

Parental Involvement and Academic Outcomes Nexus in Public Secondary Schools: A Focus on Nyamira County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study set out to examine how parental involvement impacts the academic achievement of secondary school students in standardized national examinations. The research specifically analyzed outcomes in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) within Nyamira County, which was selected due to its consistently below-average performance in KCSE outcomes over recent years. Several scholarly studies reviewed highlight growing concern over the persistently low academic performance observed in the County. This trend prompted critical inquiry into why student outcomes appeared disproportionately poor, even though the learning environments in neighboring counties are generally comparable. This study was grounded in the theory of performance in public secondary schools. The researchers employed the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table to determine an appropriate sample size. A total of 889 respondents participated, including teachers, Parents Association (PA) members, school principals, and disciplinary masters from selected schools. Data were primarily collected using structured questionnaires. For data analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used, incorporating both descriptive and inferential statistics within a multiple regression framework. To examine the relationships among the study variables, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The study's findings affirmed that parental involvement plays a critical role in influencing student academic outcomes within the subject county. Notably, the educational level of parents was found to significantly impact learners' academic outcomes. It was observed that parents of high-achieving students tend to be more engaged in their children's academic lives, both at home and within the school environment, compared to parents of low-achieving students. Furthermore, students with strong intrinsic motivation were more likely to possess positive self-perceptions regarding their academic competence, while those driven primarily by extrinsic factors exhibited lower academic self-confidence. Overall, the research highlights the urgent need for strategies that promote greater parental engagement in the learning process. This is crucial, as the lack of well-structured engagement mechanisms was identified as a key barrier to effective parental participation, thereby hindering student academic progress in secondary schools.

Keywords: Student's Academic Performance / Student's Academic Outcomes, Parental Involvement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the core issues in education research has been the reason as to *why students in certain schools do well in the standardized tests, whereas others do not manage to get minimum passing scores as indicated by the mean scores*. The question regarding the learning processes leading to successful performance in such assessments is also important. In the Kenyan education setting, the research on the specific improvement variables that influence academic performance, especially in the public secondary schools is still lacking. To address this gap, the current study sought to explore the major determinants of academic outcomes in the Kenyan public secondary schools with a special focus on Nyamira County. The study in particular attempted to

answer the two important questions that included: what explains the difference in performance between the two?

After the enactment of the new constitution in Kenya in 2010, Kenya was subdivided into forty-seven counties with one of them being Nyamira County. Nyamira is situated in the former Nyanza Province which was once a part of Kisii County when it acted as a district and was sometimes called North Kisii County. The population of the county is 598,252 according to the 2009 national census, with an estimated urban population of 41,668 in the county capital, Nyamira Town. The county is administratively subdivided into four sub-counties (constituencies): Borabu, Kitutu Masaba, North Mugirango, and West Mugirango. There are about 154 secondary schools in the county and

these schools are major players in the education sector in the region.

Secondary education is central to the development of any nation because it prepares the learners with the knowledge and skills that they require to participate in the economic and social development of the country. According to the World Bank (2013), secondary education is a key to ending poverty, achieving shared prosperity, and improving health, gender equity, peace, and stability in the society. In this regard, the Government of Kenya has stated that secondary education is considered as basic education and this strengthens its strategic role in national development initiatives (Republic of Kenya, 2007). There is therefore a need to ensure that the graduates of such level of education are of a minimum quality to enable them to serve the society in a good way.

Academic performance is a popular indicator of educational quality. It indicates the extent of knowledge and skills that a student gains which then determines how he or she will be able to operate effectively in the society. According to the World Bank education strategy group (2011), skills and knowledge acquired by the learners in schools are more related to development and poverty reduction than the years spent in classrooms. That notwithstanding, it has been noted that in most low-income countries, learners tend to finish basic education without achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills (World Bank, 2013).

The available literature has revealed some home and school related factors that affect the performance of students in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). These are characteristics of students and teachers, parental participation and education, economic status of families, and availability of physical and human resources in schools (Ayoo, 2008; Bishop, 2013; Epstein, 2009; Wamahiu, 2008). Community financial support, school infrastructure and school leadership and management have also been identified as factors that affect academic outcomes by other studies (Omolo, 2009; Kariuki, 2012; Onyoni, 2013). Nonetheless, the extent to which these factors affect academic performance particularly in Nyamira County is not well studied. This increases the necessity to examine the interaction of the improvement factors including parental involvement, educational financing, and student discipline on the development of academic success at secondary schools in the county.

