

Relationship Between Self Esteem and Academic Performance of Students in Selected High Schools in Njoro District, Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract: *Academic performance of students depends on their self-esteem and the established relationships. The study revealed that students' academic achievement is highly affected by their self-esteem. Students with high self-esteem post the highest grades. Descriptive research design was used which accurately described the association between variables minimising bias while maximising the reliability of the data. Using descriptive and inferential statistics the collected data was analysed with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS Version 21).*

Keywords: High Self Esteem, Low Self Esteem, Self Esteem, Academic performance

1. Introduction

Kenya has made concerted effort to bridge the gap in general education of the population on the understanding that education disparities lead to more inequalities in meaningful lifelong education. As a country, Kenya recognizes that education is a human right and has put in policies to ensure that basic education is free and available for all. To meet the national goals of education, policy initiatives have focused on dealing with key challenges such as access, participation, retention, equity, quality, relevance, transition and efficiency that tackles education disparities. Educating the masses emanates from the recognized view that the wider society ensures a better future generation and aid in implementation of general family program (Juma 1994). In Kenya introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Free Primary Education (FPE) has significantly reduced illiteracy levels.. According to Brown (1998), the experience of being competent to cope with basic challenges of life emerges from one's self esteem. This consists of two components; Self efficacy which is confidence in one's ability to think, learn, choose and make appropriate decisions and self-respect, which is confidence in ones right to be happy and by extension, confidence that achievement, success, friendship, respect, love and fulfillment are appropriate to oneself(Brown, 1998).

Self-evaluation is the basic context in which individuals act and react, prioritize their values, set goals and tackle the challenges. Personal responses to events are shaped in part, by who and what they think they are; that is, how competent and worthy individuals perceive themselves. (Cloringer, 2004). The study focused on intrinsic/personal factors which included self-esteem and social relationships.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The role of education in society has received attention from various stakeholders. Poor academic performance amongst secondary school students is threatening to derail economic and social development. In Njoro district, students' academic achievement has been low for a long time. There

is a large disparity between the enrollment rates and the completion rates. This has led to all manner of challenges ranging from unemployment to high crime in the district.

To reveal the factors for dismal academic achievement, studies have been conducted that have reported a variety of factors. A study by Eshiwani (1983) reported that the use of student centred methodologies led to higher academic achievement. There have been insufficient studies, if any, on students' psychological environment as determinants of their academic performance. It is therefore necessary to establish whether such a relationship exists in Njoro district. Studies by (Baumeister et al., 2003; Pottebaum, Keith,&Ehly, 1986) reported that self-esteem is a major determinant of students academic achievement. Such a relationship has not been explored in Njoro district hence the need for the current study.

1.2 Objective of the study

The general objective of the study was to establish the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance of students. The specific objectives of the study was to establish the relationship between students' academic self-esteem and academic performance.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions: What is the relationship between students' self-esteem and their academic performance?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relationship between Self-esteem and Academic performance

Learning is influenced by many factors among them personal psychological characteristics of the learner such as self-esteem. Self-esteem is commonly regarded as the attitude one has towards the concept of the self (Rosenberg 1965) which may be positive or negative. Positive attitude

towards the concept of the self is referred to as high self-esteem (HSE) while negative attitude is referred to as low self-esteem (LSE).

Self-esteem is a fundamental human motive that all people strive to protect and enhance (Rosenberg, 1989). Baumeister et al (2003) remarked that self-esteem is a highly desirable psychological source of positive behavior which may include academic achievement. For example, it is commonly believed that students with HSE attain higher grades than those LSE. This, according to studies stems from the fact that those with HSE are better motivated to learn and are likely to set higher goals in life and work tirelessly towards attaining them. People with HSE are more persistent to failure and are likely to try on a task over and over as opposed to those with LSE that give up easily by succumbing to the feelings of self-doubt and incompetence (Baumeister et al, 2003). Based on this perception, numerous educational programs and interventions have been implemented in an attempt to increase students' grades by boosting their self-esteem. Some programs have reported failure while others have reported immense success.

Most of the research examining the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement conducted among high school students show positive and consistent correlation between the two variables (Baumeister et al., 2003; Pottebaum, Keith, & Ehly, 1986). However, this is only a correlation and must not be confused with causation. Results from studies that tested a causal connection between these two variables have been mixed. Although evidence for a direct effect is inconsistent, the testing of other linkages between self-esteem and academic achievement have been more successful. Specifically, several studies tested the reverse causal direction and found that academic achievement has a significant positive effect on self-esteem (Rosenberg et al. 1989, Ross and Broh, 2000). Also, a study by Lui, Kaplan, and Risser (1992) found an indirect effect of self-esteem on a achievement whereby low self-esteem resulted in increased deviance, psychological distress, decreased motivation, illness, and absence from school, in turn, resulting in poor academic performance for students. The current study sought to establish the relationship between high school students' self-esteem and their academic achievement in a Kenyan context.

