

Influence of Principals' Communication on Vocational Identity Development Among Public Secondary School Students in Tana River County, Kenya

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Abstract

Communication is a central managerial function through which school principals articulate institutional goals, provide career information, facilitate feedback, and create social conditions in which learners can explore and clarify their future occupational identities. This article examined the influence of principals' communication on vocational identity development among students in public secondary schools in Tana River County, Kenya. The article was developed from the second objective of a wider study that investigated the influence of principals' decision-making, communication, strategic planning, and human resource management on vocational identity development. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and used quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised principals, career guidance teachers, and students in public secondary schools in Tana River County. Data were collected using structured questionnaires for students and career guidance teachers and interview schedules for principals. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The communication construct was assessed through clarity and regularity of communication, accessibility of principals, sharing of career guidance information, openness between teachers and students, and timeliness of communication. The findings showed that communication was perceived as relevant to vocational identity development, although perceptions differed between students and career guidance teachers. Students reported a mean communication score of 1.8423, while career guidance teachers reported a mean of 3.1353. Pearson correlation showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between communication and vocational identity development among students ($r = .319, p < .001$) and career guidance teachers ($r = .447, p = .008$). Multiple regression further showed that communication made a statistically significant contribution to vocational identity development, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = .286$ among students and $B = .292$ among career guidance teachers. Qualitative findings indicated that principals used career guidance messaging, feedback mechanisms, meetings and forums, accessibility, and communication about career opportunities to support students' vocational development. The article concludes that clear, timely, accessible, two-way and career-focused communication is an important leadership practice for supporting vocational identity development in public secondary schools. It recommends targeted communication-skills development for principals, institutionalised feedback mechanisms, systematic career messaging, and stronger communication linkages among principals, teachers, students, parents, and external career stakeholders.

Keywords: principals' communication, vocational identity, career guidance, secondary schools, educational leadership, Tana River County

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I. Background to the Study

Vocational identity development is an important component of adolescent development because it assists young people to understand their interests, abilities, values, aspirations, and possible occupational futures. During secondary education, learners are expected to begin exploring alternative careers, identify areas of competence, connect school subjects with future opportunities, and gradually develop confidence in making educational and occupational decisions. Vocational identity is therefore not simply the selection of a career title; it is a developing understanding of who one is, what one can do, what one values, and how these perceptions relate to possible occupational roles. Schultheiss et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of vocational identity in career decision-making, while Super's life-span, life-space perspective conceptualises career development as a continuing process through which individuals construct and revise self-concepts in relation to work and life roles (Super, 1990, 1994).

School leadership is important in this process because principals influence the organisational environment in which students receive information, interact with teachers, access guidance services, and encounter opportunities for career exploration. Among the managerial competencies of principals, communication occupies a particularly important position. Through communication, principals explain school goals and expectations, share information about career opportunities, coordinate teachers, communicate with parents and external stakeholders, and establish channels through which students can raise concerns. Communication also influences the extent to which career guidance is visible within the school and whether students perceive career development as an institutional priority.

Communication in educational leadership should be understood as more than the transmission of information. Effective communication includes clarity, regularity, accessibility, active listening, feedback, dialogue, responsiveness and the ability to adapt messages to the needs of different audiences. In the context of vocational identity, communication can help students interpret information about careers, connect personal strengths with occupational possibilities, challenge misconceptions, and develop confidence in exploring alternatives. Nguyen and Tran (2022) argue that strategic communication by school leaders can influence students' understanding of career options and their perceptions of their own capabilities. Almeida et al. (2023) similarly emphasise that clear and supportive communication creates conditions conducive to career development.

International literature increasingly links supportive leadership communication with student career exploration. Lee and Kim (2021) reported that transformational communication characterised by encouragement, support and inspiration can strengthen career exploration and self-efficacy. Wang and Chen (2022) found that participative communication can foster trust and engagement in vocational activities. Lee et al. (2022) further observed that although hierarchical communication remains common in some educational contexts, participative approaches can improve students' vocational clarity. These findings suggest that the manner in which principals communicate may be as important as the information communicated.