Kenya has been widely recognized to have education as one of its pillars of national development. Increasing access to quality education is central to increasing productivity, raising the individual incomes, promoting social equity, and narrowing income gaps (Republic of Kenya, 2011). The government has always given education a priority in its policy frameworks since independence because the government has realized that education is one of the most important drivers of socio-economic transformation.

The administration and management of the national education system is done by the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education (MoE). Nevertheless, the daily operation and prosperity of schools, both public and private, entail a wider scope of stakeholders. School management is effective when all stakeholders work together and every stakeholder plays a complementary role to ensure that the school attains educational objectives and enhances school performance. Primary and secondary education have been decentralized in order to encourage community participation and to improve quality of education services. In the secondary level, whether government sponsored or privately owned, there is intense dependency on parents, religious organizations, business firms and civil society organizations to assist and supplement in the management and development of schools especially in the aspect of enhancing academic performance

The government has also adopted a community participation policy to enhance academic performance and school standards by inviting all the education stakeholders to take part in planning, development, and maintenance of school facilities. These are parents, teachers, religious organizations, local businesses and non-governmental organizations. According to Kamunge (2014), the role of such actors is critical in increasing access without compromising the quality and relevance of secondary education. Oduro (2009) also adds that investments to enhance access should be accompanied by parallel investments to enhance quality. The importance of parents in school governance is based on the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC, 1989) recommendations which outlined the roles of parents in terms of provision of finances, enforcement of discipline and school performance monitoring.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The performance of most public secondary schools in Nyamira County has over the years continued to perform dismally in national examinations compared to other schools in other counties from the same region. Nyamweya (2013) conducted a study on factors that influence the academic performance of girls in mixed day public secondary schools in Nyamira District. The study was prompted by the persistence of the poor performance patterns as manifested in the KCSE mean scores and sought to determine the interventions that could be used to improve academic performance. This poor performance has been a matter of concern to the education stakeholders in the county. The main research questions that will be used to guide the proposed study are as follows: Why do certain public secondary schools in Kenya excel in the standardized national examinations, whereas others fail to achieve satisfactory results as indicated by the mean scores? and What are the specific variables in the learning process that determine academic performance in the public secondary schools? This study will seek to answer these questions with particular reference to schools in Nyamira County

Another similar research by Nyamongo (2014) used performance reports of the County Education Office and

established that most of the public secondary schools in Nyamira were performing poorly in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams. As an example, the KCSE results of 2011 revealed that no school in Nyamira County was ranked in the top 20 schools in the country and six of its districts were ranked among the thirty worst-performing in the country (DEOs, 2011). Although there are general research studies on academic performance, a critical review of the literature has shown that there is no particular set of variables directly associated with the academic performance in Nyamira County. Though some associative indicators have been established in more general research, the factors that are definite and could be used as a basis of improvement strategies specific to the situation in Nyamira are under-researched.

Considering these issues, the proposed study aims at examining how learning improvement variables affect academic performance in the sampled public secondary schools in Nyamira County. Although a number of areas were taken into account, specific focus was put on parental involvement as one of the major variables. The results will guide practical interventions that can assist the stakeholders to deal with the long-standing performance issues. Finally, the study will help in the overall goal of enhancing the education sector as one of the social pillars in Kenya development agenda especially in the realization of Vision 2030.

➤ *General Objective*

The study sought to examine the nexus between parental involvement on the student academic outcomes with a special focus to public secondary schools in Nyamira County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Kenya, advancement in the formal education system is highly pegged on performance in standardized tests at different levels of schooling. Although there is no national examination to take when moving up to class one, a child is supposed to show some level of competency to be allowed to move up. Learners in classes one to eight finally take the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination to enable them to join secondary school. On the same note, the transition between secondary school and the university depends on the successful completion of the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Glennerster et al. (2011) note that the public secondary schools in Kenya are hierarchically divided into National, County, and District schools, with an additional fourth category, Extra-County schools, developing in the course of a current expansion and upgrading program. These levels vary widely in the availability of teaching staff, facilities and learning materials. There are certain performance levels that learners have to attain to move between these levels

