

## **The Influence of Social Economic Background on Academic Performance of Secondary School Student Council Officials in Kenya.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the influence of socio-economic background on the academic performance of student council officials in secondary schools. The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Kajiado North, Sub-County, Kajiado County. A sample size of seven (7) principals, ten (10) deputy principals and ninety-four (94) student council officials was used in the study. Data collection was done using questionnaires, after which analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics were done for data analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science software program (SPSS). The measure of associations was determined using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) between variables which enabled the authors to determine whether the relationship between variables was positive or negative (-1.0 to +1.0). The study findings established that the high social-economic background of student council officials significantly influenced their academic performances ( $r=.025$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The findings further indicated that the availability of funds enables student council officials to have access to more academic resources; availability of funds motivates student council officials to perform better in examinations, and that student council officials from high socio-economic status were competent to pursue good grades in examinations. However, the study hypothesis was partially rejected. The authors recommend that public secondary schools should try to reduce the gap between students from the high social, economic background and low backgrounds.

**Key Terms:** Socio-economic background, academic performance, student council.

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### **How to cite this article in APA.**

Mbogo, R. W. & Wekesa, F.C. (2021). The Influence of Social Economic Background on Academic Performance of Secondary School Student Council Officials in Kenya. *Editon Cons. J. Curr. Educ. Stud.*, 3(1), 331-339. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248>

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## Introduction

Social-economic status is one of the most researched and debated factors among educational professionals that contribute towards the academic performance of students (Farooq et al., 2011; Livumbaze & Achoka, 2016). In a study conducted to examine different factors influencing the academic performance of secondary school students in the metropolitan city of Pakistan, it was revealed that socio-economic status (SES) and parents' education have a significant effect on students overall academic performance in the subjects of Mathematics and English (Farooq et al. 2011). According to Livumbaze and Achoka (2016), students were observed to decline academically on the background of the low socio-economic status of their parents, while those students that came from well-endowed family backgrounds attained higher scores.

Although the two studies did not focus on student leaders, their findings demonstrated that socio-economic factors could affect students' performance in secondary schools. This is because socio-economic factors can be deliberated in different ways, such as parental education, income, and facilities used by individuals separately or collectively, Farooq et al. (2011). Garson (2006), Kahlenberg (2006) and Herman and Kirkup (2008) in Farooq assert that the students with a high level of socio-economic status perform better than the middle-class students, and the middle-class students perform better than those at low-level socioeconomic status do. In this paper, the authors particularly sought to establish whether the socio-economic status of the student council officials influences their academic performance. Student council officials experience many challenges because of the nature of work/duties they perform. They represent students to the administration while at the same time working with the administration to ensure the school runs smoothly. Because of the many responsibilities that they perform, their academic performance may be overlooked.

The reasons given behind low-level socioeconomic status (SES) effect on students' academic performance are that it denies them an opportunity to access necessary sources and resources needed for learning (Duke, 2000; Eamon, 2005). The economically challenged parents are less able to afford the cost of education for their children at secondary levels, and consequently they do not work at their fullest potential. Lack of facilities and resources demotivate learners' effort in high achievements.

According to the study done by Graetz (1995) on socio-economic status in education research and policy, the social-economic background remains one of the major sources of education inequality. In addition, one's educational success depends very strongly on the socio-economic status of their parents. A different study done in Australia found out that those families where the parents are advantaged socially, educationally and economically, foster a higher level of achievement in their children (Considine & Zappala, 2002). They also established a provision of higher levels of psychological support by parents to their children through an environment that encourages the development of skills necessary for success at school. These observations strongly support Graetz's idea of social-economic status.

In supporting the same idea on social, economic status Combs, in Kyoshaba (2005) argues that in virtually all nations, children of parents high on the educational, occupational and social scale have a far better chance of securing good secondary schools there joining the best colleges and universities than the equally intelligent children of the ordinary workers or peasant farmers. In addition, Comb affirms that many empirical studies suggest that children whose parents are at the bottom of the social, economic hierarchy are not as inclined to seek or gain success in available educational facilities as the children with families located at the middle or top of the hierarchy. In a similar study, it was noted that students from the bottom quartile consistently perform lower than students from the top quartile of social-economic status

(Dills, 2006). A student leader may be affected by socio-economic factors as the dependent variable in correlation to other factors. On the same note, Escarce (2003) also argues that family income profoundly influences educational opportunities available to adolescents and their chances of educational success.

