

Principals' Managerial skills as Correlates of Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Upper River Region, The Gambia

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between principals' managerial skills and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Upper River Region, The Gambia. Using a correlation research design, the research involved 10 schools, 10 principals, 317 teachers, and 1,099 students who took WASSCE exams from 2020-2022. A researcher self-designed instrument titled Principals' Managerial Skills Questionnaire (PMSQ) with 0.89 as reliability coefficient was used for data collection. The findings revealed that principals possessed key managerial skills, including planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, communicating, and controlling. Student performance analysis showed low pass rates in Mathematics (3.29-4.83%) and slightly better performance in English Language (7.95-9.97%). The statistical analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between principals' managerial skills and student academic performance, with $R = 0.855$ and $p < .05$. The study found that approximately 66% of students' academic performance variance could be attributed to these managerial skills. The research concludes that principals' managerial competencies, particularly in planning, organizing, and coordinating, significantly influenced students' academic achievement. The study recommends that school principals focus on improving these skills to enhance educational outcomes.

Keywords: Principal, Managerial Competency, Skills, Students' Academic Performance

Introduction

Academic performance is a vital measure of educational success, indicating how effectively students meet learning objectives and educational goals. It is typically assessed through various methods, such as exams, ongoing assessments, and standardized tests. In public senior secondary schools, particularly in developing countries like The Gambia, academic performance serves not only as a reflection of student capabilities but also as an indicator of the effectiveness of school leadership, the quality of instruction, and the overall learning environment. According to the MoBSE (2023) report, the average credit pass rate for Mathematics and English Language in the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) stood at 6.4% and 14.5% for the years 2020 and 2021, respectively. The inadequate academic performance of students in senior secondary schools has been attributed to a wide range of factors. Several components that contribute to this problem include teacher-related concerns, student personal and family issues and possibly the difficulties of school resource availability (Nyagosia, 2013). In the Upper River Region (URR) of The Gambia, the academic performance of students has raised

concerns among stakeholders due to the region's specific socio-economic challenges, which include inadequate educational infrastructure, limited teaching resources, and a lack of qualified graduate teachers. To enhance academic performance in this setting, a comprehensive approach is necessary, with school leadership, especially the managerial skills of principals, playing a crucial role. This study examines the relationship between principals' managerial skills and students' academic performance.

In the Upper River Region (URR) of The Gambia, there has been growing concern among stakeholders regarding student academic performance, largely due to the region's distinct socio-economic challenges. These challenges include limited educational infrastructure, a lack of teaching resources, and a shortage of qualified graduate teachers. To enhance academic outcomes in this environment, a comprehensive approach is necessary, with a particular emphasis on school leadership and the managerial skills of principals. This study examines the relationship between principals' managerial skills and students' academic performance. The managerial skills of principals are crucial for ensuring that school's function

effectively and that learning outcomes are maximized. These skills include a range of competencies that enable principals to lead, organize, and effectively manage educational activities. The study delves into the following managerial skills:

Planning skills encompass the ability to set clear objectives, identify necessary resources, and create strategies to meet both academic and institutional goals. A principal who plans effectively ensures that the school's vision and mission align with the needs of students, curriculum standards, and wider educational policies. Effective planning involves creating academic calendars, scheduling lessons, organizing extracurricular activities, and preparing for national exams. Principals who excel in planning foster structured environments that enable both teachers and students to concentrate on achieving academic success. As Hoy and Miskel (2013) note, effective planning in school leadership provides a roadmap for achieving educational goals and contributes to stability and direction within the institution. Similarly, Okumbe (1999) emphasizes that proper planning is the cornerstone of educational management, ensuring optimal use of resources for maximum impact.

Organizing skills involve structuring both human and material resources in a school to create a supportive learning environment. This includes assigning roles to staff, forming teams for specific tasks, and ensuring that school facilities are well-maintained. Principals who excel in organizing streamline school operations, reduce inefficiencies, and promote better collaboration among staff members. An organized school environment allows teachers to concentrate on instruction, which positively affects students' academic performance. According to Robbins and Coulter (2016), organizing entails designing the structure of the organization and determining how tasks will be allocated, coordinated, and supervised. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) further argue that effective organization in schools enhances instructional effectiveness and ensures efficient service delivery.