Although the Government of Kenya and other international development partners such as the World Bank have made concerted efforts to popularize secondary education as a means of developing human capital and achieving national development, the number of students enrolled at the secondary level is relatively low compared to the number of students enrolled at the primary level (Yakaboski & Nolan, 2011). This shows that there are systemic issues that can impede access and retention, especially in under-resourced areas. Academic achievement is usually determined by the performance of the learners in coursework and standardized tests that are applied to gauge the comprehension and the mastery of the material (Kyoshaba, 2009). Various studies have established a number of variables that affect academic performance of students in various learning environments. These are effort of the student, previous academic performance, intrinsic motivation, the socio-economic status of parents, the age, the amount of time they spend in studying, the qualifications that they have to get in, the affordability of the tuition fee, and the geographical background of the student, whether he or she is rural or urban. These variables provide a glimpse of the multidimensionality of academic achievement and the different levels of external and internal factors in influencing educational outcomes.

Theoretically, Egler states that some of the factors that determine academic performance are not subject to change and are not in the control of the learner, but other factors can be changed by the learner or by other agents like educators and parents. Egler suggests three types of modifiable factors and calls them axioms of performance improvement. The Performer Mindset is the first axiom which involves psychological aspects that appeal to the emotions and ambitions of the learner. This involves making high but achievable goals, accepting failure as a learning process, and making environments that learners feel safe and supported. The second axiom focuses on Immersion, which is placing learners in an environment (physical, social, or intellectual) that is favorable to high performance. The important factors here are meaningful social relations, exposure to disciplinary knowledge, active participation in learning, emotional and spiritual congruence. Reflective Practice is the third axiom that promotes critical reflection on the experience of learners in order to determine their strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement. This is a process that leads to greater self-understanding and lifelong learning which are both essential towards long-term academic success.

Such theoretical understanding is consistent with the overall objective of learning and improving student performance in countries such as Kenya where educational inequality is a burning issue. Stakeholders can create specific strategies to increase academic performance and, consequently, the quality of education in general by determining which variables are most suitable to intervention.

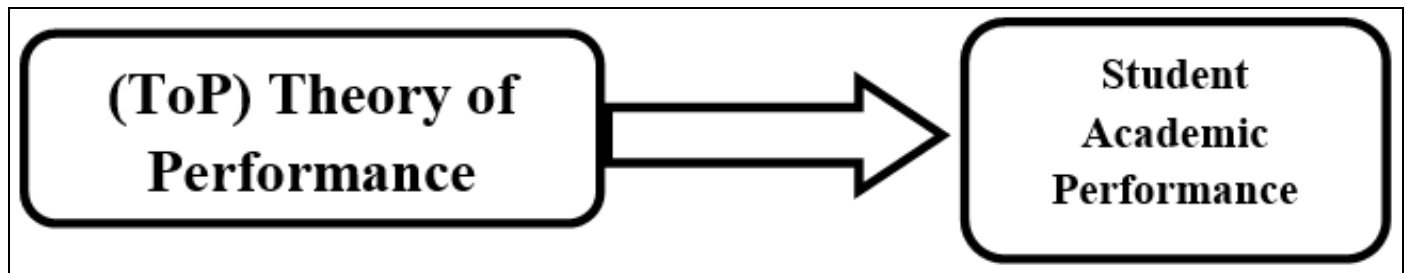


Fig 1 Theoretical Framework (Researcher, 2015)

The Theory of Performance is taken as an applicable framework to evaluate the role of the chosen improvement variables on academic performance in the school environment in this study. It is especially based on the Top part of performance and the axiom of immersion as proposed by Egler. In this context, the study conceptualizes parental involvement, community-based educational financing, and student discipline as immersion-related factors, which are part of the learning environment. The underlying assumption is that in case parents are actively involved in the education of their children, in case student discipline is applied, and in case there are sufficient financial means to finance schooling, then students will have better chances to achieve better results at school. On the other hand, the absence of such supportive factors can impede academic achievement. This is why the study is limited to the analysis of these contextual and immersion factors as the central constructs of the Performance Theory that forms the basis of the conceptual framework.

Empirically, a research conducted by Adenike (2013) under the title of the effects of family type on academic achievement of students was conducted to understand the correlation between family background and student motivation, and the research concluded that home environment and the intrinsic motivation of the learner are two major triggers of academic achievement. These results support the argument by Ajiboye (2009) that home is the basic foundation of learning and educational achievement.