Communication is particularly important in contexts where students have unequal access to career information outside school. In resource-constrained or culturally diverse communities, the school may provide one of the most systematic sources of information about occupational pathways, post-secondary education, technical and vocational education, scholarships, labour-market opportunities, and emerging careers. Njoroge et al. (2022) argue that culturally responsive communication is important in Kenyan career guidance because career aspirations are shaped by family, community and cultural expectations. Such communication can broaden students' awareness beyond occupational choices that are immediately visible within their communities.

In Kenya, the need for effective career communication has become more significant as education and employment pathways become more diverse. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework emphasises competencies, practical skills, critical thinking and problem-solving, while national development priorities require young people to develop capabilities relevant to changing economic conditions (Ministry of Education, 2021; Government of Kenya, 2023). Career guidance is therefore expected to help learners connect educational experiences with future opportunities. However, Wanjala and Muthoni (2022) note that effective communication between principals, students and parents influences the success of vocational guidance programmes.

Tana River County presents a particularly relevant context for examining principals' communication and vocational identity. The county experiences socio-economic and geographical challenges, linguistic diversity and communities whose occupational patterns can shape young people's expectations. The thesis from which this article was developed notes that students' vocational aspirations may be influenced by parental background, traditional occupational preferences, economic vulnerability and limited exposure to modern vocational and technical alternatives. In such an environment, school leaders have an important role in creating communication structures that make career information accessible, understandable and relevant.

The present article isolates communication from the other managerial skills examined in the parent study. This focus is important because treating managerial skills as a single construct can obscure the specific ways in which communication influences students' vocational identity. The study therefore considered five communication indicators: regular communication of school goals and expectations, students' accessibility to the principal, sharing of career guidance information through meetings or announcements, promotion of open communication between teachers and students, and timely communication of important decisions. These dimensions reflect the view that communication supports vocational identity when it is informative, relational, accessible and responsive.

Statement of the Problem

Students are expected to develop career aspirations from an informed understanding of their interests, abilities, educational options and occupational opportunities. Yet the process of vocational identity development can be constrained when learners have limited access to reliable career information or when school communication is irregular, one-directional or inaccessible. Students may consequently develop narrow career expectations, misunderstand the relationship between subjects and occupations, or make choices primarily on the basis of family

expectations, peer influence or incomplete information. The problem is especially important during adolescence because students are moving through stages of exploration and crystallisation in which environmental information and feedback can influence the development of self-concept (Super, 1990, 1994).

Although communication is recognised as an important leadership competency, there is limited empirical evidence showing how specific communication practices by principals relate to vocational identity development among students in public secondary schools in Tana River County. Existing studies cited in the thesis indicate that communication can enhance career awareness and participation in guidance programmes, but the direct relationship between principals' communication and students' vocational identity remains underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between communication by principals and vocational identity development and by integrating perceptions from students and career guidance teachers with qualitative evidence from principals.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this article was to investigate the influence of communication on vocational identity development among public secondary school students in Tana River County, Kenya.

Research Question

The study was guided by the question: What is the influence of communication on vocational identity development among public secondary school students in Tana River County?

II. Literature Review

Principals' communication refers to the processes through which school leaders exchange information, expectations, guidance, feedback and meaning with teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders. In educational leadership, communication is a managerial activity because principals must translate policy into school-level expectations, coordinate people and resources, respond to emerging problems, and create shared understanding around institutional goals. Effective communication is therefore both informational and relational.

In vocational development, communication has several functions. First, it makes career information visible. Students need to know about career days, mentorship opportunities, scholarships, post-secondary pathways, technical and vocational options, and the competencies required for different occupations. Second, communication creates opportunities for feedback. Students can express uncertainty about career choices and seek clarification from school leaders and teachers. Third, communication can strengthen motivation by conveying positive expectations about students' capacities. Fourth, communication can coordinate the work of career guidance teachers and other school personnel. Finally, communication can connect schools to parents, colleges, employers and community organisations.