Coordinating skills ensure that all school activities and functions work together smoothly to achieve established goals. A principal with strong coordinating skills enhances communication among staff, organizes team meetings, and ensures that various departments (academic, administrative, and extracurricular) operate in alignment with the school's objectives. Effective coordination boosts teamwork and ensures consistency in instructional

delivery, which directly influences student outcomes. Koontz and O'Donnell (1986) highlight coordination as the essence of management, ensuring unity of effort and integration of organizational activities. In the educational context, Peretomode (2001) affirms that coordination by school leaders harmonizes human and material resources to achieve set objectives effectively.

Staffing skills encompass the recruitment, development, and retention of qualified personnel who support the school's mission and vision. Effective principals recognize staffing needs, recruit skilled teachers, and provide opportunities for ongoing professional development. They also promote job satisfaction through recognition and motivation. A well-staffed school with engaged educators is better equipped to deliver high-quality instruction, ultimately enhancing student academic performance. According to Nwankwo (1982), staffing is critical in educational management as it ensures that competent personnel are placed in the right positions. Bush (2011) also stresses that professional development and motivation of staff are key strategies principals use to build effective teaching and learning environments.

Effective communication is essential for fostering an open, inclusive, and collaborative atmosphere in schools. Principals who excel in communication keep clear and transparent lines open with teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. They listen attentively to concerns, offer constructive feedback, and ensure that information circulates effectively throughout the school. By maintaining open communication channels, they help create a supportive school environment that encourages greater student engagement and academic achievement. As Leithwood et al. (2004) observe, communication is central to instructional leadership, as it builds trust and clarity among school stakeholders. Okumbe (1999) further asserts that effective communication in schools facilitates decision-making and minimizes conflict, thereby improving academic outcomes.

Controlling skills involve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of school activities to ensure they align with established objectives. This process includes assessing teacher performance, tracking student progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Principals who excel in controlling utilize feedback mechanisms, performance appraisals, and data analysis to make well-informed decisions. By upholding high

standards and holding staff accountable, these principals foster continuous improvement in teaching practices and enhance student learning outcomes. Koontz and Weihrich (1990) emphasize that control ensures performance conforms to plans, making it a vital function of management. In the education sector, Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) affirm that controlling practices such as supervision and performance evaluation are critical to achieving quality teaching and learning.

Proficient managerial skills are necessary to ensure the successful execution of daily school operations. Another important aspect is the need to assess performance in teaching and learning. The relationships between pupils and their academic achievements, as well as the relationship within the school community, are also crucial. Therefore, it is evident that a principal lacking sufficient managerial skills would disrupt these responsibilities of motivating the school and the educational process. Management skills refer to intangible abilities that a manager must possess to accomplish the established objectives of an organization and enhance its productivity (Hartzel, 2018).

The significance of managerial skills lies in their role as the necessary instruments for achieving institutional goals. Therefore, these instruments are essential for a principal to make it possible to achieve the objectives of the school. The development of managerial skills results from acquiring knowledge and experience, which individuals must then apply effectively. This implies that these skills are not innate or inherited by individuals (Suteviski, 2009). Consequently, a newcomer in the field cannot simply assume the role of a principal. This is why the highest-ranking teacher in the hierarchy is often selected for the position. Even if the newcomer has the necessary knowledge but lacks the experience typically gained through years in the profession, there will undoubtedly be challenges in managing the school daily without prior experience. Sutevski (2009) elaborated that the aforementioned knowledge and skills required to fulfill the role necessitate certain managerial capabilities for the effective execution of the job. Nevertheless, the acquisition of knowledge and experience typically takes a considerable amount of time.