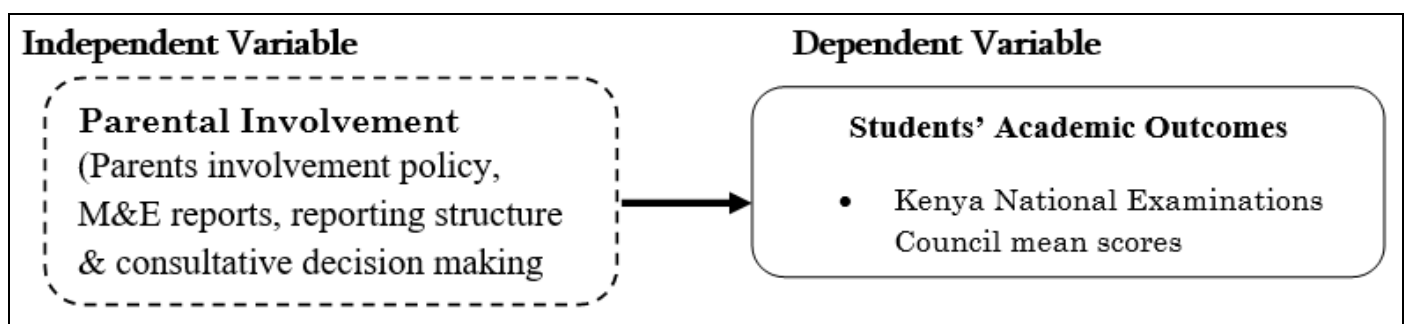
Parental involvement can be conceptualized in a broad sense as the attitudes, behaviors and actions of parents that are meant to promote the educational well-being of their children. It is a bidirectional and multidimensional construct according to Fantuzzo, Tighe, and Childs (2000) and has close connections with social and academic outcomes (Weiss et al., 2004; El Nokali et al., 2010). Although the

conventional definitions have tended to restrict the parental involvement to the involvement in school-based events and activities (Epstein, 2002), the study takes a broader perspective. It encompasses subject-specific interaction and home-based academic assistance, particularly in such subjects as mathematics, the results of which are determined by a combination of home, school, and community factors (Vukovic, Roberts & Wright, 2013).

In addition, parental involvement, together with the environmental and economic factors, can have a great impact on the cognitive development of a child, language acquisition, and social skills. Wynn (2014) underlined that family involvement at an early age influences school readiness and future success significantly. The study by Driessen, Smit, and Slegers (2005) also revealed that parental involvement in the education continuum results in better academic performance. On the other hand, the absence of such involvement has been linked to risk behaviors and poor psychosocial outcomes such as substance abuse, delinquency and emotional problems (Annunziata et al., 2006).

In general, parents are important in determining the home and school learning environment. Their participation is usually associated with better performance of students in basic subjects like mathematics and language, enrolment in more demanding academic programs, better academic perseverance, better behaviour, better social integration, regular attendance and lower dropout rates (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). All these findings confirm the choice of parental involvement as a key improvement factor in the performance of students in Nyamira County in the present study.

The study was conceptualized as shown in the diagram below.

Fig 2 Conceptual Framework
Source: Author (2025)

The conceptual framework of Figure 2.2 shows the interrelation between the main variables of this research. The model is founded on the fact that parental involvement (the independent variable) has a substantial effect on the academic performance of students (the dependent variable). This association presupposes that different degrees and types of parental involvement have a direct or indirect influence on the academic performance of learners in high schools

III. METHODOLOGY

This research was based on cross-sectional survey design where data was gathered at the given time period and on the chosen sample of respondents in the study area. This design was appropriate in the study aim of investigating the effect of learning improvement variables on academic performance in the public secondary schools in Nyamira County. The process of data collection entailed the administration of structured questionnaires to a sample of the participants who were members of different stakeholder groups in the sampled schools.

The target population was all the public secondary schools in Nyamira County and this was 189 institutions. Other people in the population were principals, teachers working in the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), disciplinary masters, PTA members, and students. A sample size of 127 schools was selected out of the total population of schools based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size determination. To achieve representativeness of the various types of schools, schools were sampled based on stratified random sampling in the national, extra-county, and sub-county categories. The sample size of the schools selected in each category was proportional based on the formula $(x/189 \times 127)$, where x indicated the number of schools in each stratum.

Simple stratified random sampling methods were used to sample participants in the sampled schools. Four class teachers were identified in every school; one in each form (Form 1 to Form 4) to give the data pertinent to the thematic areas of the study. Moreover, a single PTA member, namely, the PTA chairperson, was involved as she answered questions based on the themes of parental involvement. One disciplinary master or deputy principal was incorporated to deal with the matters that concern the student discipline, and the principal of each school was engaged in all the thematic areas and also the school performance data was provided.