The communication construct in the present study reflects these functions. The student questionnaire assessed whether principals regularly communicated school goals and expectations, whether students could approach principals with concerns, whether career guidance information was shared through meetings or announcements, whether principals encouraged open communication between teachers and students, and whether important decisions were communicated in a timely manner. The career guidance teachers' questionnaire similarly considered clarity and regularity of communication about career initiatives, collaboration with the guidance department, staff meetings, information about career opportunities, and the creation of a career-supportive culture. The interview schedule examined career guidance messaging, feedback mechanisms, frequency of discussions, accessibility, and communication of career opportunities.

Communication and Career Exploration

Career exploration involves gathering information about oneself and possible occupational futures and evaluating how different careers fit personal interests, abilities and values. Communication can support exploration by making opportunities and information accessible. When principals communicate regularly about career programmes, students are more likely to recognise that career development is part of the school's educational mission rather than an occasional activity. This visibility can encourage participation in career guidance sessions and other exploratory experiences.

Lee and Kim (2021) found that transformational leadership communication can encourage career exploration through support and inspiration. Wang and Chen (2022) similarly emphasised participative communication as a means of strengthening engagement. The implication is that students benefit when communication allows them to ask questions, receive feedback and interact with adults who can help them interpret career information. Communication that is merely directive may transmit information without necessarily supporting reflection or self-understanding.

Career exploration also depends on students' perceptions of the credibility and relevance of information. In culturally diverse communities, communication that ignores local language, social norms or family

expectations may have limited impact. Njoroge et al. (2022) highlight culturally responsive communication as an important feature of career guidance in Kenya. For Tana River County, this suggests that principals and career guidance teachers need to communicate career possibilities in ways that connect with students' lived experiences while also expanding their horizons.

Communication, Self-Efficacy and Vocational Self-Concept

Vocational identity is closely associated with self-efficacy and self-concept. Students need confidence that they can learn, perform and succeed in activities associated with potential careers. Communication can influence these beliefs through encouragement, feedback, recognition and information about pathways. Super's theory emphasises the role of environmental experiences in the development of self-concept, while social cognitive perspectives emphasise the role of self-efficacy and environmental supports in career behaviour (Lent, 2021; Lent & Brown, 2021).

When a principal communicates confidence in students' potential and provides access to relevant opportunities, the student may develop a stronger sense of agency. Conversely, when career communication is absent or negative, students may have difficulty evaluating their strengths and identifying realistic alternatives. Johnson et al. (2021) reported that supportive and authoritative communication styles were associated with vocational development among secondary students. Ojo and Adeyemi (2022) similarly associated inclusive and dialogic communication with career awareness among Nigerian secondary school students.

Feedback is particularly important. Students often need adults to help them interpret performance, interests and experiences. Constructive feedback can help a learner identify areas of competence and areas requiring improvement. It can also connect academic experiences with future occupations. Wambua and Kimani (2020) link principals' communication skills with school climate and career exploration, suggesting that communication contributes not only through direct career messages but also by shaping the general environment in which students learn and develop aspirations.

Communication and Career Guidance

Career guidance is a major institutional mechanism through which communication supports vocational identity. Guidance services require information exchange between students and teachers, coordination among staff, and communication with external stakeholders. Principals can strengthen these services by ensuring that career guidance is discussed in staff meetings, that students are informed about relevant activities, and that guidance teachers have access to institutional support.

Wanjala and Muthoni (2022) reported that principals' ability to communicate effectively with students and parents influences the success of vocational guidance programmes. Muthoni and Wainaina (2022) likewise emphasise leadership practices in the implementation of career guidance in Kenyan secondary schools. These studies indicate that career guidance is unlikely to operate effectively when communication between school leadership and guidance personnel is weak.

Communication also provides a bridge between school-based guidance and external opportunities. Career days, mentorship programmes, college visits, scholarship information and engagement with employers can expose students to occupations that may not be represented in their immediate communities. The principal's role includes ensuring that such information reaches students in a timely and comprehensible manner. Kumar and Sharma (2022) show the importance of school leadership in integrating vocational education with wider opportunities, while Turner and Williams (2022) emphasise the value of industry partnerships in strengthening vocational pathways.

Communication and the Kenyan Context

Kenya's changing education and labour-market environment makes school-based career communication increasingly important. The country's education policy emphasises relevant competencies and preparation for future work, while Kenya Vision 2030 highlights human capital development as a foundation for national transformation (Government of Kenya, 2023). At the school level, these aspirations require leaders who can communicate the meaning of educational pathways and help students connect learning experiences with future opportunities.