Consequently, the development of managerial skills in principals tends to occur gradually. This is why the role is often retained by the oldest staff members in a school setting, who are often believed to possess all the necessary skills to effectively lead the school in its daily operations and also to oversee the instructional process. These skills manifest in several forms, such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, and controlling. Despite several studies undertaken in this field, there remains a significant amount of knowledge that needs to be acquired. In senior secondary schools, the principal serves as the primary administrator responsible for efficiently using different resources by applying management ideas and techniques to achieve school goals. Publicly funded senior secondary schools in The Gambia face systemic managerial and resource challenges that undermine quality education. Teacher absenteeism and tardiness are persistent, with about 14% of teachers absent weekly and 11% arriving late or leaving early, reducing instructional time (UNICEF, 2022). Weak leadership and management practices further demotivate teachers, as ineffective leadership styles, limited promotion pathways, and insufficient professional development contribute to attrition and low morale (Jawara & Conteh, 2023). In addition, inadequate infrastructure including overcrowded classrooms, outdated buildings, and insufficient laboratories along with shortages of textbooks and teaching materials compromise the learning environment (Broken Chalk, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Chronic funding shortfalls, with education historically under-resourced at less than 10% of the national budget, further exacerbate these issues by limiting investments in facilities, staff, and resources (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2011; Kairo News, 2016). These systemic weaknesses also affect curriculum coverage and contribute to student absenteeism, which has been reported at between 20% and 40% in some regions (World Bank, 2010). Collectively, these findings underscore the lack of decisiveness among principals and policymakers in ensuring effective school management, accountability, and resource mobilization, ultimately hindering education delivery in The Gambia. Nevertheless, this could be attributed to the

inadequate managerial abilities of the principals in effectively and efficiently managing the crucial resources in the school system, namely human, material, and financial resources. Effective management of resources is a fundamental requirement for any significant institutional conversion to occur. In the context of the Upper River Region, where resource limitations and socio-economic challenges are significant, effective managerial skills become even more essential. A principal who can strategically plan, efficiently organize resources, effectively coordinate activities, competently staff, communicate clearly, and diligently control processes is better prepared to tackle the challenges that impede student academic success. Given the various roles that principals fulfill, it is crucial to understand the specific managerial competencies that are linked to improved academic performance.

Previous studies largely relied on descriptive surveys and focused on countries like Nigeria and Kenya, leaving a gap in the Gambian context. Many works emphasized teacher retention and job satisfaction but did not fully link principals' managerial skills to student academic outcomes. This research aims to fill the gap in existing literature by providing empirical evidence on how principals' managerial skills influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in the Upper River Region. The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders, guiding efforts to enhance educational leadership and ultimately improve student achievement in The Gambia. The ideal scenario is that principals possess managerial skills that create an environment conducive to academic success. This involves effectively planning school activities, organizing resources, coordinating instructional delivery, recruiting qualified staff, ensuring open lines of communication, and upholding high standards through robust control mechanisms. In such an environment, students in public senior secondary schools would consistently achieve strong academic results, while teachers would feel motivated and supported in delivering quality instruction. Unfortunately, the reality in the Upper River Region of The Gambia tells a different story.

Many public senior secondary schools in this area struggle with ongoing issues, such as poor academic performance, teacher absenteeism, low levels of student engagement, inadequate facilities, and ineffective teaching methods. Despite the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) making efforts to improve educational outcomes, student performance in West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) continues to fall short of expectations. This study aims to address the gap in empirical evidence regarding the direct impact of principals' managerial skills on students' academic performance in the region. While previous studies in other contexts have highlighted the importance of school leadership in influencing educational outcomes, there is a lack of research specific to The Gambia, especially in the Upper River Region. By pinpointing the managerial skills that are linked to better academic results, this study seeks to offer valuable insights for policymakers, educational leaders, and other stakeholders to create targeted interventions that enhance principals' abilities and boost student performance.

Research Questions

The study answered the following questions:

- i. What are the managerial skills possessed by senior secondary school Principals in Upper River Region, The Gambia?
- ii. What is the nature of Students' Academic Performance in Mathematics and English Language in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)?

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis was tested:

H₀₁: There is no significant composite contribution of principals' managerial skills (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, and communicating) to students' academic performance in Upper River Region, The Gambia.

Method

The study employed a correlational research design. The choice of this research design approach allowed the researcher to establish a significant relationship between the independent factors, namely the managerial skills of the principals, and the dependent variable, which is the academic performance of students.

This study focused on the entire population of 10 public senior secondary schools, 10 principals, 317 teachers, and 1099 students who participated in the WASSCE examinations during the academic years 2020, 2021, and 2022 in the Upper River Region.

