral, written and electronic channels) but some of the channels are given greater emphasis in transmitting school information than others. Written channels such as letters and memos are emphasized in the same strength as face to face meetings but electronic channels of communication such as emails, website, radio and TV are the least used. Further, the study established that teachers did not openly express their opinion or provides upward communication for fear of victimization and dismissal.

This study also concludes that communication of school duties and other school activities such as changes in the curriculum, school program, time table, teachers sacking, students' discipline matters, new staff and student matters were some of the message types communicated by internal publics of POSS. Regarding these uses, the study observed that there existed gaps in feedback mechanism as departmental staff did not always give timely and appropriate feedback.

This study established that there existed a communication gap in the area of key communication indicators such as the non-existence of organizational charts, communication plans, clarity of responsibilities and reporting lines. The findings also implied that communication gaps existed in POSS as the communication inventories sent conflicting messages to internal publics. From the findings of the study, It was established that website as a communication tool was not effectively used. This is because some POSSs did not have websites, and those that had, did not exhibit user-friendliness.

Further, most school managers communicated with their internal publics about school routine, school timetable, and meetings. However, most school managers communicated to the student body verbally and in the same breadth HODs communicated to the school managers verbally. Although all types of communication in schools are important under different circumstances, most school managers preferred use of verbal other than written communication.

Many POSCO respondents stated that they met with their class teachers regularly but never met with the school managers since the school managers communicated to the students through the

class presidents or class teachers. This method of communication is ineffective because it discourages free dialogue and upward communication between the school manager and the students. The information conveyed through class teachers and class presidents may lead to filtered and distorted information.

Effective feedback mechanisms were lacking in POSSs since some school managers failed to encourage direct communication between themselves and the student body. This was perceived as a potential problem which was likely to cause tension or disruption, especially when students feel they have been left out of the decision making processes affecting them. Effective communication can be enhanced in schools by putting in place both formal and informal feedback mechanisms to establish how the messages flowing in the schools are interpreted by the student body thus encouraging free flow of communication from all directions.

Recommendations

Lastly, proprietors and/or developers of private secondary schools should invest in staff development of their school managers with a deliberate emphasis on corporate communication since private secondary schools are run like corporate/ private businesses.

Recommended Areas for Further Studies

The study audited communication among internal publics of POSSs in Nairobi County. Similar studies should be conducted in public secondary schools. The study also recommends that regular in-depth communication audits be conducted in all POSSs with a view to understanding the actual communication gaps. The study has shown that communication audits of internal publics of organizations need to be conducted regularly and follow-up of audit findings and recommendations done. The study further recommends that a comparative study of a communication audit in the private and public secondary schools in Kenya be conducted to fully understand the level of communication audit effectiveness in the public schools *vis-a-vis* the private schools, with a view to highlighting the differences, if any. Finally, the study recommends that the scope of internal audit services should not be limited to the audit of regular activities only. Also, budgetary allocation and vote heads for communication audits amongst internal publics in POSSs should be established.

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