However, communication practices operate within contextual constraints. Schools in economically disadvantaged and geographically remote settings may have limited access to external career resources. Students may also encounter cultural expectations that favour familiar occupations. In Tana River County, socio-economic conditions and cultural diversity can shape students' exposure to careers. The thesis notes that traditional occupational preferences, parental background and economic vulnerability may limit awareness of modern vocational and technical alternatives. Communication therefore needs to broaden students' knowledge while remaining culturally responsive.

The Kenyan literature also suggests that school leadership influences career guidance effectiveness. Mwangi and Wainaina (2021) found that school leadership is relevant to career guidance effectiveness, while Owino et al. (2023) examined school leadership and the implementation of career guidance in Kenyan public secondary schools. These studies reinforce the need to examine communication not only as an interpersonal skill but also as an institutional process through which career guidance is organised and sustained.

Theoretical Framework

Donald Super's Career Development Theory provided an important theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between principals' communication and vocational identity development. Super (1990, 1994) conceptualised career development as a life-span, life-space process centred on the development and implementation of self-concept. During adolescence, individuals engage in exploration and begin to crystallise vocational preferences. Environmental experiences influence how young people understand their abilities, interests and possible future roles.

The theory is particularly relevant because communication is one of the environmental mechanisms through which students encounter information and feedback. Principals can create opportunities for exploration by communicating about career programmes, encouraging students to discuss aspirations, facilitating access to guidance, and ensuring that career information is shared. Communication can therefore contribute to the environmental support through which students develop and revise vocational self-concepts.

Super's framework also suggests that career development is not a single event. Students may initially express broad or uncertain aspirations and gradually refine them as they receive information and gain experience. Effective school communication can support this process by allowing learners to compare alternatives, reflect on their strengths and receive feedback. Communication that is clear, timely and responsive can consequently support exploration and crystallisation, whereas limited communication may leave students with fragmented or inaccurate understandings of career pathways.

Research Design and Setting

The article was developed from a descriptive survey study that examined the influence of principals' managerial skills on vocational identity development among public secondary school students in Tana River County, Kenya. The broader study employed quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews. The communication objective was analysed as a distinct component of the managerial skills construct. The study was conducted in public secondary schools within Tana River County, a setting selected because of its socio-economic, geographical and cultural characteristics and the importance of strengthening students' career development opportunities.

Target Population and Sampling

The broader study targeted principals, career guidance teachers and students in public secondary schools in Tana River County. The sample included 312 students and 34 career guidance teachers for the quantitative analysis reported for the communication objective. Qualitative evidence was obtained through interviews with principals. The thesis indicates that 34 principals were purposively selected, while the student sample was obtained using Yamane's formula. The design therefore allowed the study to combine the larger number of student responses with the professional perspectives of career guidance teachers and the explanatory accounts of principals.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaires were used for students and career guidance teachers. For students, communication was measured using five statements concerning regular communication of school goals and expectations, accessibility of the principal, communication of career guidance information through meetings or announcements, encouragement of open communication between teachers and students, and timely communication of important decisions. Career guidance teachers responded to five corresponding indicators concerning communication about career initiatives, collaboration with the guidance department, staff meetings, information about career opportunities and the creation of a career-supportive culture.

Principal interviews focused on five indicators: clarity, feedback mechanisms, frequency, accessibility and career guidance messaging. The interview questions examined how principals communicate school goals and expectations, methods for ensuring two-way communication, frequency of career-related discussions, accessibility to students and staff, and communication of opportunities such as career days, mentorship programmes and scholarships.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, cleaned and analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise perceptions of communication, while Pearson product-moment correlation was used to establish the

direction and strength of the relationship between communication and vocational identity development. Multiple linear regression was used in the broader study to determine the contribution of communication alongside decision-making, strategic planning and human resource management. Qualitative interview responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to communication practices.