Total enumeration sampling method was employed to choose all the 10 Principals of public senior secondary schools for this research. The application of the sampling approach depends on the limited size of the population under investigation. The research sample comprised twenty instructors of English language and Mathematics at grade twelve, selected using the stratified sampling approach. The collection of pertinent data involved the use of two instruments. The Researcher utilized a self-designed instrument called the Principals' Managerial Skills Questionnaire (PMSQ) to collect data specifically connected to principals. Additionally, an academic proforma titled "Students' Academic Performance Proforma (SAPP)" was employed to collect data specifically linked to students' academic performance. The PMSQ has 40 items designed to gather data on the professional competencies of the principal, specifically in the areas of planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, and exercising control functions.

The Principals' Managerial Skills Questionnaire (PMSQ) was validated by a meticulous development of the instrument items, followed by a rigorous examination of each item by the

project supervisor and selected specialists from the faculty of Education. All detected mistakes were immediately rectified to guarantee the content accuracy of the Instrument. The Students' Academic performance Proforma (SAPP) was ensured to have construct validity considering that the WAEC examination is a standardized test known for its high degree of integrity.

To ensure the instruments' reliability in collecting relevant data, a test-retest of the Principals' Managerial Skills Questionnaire (PMSQ) was conducted every two weeks on a sample of 10 General Science teachers from 10 senior secondary schools selected at random in the study's geographical region. The given coefficient of reliability, which was 0.89, signifies the level of consistency exhibited by the instrument in gathering the required data.

The researcher conducted the administration of the instruments within a two-week time frame. While the PMSQ was obtained immediately from the respondents, the principals who participated in the SAPP were given two-week time frame to provide pertinent data due to their busy schedules.

The study addressed research questions 1 and 2 by employing descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, which were developed according to the specified objectives. The researcher tested the assumptions using multiple regression analysis. Statistical significance threshold of 0.05 was used to draw conclusions. Mean scores equal to or over 3.0 on the 5-point scale were regarded as agreement, and scores below 3.0 were regarded as disagreement. When the p value in regression analysis was less than the significance level ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis was rejected; otherwise, accepted.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the managerial skills possessed by senior secondary school Principals in Upper River Region, The Gambia?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on the managerial skills possessed by senior secondary school Principals in Upper River Region, The Gambia

Items Raised	Mean	SD	Ranking
Planning Managerial Skill	3.28	1.123	3 rd
Utilizes a range of monetary and non-monetary incentives to motivate people in attaining excellence in their job performance.	3.77	.935	
Frequently allocates monies for the acquisition of instructional and educational resources in my specific technical field.	3.37	1.245	
Ensure that a comprehensive school improvement plan is in place to encompass all activities planned for each academic year.	2.80	1.448	
Typically formulates the school budget and presents it to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in advance of each academic year.	3.07	1.258	
Provides consistent strategic planning for curriculum and textbook procurement.	3.43	.898	
Catalogues all educational activities conducted inside the school.	3.37	.900	
Guaranties adherence to the authorized teacher-student ratio in the assignment of classes or subjects to teachers.	2.80	1.106	
Maintains comprehensive records of actions for the purpose of research.	3.07	1.129	
Has good knowledge of book keeping	3.43	1.230	
Resolves issues that arise from my topic area curriculum	3.50	.935	
Organize sessions to address deficiencies in students' learning achievements	3.50	1.074	
Organize a meeting to discuss potential methods for improving academic achievement.	3.37	.890	
Commends students who excel in examinations	3.07	1.226	
Invariably ensure timely provision of teaching and learning aids.	3.43	1.450	
Verify that the school has an adequate supply of textbooks for students.	3.13	1.349	
Always guarantee that the educational environment is conducive to effective teaching and learning.	3.43	.894	
Organizing Managerial Skills	3.04	1.210	6 th
Assigns tasks to each teacher according to their distinct areas of expertise.	3.40	1.341	
Conducted evaluation sessions to deliberate on the positive aspects of students' academic achievements	2.53	1.135	
organizes induction training for new teachers	3.20	1.155	
Staffing Managerial Skills	3.57	1.045	1 st
Always verify that all students' assignments have been duly graded.	3.43	.968	
Typically, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education has authority over issues concerning the recruitment and assignment of teachers.	3.67	.861	
Adequately staffed with instructors in my field of study	3.60	1.305	
Coordinating Managerial Skills	3.45	1.136	2 nd
Promotes collaborative teamwork among staff members	3.53	.860	