There have also been studies on self-esteem and academic achievement amongst college students. Osborne (1995) states that "students who feel positive about themselves have fewer sleepless nights, are less likely to use drugs and alcohol, are more persistent at difficult task, are happier and more sociable, and tend to perform better academically"...pg 32.

College students with a low self-esteem tend to be unhappy, less sociable, more likely to use drugs and alcohol, and are more vulnerable to depression, which are all correlated with lower academic achievement (Wiggins, 1994) in Ross and Broh (2000). Wiest (1998) in Sirin and Jackson (2001) is in agreement with Baumeister et al (2003) that academic achievement is influenced by perceived competence, locus of control, autonomy, and motivation. All these are aspects of self-esteem and if a student perceives himself/herself

positively, he/she sets higher goals (Broh (2000) and becomes motivated to succeed academically by engaging himself/herself in meaningful academic activities.

There are some studies however which have reported contradictory finding to the ones reported above. For example Demo and Parker (1988) found a non-significant correlation between academic achievement and self-esteem. Crocker and Luhtanen (2003) used regressions to examine self-esteem as a predictor of college students' academic achievement and found that the level of self-esteem did not significantly predict GPA. However, they did find that self-esteem negatively predicted students' self-reported academic problems, such as lower grades than desired and dissatisfaction with school.

Oliwa (1998) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between achievement motivation, locus of control, and academic performance of class eight pupils in Bondo district. The study sample comprised of 172 girls and 190 boys totaling to 362 pupils. The problem of the study was to consider whether locus of control variable would improve the predictability of achievement motivation in relation to academic achievement.

The study aimed at finding out the relationship between pupils' need for achievement and their locus of control orientation. Two principal questions were raised:

- 1) What is the relationship between locus of control and students' academic performance?
- 2) Are there differences in students' achievement motivation?

To find out the relationship between her variables, she used a correlation design which attempted to investigate possible relationship among variables without intervention. She used the locus of control instrument referred to as the Internal-External scale (the I-E scale) constructed by Norwicki and Strickland, Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) as achievement motivation instrument and standardized end-term scores for class seven as measures for academic performance instrument,

Her findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between locus of control and academic performance because low achievement motivation and external locus of control were negatively related to students' academic performance. It also revealed that there was no significant difference between mean score of boys and girls in academic achievement motivation. Oliwa's study was related to the current study in such a way that it tested the locus of control and achievement motivation on academic performance while this study seeks to find the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. Furthermore, there is need to carry out this study in Kenyan secondary schools as Oliwa's was carried out in primary schools.

2.2 Students' self-esteem versus academic performance

The first objective of this study was to establish how students' self-esteem relates to their academic performance. Students' self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg

self-esteem scale which had ten items. The items were scored on a four point Likert scale with half of them positively worded and the other half negatively worded. For each question, the students were supposed to tick one of the levels given as either strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD). The positively worded items were scored such that those who ticked SA scored 3 and those who ticked SD scored 0. The scoring was reversed for negatively worded items. Since there were ten items, the maximum score was 30. For purposes of analysis in this study though, scores below 14 were considered low self-esteem (LSE) while those between 14 and 16 were considered moderate self esteem (MSE). Scores of 17 and above were considered high self-esteem (HSE). Table 4.2 illustrates the distribution of self-esteem and student performance in the District:

	Frequency (N = 280)	Percent	Mean Score
High	239	85.4	62.55
Low	11	3.9	46.09
Moderate	25	8.9	51.60
Missing	5	1.8	—
Total	280	100.0	

Table 4.2 shows that majority of the sampled students (239 students, 85.4%) in Njoro District had high self-esteem. Only 11 students (3.9%) had low self-esteem while 25 other students (8.9%) were found to have a moderate self esteem. Table 4.2 also reveals that students with high self-esteem performed better (mean = 62.62) than their counterparts with low self-esteem (mean = 49.21) and moderate self esteem (mean = 51.60). To test whether these means were statistically significantly different, an ANOVA statistic was computed. The results were as shown in table 4.3:

Table 4.3: ANOVA for Self-esteem vs Academic achievement

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5227.144	2	2613.572	24.926	.000
Within Groups	28520.005	272	104.853		
Total	33747.149	274			

The results in table 4.3 ($F(272,2) = 24.926, p = 0.00, p < 0.05$) show a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of students with different levels of self-esteem (Low, High and Moderate).

To assess which of these means were different, further analysis was done using the Turkey HSD post hoc tests. The results were as shown in table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Multiple comparisons for academic achievement among different levels of self esteem

(I) Self Esteem	(J) Self Esteem	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
High	Low	16.461	3.158	.000
	Moderate	10.952	2.152	.000
Low	High	-16.461	3.158	.000
	Moderate	-5.509	3.705	.299
Moderate	High	-10.952	2.152	.000
	Low	5.509	3.705	.299

Results obtained from this post hoc analysis indicate that the difference in mean scores between students with high self

esteem and those with low self-esteem were statistically different ($I-J = 16.461, p < 0.05$). This difference is in favour of students with high self-esteem. On the other hand, the mean difference between students with moderate self-esteem and those with low self-esteem was not statistically different ($I - J = 5.509, p > 0.05$).