III. Results

The descriptive results showed differences between students and career guidance teachers in their perceptions of principals' communication. Career guidance teachers reported an average communication score of $M = 3.1353$ ($SD = 0.56509$), while students reported $M = 1.8423$ ($SD = 0.43276$). The difference suggests that communication practices were perceived more positively by career guidance teachers than by students. This divergence is important because principals may perceive communication as adequate when information has been shared through formal channels, while students may judge effectiveness according to accessibility, timeliness and whether the communication creates opportunities for dialogue.

Among career guidance teachers, the highest mean was recorded for the statement that there were regular staff meetings to discuss student development and career matters ($M = 3.6765$, $SD = 0.68404$). The statement that principals communicated clearly and regularly about career initiatives recorded $M = 3.3529$ ($SD = 0.91725$). Communication that encouraged collaboration with the guidance department recorded $M = 2.8235$ ($SD = 0.62622$), while ensuring that students were informed of career opportunities and sessions and promoting a career-supportive culture each recorded $M = 2.9118$. The average score was 3.1353.

Student responses showed relatively lower scores. Regular communication of school goals and expectations recorded $M = 1.6154$ ($SD = 0.68481$). Students' ability to approach the principal to discuss concerns recorded $M = 2.0192$ ($SD = 1.04848$). Sharing career guidance information through meetings or announcements recorded $M = 2.5385$ ($SD = 0.97152$), while encouragement of open communication between teachers and students recorded $M = 1.5000$ ($SD = 0.72173$). Timely communication of important decisions recorded $M = 1.5385$ ($SD = 0.86656$). The overall student mean was 1.8423.

Table 1. Descriptive Results for Communication Indicators

Communication indicator	Students M	Career guidance teachers M	Interpretation
Regular communication of goals/expectations	1.6154	3.3529	Perceptions differ
Accessibility/approachability	2.0192	—	Moderate access
Career information through meetings/announcements	2.5385	2.9118	Relatively stronger
Open communication between teachers/students	1.5000	2.8235*	Lower among students
Timely communication of important decisions	1.5385	—	Lower among students
Overall communication mean	1.8423	3.1353	Clear perception gap

Note. *The teacher questionnaire used related but not identical wording; the table is a synthesis of the communication indicators reported in the thesis.

The qualitative evidence provided additional insight into how principals understood and implemented communication. The first theme was career guidance messaging. All 34 principals identified career guidance messaging as a means of communicating school goals and expectations related to career development. The second theme was the use of feedback mechanisms. All 34 principals reported mechanisms for two-way communication between administration and students. This suggests that principals recognised the need for students to provide feedback rather than simply receive information.

The third theme was frequency. All 34 principals reported that career-related issues were discussed frequently in meetings or forums. The fourth theme was accessibility. All 34 principals indicated that students and staff had opportunities to access the principal when they wished to raise concerns related to vocational choices. The fifth theme involved career guidance messaging about opportunities. Thirty-two principals reported communicating information about opportunities such as career days, mentorship programmes and scholarship information. These findings demonstrate that principals reported multiple communication practices that were intended to support career development.

The qualitative evidence therefore presented a generally positive picture of principals' communication practices, while the student descriptive results were more cautious. The difference between these strands is analytically important. It suggests that the existence of communication mechanisms does not automatically guarantee that students experience communication as clear, timely, accessible or participatory. The quality and reach of communication may depend on how messages are received, interpreted and acted upon.

Correlation between Communication and Vocational Identity Development

Pearson product-moment correlation established a positive and statistically significant relationship between communication and vocational identity development. Among students, communication had a correlation coefficient of $r = .319$, $p < .001$. Among career guidance teachers, the correlation was $r = .447$, $p = .008$. The results indicate that higher levels of perceived communication were associated with higher levels of vocational identity development.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between Communication and Vocational Identity Development

Respondent group	N	Pearson r	p-value
Students	312	.319	< .001
Career guidance teachers	34	.447	.008

The student correlation indicates a positive but modest relationship, while the teacher correlation is stronger. The difference may reflect the distinct vantage points of the two groups. Students experience communication directly, whereas career guidance teachers are professionally involved in the processes through which career information is planned and delivered. Nevertheless, both groups produced statistically significant positive relationships, providing convergent evidence that communication is relevant to vocational identity development.