Consistently assign me to in-service training and workshops aimed at enhancing my teaching skills in my specific subject area.	3.17	1.006	
Can efficiently execute scheduled activities for the school	3.43	1.196	
Structures the school to optimize efficiency	3.33	1.418	
Transfers school official tasks and responsibilities as needed	3.60	.988	
Advocates for the active involvement of parents, former students, and other relevant parties in the advancement of the school.	3.50	1.074	
Facilitate instructors' autonomy	3.57	1.373	
Fosters and cultivates a robust rapport with educators	3.43	1.174	
Communicating Managerial Skills	3.14	1.073	5 th
Exhibits a very advanced level of decision	3.47	.819	
Possesses strong problem-solving skills	2.70	.894	
Demonstrates exceptional communication skills, especially in overseeing meetings in educational establishments.	3.30	1.028	
Establishes strong rapport with all the teachers	3.53	1.206	
Strategically utilizes school notice boards to effectively distribute information to both staff and students.	2.90	1.273	
Deliberately attending to the voices of educators and learners	3.00	1.215	
Controlling Managerial Skills	3.27	1.181	4 th
Possesses comprehensive understanding of all the institutional activities	3.67	1.028	
Periodically conducts classroom observations to study teaching and learning processes.	3.17	1.206	
supervises regular lesson planning in my specialized field	3.03	1.273	
Unwaveringly focused on ensuring outstanding academic achievement among students in my field.	3.20	1.215	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 displays the findings about the managerial skills of principals in senior secondary schools in the Upper River Region of The Gambia. Cluster mean values for planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, communicating, and controlling were found to be 3.28, 3.04, 3.57, 3.45, 3.14, and 3.27,

respectively, among senior secondary school Principals in Upper River Region, The Gambia.

Research Question 2: What is the nature of Students' Academic Performance in Mathematics and English Language in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)?

Table 2: Nature of Students' Academic Performance in Mathematics in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)

Academic Years	No of students	Grades								
		A1	B2	B3	C4	C5	C6	D7	E8	F9
2020	365	0	0	1	3	3	5	24	22	307
2021	403	0	1	0	2	6	9	20	18	347
2022	331	1	0	1	4	5	5	29	24	262
Percentage number of students passed in 2020	12 (3.29%)									
Percentage number of students passed in 2021	18(4.47%)									
Percentage number of students passed in 2022	16(4.83%)									

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 presented the students' mathematical academic achievement in the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. Analyzed data revealed that 3.29%, 4.47%, and 4.83% of students successfully completed

Mathematics for the academic sessions of 2020, 2021, and 2022 at the A1, B2, B3, C4, C5, and C6 grade levels. The consequence of this outcome was that a higher proportion of students did not pass mathematics over the examined years.

Table 3: Nature of students' academic performance in English Language in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

Academic Years	No of students	Grades								
		A1	B2	B3	C4	C5	C6	D7	E8	F9
2020	365	3	2	8	1	2	13	43	44	249
2021	403	5	2	5	2	8	14	60	60	247
2022	331	4	2	3	6	3	15	42	54	202
Percentage number of students passed in 2020	29(7.95%)									
Percentage number of students passed in 2021	36(8.93%)									
Percentage number of students passed in 2022	33(9.97%)									