The County Education Office data show that there are about 1,617 teachers in the Nyamira public secondary schools all of whom are employed by the Teachers Service Commission. This number implies that there are

approximately 12 teachers in a school. Out of this pool, teachers were identified to make sure that they could give the right and relevant answers according to the objectives of the study.

The structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data and it was distributed to the identified respondents. The questionnaire had closed and open questions. The closed-ended questions were prepared on a five-point Likert scale, where the extent of agreement or disagreement with particular statements was measured, on a scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The scale was considered to be suitable in measuring attitudes and perceptions in accordance with the objectives of the study as affirmed by Golafshani (2003). The fact that the open-ended questions were included in all sections enabled the respondents to share their opinions and give more details on the main thematic areas that were studied.

The questionnaire was separated into five parts. The initial part recorded the demographic data of the respondents. The school principal and the four class teachers completed the second section which was in line with the Objective One. The third part, which is under the Objective Two, was completed by the school principal and the PTA chairperson. The fourth part, which covered Objective Three, was filled by the principal and the disciplinary master. Lastly, the fifth part was to have the school principals submit KCSE mean score records of the years under analysis to enable quantitative performance analysis.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

After receiving the filled in questionnaires, the researcher embarked on a rigorous process of inspection and editing to check the completeness of data and internal consistency. The verified data was then coded and inserted into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 both in descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The categorical variables were arranged and interpreted by frequency counts and percentages giving a clear overview of the distribution pattern of the variables in the study sample. The strength and nature of relationship between variables was determined using correlation and regression analysis at a level of significance of 0.05 on continuous scale variables. Moreover, the qualitative data collected through open-ended answers was analyzed in a thematic way, and the themes were oriented to the particular aims of the study. The analysis also helped the researcher to make some interesting conclusions regarding the impacts of different factors on academic performance. The table below shows the findings of the correlation test analysis of the dependent variable (KCSE student performance) and the independent variable (parental involvement in the school management process).

Table 1 Relationship between Parental Involvement in School Management Process and KCSE Students' Performance

Variable		KCSE students' Performance	Parental involvement in school management
KCSE students' Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.828
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	744	244

Parental involvement in school management	Pearson Correlation	.828	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	744	744

Source: Research Data (2016)

The research found out that there was a positive relationship between parental involvement in the management of the school and performance of the students in KCSE with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.828. The relationship was also found to be statistically significant with a p-value of 0.000 which is far much below the standard significance level of 0.05. Such findings indicate that a higher involvement of parents in school governance and other activities will probably lead to a similar increase in the academic performance of students. In particular, the results suggest that a unit increase in parental involvement is associated with an estimated improvement in the performance of students in the KCSE by a factor of 0.828.

The initial hypothesis of the research aimed at analyzing the character of the correlation between the performance of students in KCSE and parental engagement in the school management practices. In testing this hypothesis, the KCSE performance index as the dependent variable was regressed against a composite index of the degree of parental involvement in school management which was the independent variable. The result of the regression analysis revealed a statistically significant and strong relationship, which supports the central role of parental involvement in determining academic performance of secondary school learners.

Table 2 Parental Involvement in School Management and Students' Performance

Table 2 Parental Involvement in School Management and Students' Performance						
(a)Model Summery						
Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1		.828 ^a	.686	.685	1.60705	
a. predictors: (constant) Parental involvement in school management process						
b. Dependent: Variable : Students' Performance in KCSE						
(b) ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1294.34	1	1294.34	501.176	.000 ^b
	Residual	1916.59	742	2.583		
	Total	3210.93	743			
a. Dependent Variable : Students Performance' in KCSE						
(c) Coefficient						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
1		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	Constant	-9.490	1.325		-7.163	.000
	Parental involvement in management process	.752	.034	.828	22.387	.000
b. Dependent: variable : Students Performance in KCSE						

Source: Research Data, 2016

The regression equation obtained from this output was that, Students Performance in KCSE = -9.490 + 0.752 Parental involvement in school management process + e.... equation (1)

According to the results shown in the table above the adjusted R square of the regression between parental involvement in school management and performance of students in KCSE was determined to be 0.685. This shows that the level of parental involvement in school governance and administration functions is the source of 68.5 percent of the variability in the performance of students in KCSE. Moreover, the ANOVA test results indicate that the F-ratio (1, 744) = 1294.335 is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, which proves that the model makes a significant prediction of the influence of parental involvement on academic outcomes.