IV. Multiple Regression Findings

In the broader multiple regression model, communication retained a statistically significant contribution to vocational identity development after decision-making, strategic planning and human resource management were considered. Among students, communication had an unstandardized coefficient of $B = .286$, a standard error of $.055$, a standardised beta of $\beta = .174$, $t = 5.156$, $p < .001$. Among career guidance teachers, communication had $B = .292$, $SE = .103$, $\beta = .352$, $t = 2.829$, $p = .008$. These findings show that communication contributed independently to the prediction of vocational identity development rather than merely reflecting overlap with other managerial skills.

For students, the overall regression model involving the four managerial skills produced $R = .847$, $R^2 = .717$ and adjusted $R^2 = .714$, with $F(4,307) = 194.865$, $p < .001$. For career guidance teachers, the model produced $R = .895$, $R^2 = .800$ and adjusted $R^2 = .773$, with $F(4,29) = 29.091$, $p < .001$. Communication was therefore one of the managerial competencies making a statistically significant contribution within a broader leadership model. However, the regression coefficient should be interpreted as a statistical contribution rather than proof of causation because the study was cross-sectional.

V. Discussion

Communication as an Environmental Support for Vocational Identity

The positive association between communication and vocational identity development supports the proposition that school leadership communication forms part of the environmental context in which adolescents construct career-related self-concepts. The result is consistent with Super's theory because communication supplies experiences, information and feedback that can influence exploration and crystallisation. Students cannot easily evaluate possible careers if they lack information about occupations, educational requirements, skills and pathways. Principals therefore contribute indirectly to vocational identity when they create communication structures that make such information available.

The finding also supports the SCCT perspective, which recognises environmental supports as important to career development (Lent, 2021; Lent & Brown, 2021). Communication can influence self-efficacy through encouragement and feedback and can shape outcome expectations through accurate information about career opportunities. When students receive consistent messages that their abilities can be developed and that multiple career pathways are available, they may be more willing to explore and set goals.

The magnitude of the student correlation ($r = .319$) should nevertheless be interpreted carefully. Communication is important, but it is not the only influence on vocational identity. Students' identities are also shaped by family, peers, teachers, academic experiences, economic resources, cultural expectations and access to career opportunities. The moderate relationship therefore supports a view of communication as one component of a broader ecological and social process.

Alignment with Previous Research

The finding is consistent with Wanjala and Muthoni (2022), who reported that effective communication between principals, students and parents influences the success of vocational guidance programmes. The present findings extend that observation by demonstrating a statistically significant relationship between communication and a broader vocational identity construct. The result also aligns with Njoroge et al. (2022), who emphasise culturally responsive communication in Kenyan career guidance.

The findings further agree with international evidence. Lee and Kim (2021) found that transformational communication can strengthen career exploration, while Wang and Chen (2022) associated participative communication with trust and vocational engagement. Johnson et al. (2021) similarly identified supportive communication as relevant to vocational development. Ojo and Adeyemi (2022) reported positive effects of inclusive and dialogic communication on career awareness among Nigerian students. Taken together, the literature and the present findings indicate that communication is most useful when it creates interaction, support and opportunities for students to make sense of career information.

At the same time, the findings reveal an important contextual difference between principals' and students' perceptions. Principals reported extensive use of career guidance messaging, feedback mechanisms, meetings and accessibility, whereas students recorded a lower overall communication mean. This discrepancy suggests that the presence of communication mechanisms should not be equated with communication effectiveness. A school may hold meetings and issue announcements, but students may still feel that messages are not timely, sufficiently clear or open to dialogue.

Communication and Student Accessibility

Student accessibility to the principal is an important dimension of vocational communication. Students may have concerns that they are unwilling or unable to raise in formal meetings. An approachable principal can create a psychologically safer environment in which students ask questions about subjects, careers, educational pathways and personal strengths. The student mean for accessibility ($M = 2.0192$) suggests that this dimension was not uniformly strong.

Accessibility also has an equity dimension. Students who already possess strong family networks may obtain career information outside school, while students with limited networks may depend more heavily on school personnel. An accessible principal can therefore help reduce information inequalities. However, principals cannot provide all specialised career guidance themselves. Accessibility should be combined with a functioning guidance department, referral mechanisms and partnerships with external professionals.