Source: Field Survey, 2023

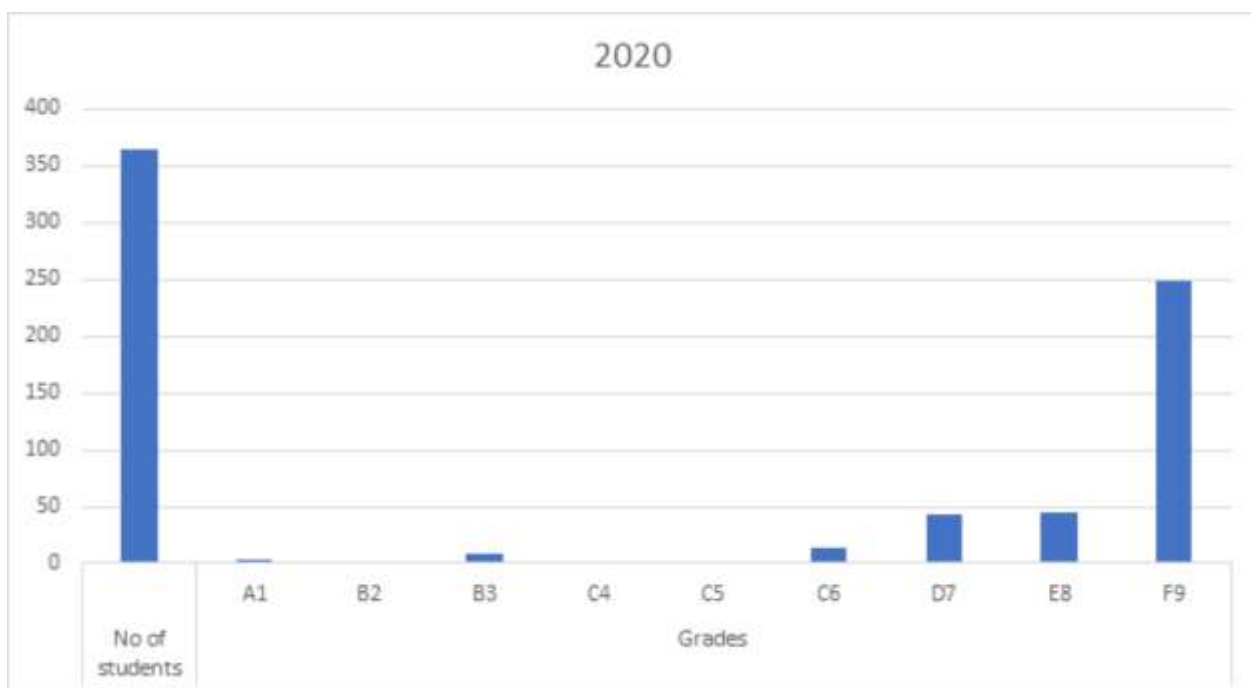


Figure 1: Bar-chart showing the number of students who passed English Language in 2020

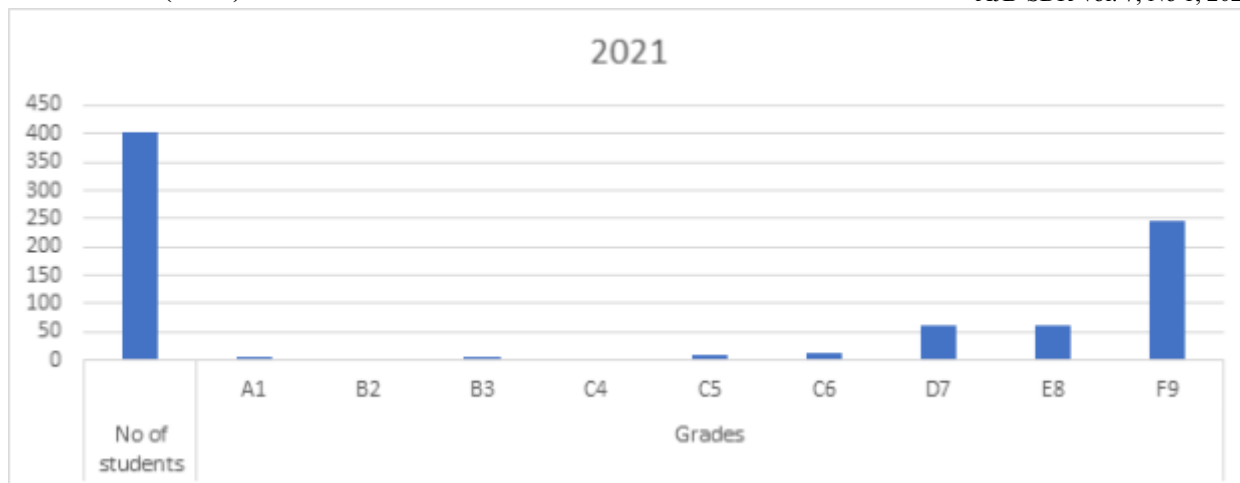


Figure 2: Bar-chart showing the number of students who passed English Language in 2021