These findings are in agreement with most of the findings presented by the reviewed studies in chapter two. These studies include those by Baumeister et al., (2003); Pottebaum, Keith, & Ehly, (1986) who found a strong positive correlation between secondary school students self esteem and their academic achievement. Other studies reviewed and that are in agreement include those by Sirin and Jackson (2001). One possible explanation to this is the fact that students with positive self esteem tend to value their academic endeavors and therefore work harder to achieve their academic dreams as compared to their counterparts with low self esteem. Table 4.6 indicates the cross tabulation for self esteem and intended level of education among the students involved in the study

Table 4.5: Intended Level of Education * Self Esteem Cross tabulation

		Self Esteem			Total	
		High	Low	Moderate		
ILED	University	Count	223	10	23	256
		% within ILED	87.1%	3.9%	9.0%	100.0%
		% within SE	93.7%	90.9%	95.8%	93.8%
		% of Total	81.7%	3.7%	8.4%	93.8%
	College	Count	15	1	1	17
		% within ILED	88.2%	5.9%	5.9%	100.0%
		% within SE	6.3%	9.1%	4.2%	6.2%
Total	% of Total	5.5%	0.4%	0.4%	6.2%	
	Count	238	11	24	273	
	% within ILED	87.2%	4.0%	8.8%	100.0%	
	% within SE	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
		% of Total	87.2%	4.0%	8.8%	100.0%

KEY: ILED: Intended Level of Education, **SE:** Self Esteem

Table 4.6 indicate that majority of students (87.1%) with high self esteem intended to achieve up to university education while majority those with low self esteem(88.2%) intended to achieve only up to college level education. However, there were still some students with high self esteem but intended to achieve only college level education. A small percentage (3.9%) of students with low self esteem also intended to achieve up to university education. This trend can be a possible explanation as to why students with high self esteem outperformed their counterparts with low self esteem.

These findings however are in contradiction with those reported in studies conducted by Demo and Parker (1988) who found a non-significant relationship between self-esteem and students' academic achievement. Furthermore, Crocker and Luhtanen (2003) used regressions to examine self-esteem as a predictor of college students' academic achievement and found that the level of self-esteem did not significantly predict GPA scores of students.

3. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 Self-esteem versus academic Performance

Most students (85.9%) in the district were found to have high self-esteem. Very few students (totaling 9.8%) were found to have low and moderate self-esteem. On academic achievement, students with high self-esteem had a higher mean score (mean = 62.55%) than those with moderate self-esteem (mean = 51.60%) and low self-esteem (mean = 46.09%). These mean scores were found to be statistically significantly different using ANOVA statistic ($F(2,2) = 24.926, p = 0.00, p < 0.05$). Post hoc analyses indicated that the differences in achievement were in favour of students with high self-esteem over their counterparts with either low self-esteem or moderate self-esteem.

3.2 Conclusion

From the findings of this study, students' self-esteem, is related to their academic achievement. However, it is important to note that these alone are not sufficient conditions to ensure student success in academic work. Social relationships and self-esteem are all psychological factors but there are many other non-psychological causes that may impede or enhance student success in academic work. These may include availability of resources (both human and physical), students' entry behaviour, quality of teachers, nature/type of measuring instruments among others. These therefore, should be considered alongside the identified psychological factors while making academic policies. For instance, provision of text books to students is important as suggested by other studies. But other studies have also suggested that discussion among students enhances learning and therefore achievement. These discussions can only be meaningful in a class where students relate well with each other as shown in the current study.

Similarly, provision of adequately trained teachers and a good learning environment on its own may not help improve a student performance if the students have a low self-esteem.

Therefore, the low self-esteem could as well be dealt with while providing the physical facilities for optimal performance to be realized.

3.3 Study Recommendations

The contribution of psychological factors in students' academic achievement has received a lot of attention in the recent past from researchers in the field of educational psychology. These studies were all aimed at making working recommendations that could, if well implemented, improve the students achievement. The current study was also designed to establish the relationships between students' academic performance and their self-esteem. Following the findings as reported in the previous chapter and summarized in the current one, the following recommendations are made:

Since it has been empirically established in this study that students' high self-esteem is significantly related to their performance, this study recommends that teachers and parents should work in collaboration to improve students' self-esteem. This could be done by carrying out regular spot checks on every student to find out if the students are going through any stressing situations that could make them lower their self-worth. For the students who join school with an already low self esteem, the teachers in charge of guidance and counseling should hold regular sessions with them aimed at improving their self esteem.

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