Communication and Feedback

Feedback emerged strongly in the qualitative findings. All principals reported mechanisms for two-way communication between administration and students. This is consistent with the conceptualisation of effective leadership communication as interactive rather than purely directive. Feedback allows school leaders to identify students' concerns, understand barriers to career exploration and adjust programmes.

From a vocational identity perspective, feedback helps students interpret their experiences. A student who performs well in a particular subject may need guidance to understand the range of occupations connected with that competence. Another student may discover an interest through a school activity but lack information about the training required to pursue it. Two-way communication provides an opportunity for such experiences to be discussed and connected with future goals.

Communication of Career Opportunities

The qualitative evidence showed that principals communicated information about career days, mentorship programmes and scholarships. Such opportunities can broaden students' career horizons because they provide information and experiences that may not be available within ordinary classroom instruction. Career communication should therefore be viewed as an ongoing process rather than an occasional announcement.

However, communication should also be timely. Scholarship deadlines, career events and application procedures often involve specific timeframes. If information reaches students late, the communication may have little practical value. Similarly, career information needs to be understandable and sufficiently detailed for students to act on it. Principals should therefore ensure that career messages answer basic questions about what an opportunity involves, who can participate, what qualifications are required, and where students can obtain additional information.

Implications for School Leadership

The findings have several implications for principals. First, communication should be integrated into the school's career guidance system rather than treated as an informal personal skill. Second, principals should use multiple communication channels to reach students and staff. Third, communication should include structured opportunities for questions and feedback. Fourth, principals should monitor whether students actually receive and understand career information. Finally, communication should connect school-based guidance with parents, colleges, employers, training institutions and community organisations.

These implications are especially important in Tana River County, where socio-economic and cultural conditions may restrict students' exposure to diverse career possibilities. Culturally responsive communication can expand horizons without dismissing community values. Principals can, for example, use local examples of

successful professionals, community role models and emerging economic activities while also introducing students to national and international career opportunities.

VI. Conclusions

The study concludes that principals' communication is significantly associated with vocational identity development among public secondary school students in Tana River County. Both students and career guidance teachers reported positive and statistically significant relationships between communication and vocational identity development, although the strength of the relationship differed between the two groups. Communication also retained a statistically significant contribution in the broader multiple regression model.

The evidence indicates that communication contributes to vocational identity through several interconnected functions: making career information available, supporting student access to principals, creating feedback opportunities, coordinating career guidance activities, and communicating opportunities for mentorship and further education. The findings therefore support the view that effective communication is an important environmental support for students' exploration, self-awareness and career goal development.

Nevertheless, the study does not establish that communication alone causes vocational identity development. The cross-sectional design and reliance on perceptual measures mean that the results demonstrate association and predictive contribution rather than definitive causality. Vocational identity remains a multidimensional outcome shaped by school, family, cultural, economic and individual factors.

VII. Recommendations

First, school principals should undertake targeted professional development in educational communication, with emphasis on active listening, feedback, participatory dialogue, conflict-sensitive communication and communication of career information.

Second, schools should institutionalise two-way communication mechanisms for students. These may include scheduled career forums, student feedback systems, career suggestion boxes, structured guidance sessions and opportunities for students to meet school leaders.

Third, career guidance communication should be systematic and planned. Schools should develop annual communication calendars showing career days, mentorship sessions, scholarship deadlines, university and TVET information sessions and other relevant activities.

Fourth, principals should strengthen communication between the administration and career guidance departments. Regular staff meetings should include career development issues, student needs and emerging opportunities so that guidance teachers have timely institutional support.

Fifth, schools should strengthen communication with parents and external stakeholders. Parents can reinforce career messages at home, while colleges, employers, professionals and training institutions can provide students with practical information about pathways and occupational requirements.

Sixth, communication should be culturally responsive and inclusive. Principals and career guidance teachers should recognise local social and cultural realities while ensuring that students receive balanced information about a broad range of educational and vocational options.

Finally, schools should monitor whether communication is reaching students and influencing their understanding. Simple evaluations after career events and periodic reviews of students' career knowledge can help school leaders identify communication gaps and improve practice.

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