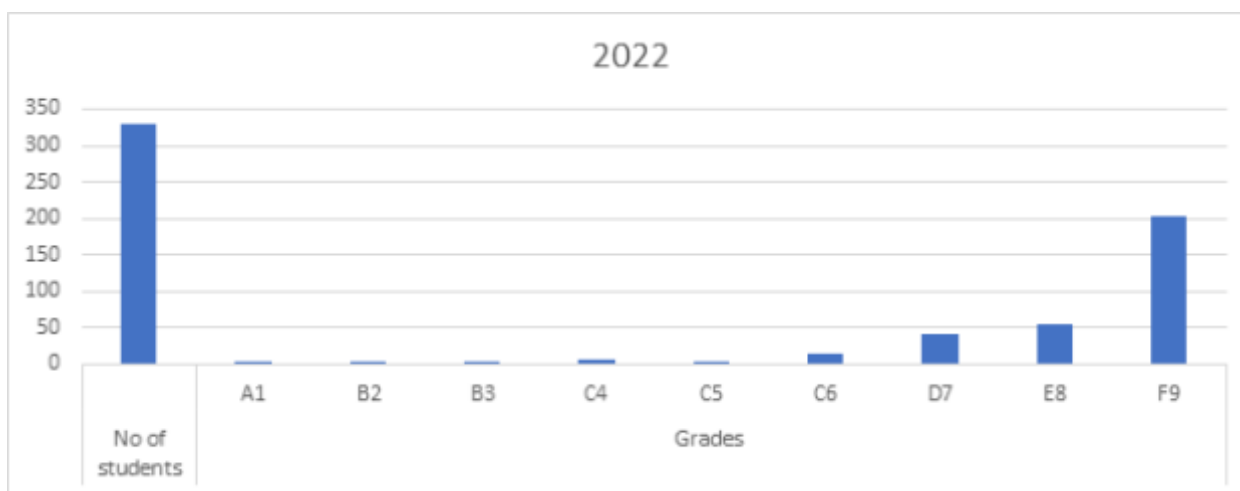


Figure 3: Bar-chart showing the number of students who passed English Language in 2022

The table below presents the students' academic performance in English Language during the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) held in 2020, 2021, and 2022. The data presented in Table 4.3 indicates that 7.95%, 8.93%, and 9.97% of students successfully completed the English Language course for the academic sessions of 2020, 2021, and 2022, at the A1, B2, B3, C4, C5, and C6 grade. The findings indicate that a

significant proportion of pupils did not pass the English Language exam during the chosen years. Nevertheless, when comparing academic achievement in Mathematics, it may be deduced that a greater number of pupils completed English Language than in Mathematics.

H₀₁: There is no significant composite contribution of principals' managerial skills on students' academic performance in Upper River Region, The Gambia.

Table 4: Composite contribution of principals' managerial skills on students' academic performance

R = .855					
R ² = .731					
Adj R ² = .660					
Std. Error = 1.9129					
ANOVA					
Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F-ratio	P
Regression	228.139	6	38.023	10.391	0.000
Residual	84.161	23	3.659		
Total	312.300	29			

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Dependent Variable: Students' academic performance statistical analysis revealed a substantial combined impact of the independent variables (principals' managerial abilities (planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, communication and control skills)) on the dependent variable (students' academic performance) with a coefficient of determination $R = .731$, $P < .05$). With an estimated Adjusted R^2 value of 0.660, the table revealed that around 66% of the variation in Students' Academic Performance could be accounted for by the linear combination of the independent variable. The ANOVA obtained from the regression analysis revealed a significant collective influence of the independent variables on the dependent variables; ($F_{(6,23)} = 10.391$, $P < .05$). Principals' Managerial Skills ($R = .855$, $P < .05$) and Students' Academic Performance.