The unstandardized beta coefficient of parental involvement was 0.752 and the value was significant at $p < 0.000$. This implies that a unit change in the parental involvement measurement scale is associated with a 0.752 increase in KCSE performance. Also, the intercept of the regression model was -9.490 which means that in a scenario where there is no parental involvement, the baseline performance of a student would be negative. Consequently, the null hypothesis 1 that there exist no statistically significant correlation between parental involvement and student performance in KCSE is rejected. These results support the fact that there is a close, positive correlation between parental involvement in school management and better academic performance of students. This finding is in line with the study by Fraenkel (2011) that indicated that parent participation in academic planning activities, including academic clinics, has a positive effect on student success because it helps in effective delivery of the curriculum.

Respondents observed that parents in Nyamira County are actively involved in the different areas of school governance. As an example, parents make contributions to school finances, especially in terms of instructional materials and assistance of student motivation programs. In addition, they are involved in student discipline where they are supposed to support good behaviors and instil morality at home. Also, parents are involved in the development of school strategic plans and in most cases involved in the monitoring and evaluation of school development initiatives. The data also indicated that a great number of secondary schools in the county hold parent-teacher consultation meetings, particularly at the level of classes, with the aim of enhancing the results of students. This partnership between school administrations and parents is entrenched in a common desire to ensure academic achievement among learners.

V. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the descriptive analysis show that there is a definite relationship between parental involvement and better student academic performance. This positive correlation was observed in many indicators such as grades, standardized test scores, and other performance indicators. The uniformity of this pattern in various dimensions of parental involvement highlights the significance of general and specific types of involvement. On the whole, the results of the present research provide useful information. To begin with, the evidence is strong and supports the assumption that parental involvement has a strong impact on student performance in different student populations.

Secondly, the data indicate that not only does informal or voluntary parental involvement matter, but structured parental support programs also contribute meaningfully to learners' academic success. Consequently, it is recommended that schools implement deliberate strategies to increase parental participation in educational activities. Additionally, educators including teachers, school heads, and counsellors should become well-informed about the most effective forms of parental involvement, enabling them to guide parents more effectively. These may include more direct forms of participation such as reading with children and maintaining open communication, as well as indirect forms like setting clear academic expectations and adopting supportive parenting styles.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study has offered a comprehensive analysis of the determinants influencing academic performance in public secondary schools in Nyamira County, Kenya. The results underscore the pivotal role of parental involvement in promoting student achievement. Evidence from the study revealed that the educational level of parents significantly impacts learners' academic outcomes. Notably, parents of high-achieving students were found to be more engaged and interested in their children's educational progress than those of lower-achieving students. Furthermore, learners who demonstrate intrinsic motivation were more likely to possess

a strong sense of academic competence, whereas those motivated primarily by external incentives displayed lower self-perceived academic capability. The study, therefore, concludes that active parental participation in both school-based and home-based academic activities can significantly boost student performance an outcome that is critical for achieving long-term educational improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to formulate strategies that encourage parental engagement in academic improvement strategy. This is based on the revelation that lack of proper engagement procedures impeded participatory levels of parents in academic improvement strategy and therefore negatively affecting student performance. There is also need to improve parental involvement in student discipline. This will help to curb some of the challenges in instilling discipline like lack of cooperation from parents, different lifestyle and societal norms.

➤ Notes

- The chief aim of this study was to empirically establish whether defined improvement factors can lead to better performance among secondary school students who sit yearly national examinations in Kenya.
- The study was conducted in Nyamira County, Kenya over a period of four years culminating in this abridged paper of findings.
- Whereas there exist many factors that can potentially influence student performance at Kenya National Examinations administered annually, this study focused primarily on parental involvement variable. This is because there was strong indication that parental involvement in the subject county was either minimal or nonexistence although existing relevant literature points to its relatively great importance in improved learner academic performance.
- Data was collected and thematically analysed using statistical methods in line with data types collected and systematically collated.
- The findings do answer substantive research questions raised at the beginning of the study. This is demonstrated by strong correlation coefficient delineated in the study findings herein.
- The educators and education managers in Nyamira county and Kenya at large, are encouraged to apply the recommendations in this study to develop sound academic improvement strategies to align student learning outcomes with Kenya's Vision 2030 socioeconomic development goals.

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