The null hypothesis (H_0), which states that principals' managerial skills have no significant effect on students' academic performance, is rejected since the regression results show a strong positive relationship ($R = .855$) and a significant F-ratio ($p < .05$). The adjusted R^2 value of .660 further indicates that 66% of the variance in students' performance is explained by principals' managerial skills. Therefore, principals' managerial abilities significantly influence students' academic performance.

Discussion

The principals of senior secondary schools in the Upper River Region of The Gambia possessed managerial skills such as planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, communicating, and controlling. These findings align with the claims stated by Olaleye (2013), who emphasized the need for secondary school principals to have professional and administrative skills to effectively fulfil their duties. Competence in guiding instruction is crucial for principals, as it involves overseeing a revolutionary process that involves the entire school community. Successful leadership in this situation requires giving priority to relationships, facilitating effective cooperation, and ensuring a shared commitment to a single plan. In order to successfully guide the process of change, leaders must sufficiently equip their teams to anticipate unforeseen circumstances and maintain their commitment. As per Carvazos (2012), principals should exhibit pragmatism, flexibility in response to current conditions, and

the capacity to formulate compromises. Furthermore, Ladd (2009) highlighted the critical influence of school leadership in determining working circumstances. A study undertaken by Hirseh et al., (2008) revealed that competent school leadership significantly influenced teachers' propensity to remain in their current educational institutions. Efficacious principal cultivates a conducive working environment. The five fundamental competencies identified by the CCSRI (2007) are verbal communication, general management, project management, financial management, and human resource management. This study defines a principal as competent if they effectively supervise instruction, maintain discipline, manage money, and achieve outstanding academic results. A key measure of effective leadership is the ability to build relationships with the broader community and effectively achieve school goals. The aim of this study was to examine the influence of principals' competencies on the management and administration of educational institutions.

The Data analysis of Research Question 2 indicated that a significant percentage of students failed Mathematics and English Language throughout the selected years. However, a higher proportion of students achieved successful completion in English Language compared to Mathematics. The results are consistent with the conclusions of Wango (2009), which suggest that student academic achievement is frequently below grade level and that principals play a crucial role in fostering academic excellence.

A significant influence of principals' managerial competence on students' academic performance was observed. This aligns with the study undertaken by Horng et al., (2010), which established a correlation between focusing on organizational management and instructional leadership and higher levels of student achievement. Macharia (2016) precisely described 21st-century principals as instructional leaders whose primary duty is to improve student learning outcomes. The principles of instructional leadership include precisely establishing school goals, ensuring a safe learning environment, guiding instructors' efforts towards effective teaching and professional development, and continuously assessing classroom instruction. Effective

instructional directors should engage actively in the teaching process, oversee the execution of curriculum, verify the professional registrations of instructors, oversee the covering of the syllabus, ensure attendance, provide teaching materials, and enable the introduction of new teachers. Moreover, in the 21st century, principals should foster teachers' self-efficacy by actively including them in decision-making processes. The educational reforms enacted in the past decade have imposed more demands on principals in their capacities as educators, authoritative figures, and catalysts for transformation.

Conclusion

The study concluded that senior secondary school principals in Upper River Region, The Gambia, with the following managerial skills: planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, communicating, and controlling, have a correlation with the academic performance of students in public senior secondary schools. A significant combined effect of the independent variables (principals' managerial skills including planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, communication, and control skills) on the dependent variable (students' academic attainment) was found in the study;

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were provided:

Principals should engage in ongoing professional development programs that emphasize essential managerial skills such as planning, organizing, and coordinating.

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) should also carry out regular performance evaluations to pinpoint deficiencies in leadership abilities and organize targeted training workshops to address these issues.

Schools should introduce remedial classes and focused intervention strategies for students who are struggling with Mathematics and English Language, based on the performance trends identified in past WASSCE results. Additionally, regular mock exams and continuous assessment systems should be implemented to track student progress.

A comprehensive leadership framework should be established, incorporating all facets of

effective school management to boost student performance. Principals should be encouraged to utilize data-driven decision-making processes and actively involve teachers and parents in enhancing academic results.

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