On the contrary, studies elsewhere have revealed that students coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds perform relatively better than those coming from higher socioeconomic status, a case they referred to as phenomenal educational resilience (PER) (Pedrosa et al., 2006). A number of studies have therefore addressed the relationship between parents' socio-economic status and the performance of their children in schools. The current study, however, has its focus on the academic performance of student council officials' socio-economic backgrounds. The study revealed that different schools had their criteria for selecting possible candidates based on their different abilities, academic performance and communication skills.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive study in line with a quantitative survey design to analyze the influence of student officials' socio-economic background on their academic performance in Kajiado North sub-County. A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell 2003).

The study was conducted in Kajiado North sub-County purposefully as it is one of the sub-counties with a large number of public secondary schools among other sub-counties (Ministry of Education, 2015) Ngong office. At the time of study, there were twenty-nine (29) public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County. The schools comprised twelve (12) boarding schools and seventeen (17) day schools. The researchers purposefully chose ten public secondary schools for conducting the study. Three (3) boys' boarding school, three (3) girls

boarding, two (2) mixed day boarding and two-mixed day were randomly selected for the study.

According to the information obtained from the Ministry of Education in Ngong Sub-County, Kajiado North is the largest among other three sub-counties in Kajiado. The sub-county has one national school, and two county secondary schools. (MoE, 2015). This study targeted student council officials in various leadership positions.

In addition to the two main categories of boarding and day schools, the authors sought to categorize those schools into four other subgroups that included boy's boarding schools, girl's boarding schools, mixed day schools, mixed day, and boarding as recommended by Muli (2011). The subgroups were then labelled W, X, Y and Z, respectively. Simple random sampling was used to select the public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County. The subgroups were then sampled by dividing each of the four groups into two homogenous groups with similar characteristics i.e. group A-male and group B-female. School principals were purposefully selected because they are expected to be in school always and meet often with student council officials. Gay in Muli (2011) suggests that a sample of 10%, of the target population is considered minimum, while a sample of 20% is required for smaller population and 30% for statistical analysis. A minimum sample size of 30% of student leaders from each school was considered.

Questionnaires were used for collecting data from the principals, deputy principals and student leaders in the selected secondary schools. According to Annum (2015), a questionnaire is a form of an inquiry document which contains a systematic, compiled and well-organized series of questions intended to elicit the information which provide insight into the nature of the problem under study. The questionnaire was useful in this study because the authors were able to select several types of questionnaires from highly structured to unstructured (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were done for data analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science software program (SPSS). The measure of associations was determined using Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient (r) between variables which enabled the authors to determine whether the relationship between variables was positive or negative (-1.0 to +1.0). The test of correlations provided information on whether the correlations were statistically significant (Marczyk & Festinger, 2005). The correlations were also used to determine the proportion of variance by finding the coefficient of determination (r). The p value of 0.05 represented the probability of chance error in determining whether the findings were valid.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on student responses, three variables recorded a mean of 2.5 and above which was considered high. The first variable at a mean of 3.0 was perceived to indicate that the availability of funds enables a student council official to have access to more academic resources. The second variable at a mean of 2.7 was perceived to indicate that the availability of funds motivates student council officials to perform better in examinations. The third variable at a mean of 2.7 was perceived to indicate that student council officials from high socio-economic status are competent and courageous to pursue good grades in examinations. The same opinions were observed from Principals whose mean was more than 2.5, indicating a relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance. However, the authors tested the findings using the SPSS program to verify the hypothesis. The findings are tabulated as indicated in Table 1.

*Table 1: Student Council Officials’ Response (n=94)*

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Availability of funds enables accessibility to resources	3.04	1.42

Availability of funds motivate good performance	2.74	1.81
Officials from high socio-economic status are competent in academic performance	2.71	1.29
Social-economic status favour student’s academic performance	2.46	1.46
High social status enhances confidence in academic performance	2.46	1.28
High social-economic status builds strong relationships	2.43	1.29
Student council officials from high income earning families perform better in examinations	1.84	1.11

Based on the opinions from school principals, the mean findings were perceived to mean that social; economic status enhances confidence in handling responsibilities and academic performance. This was indicated by the highest variable mean of 4.00. Other variable means ranged from 3.00 to 4.00, indicating a relationship between academic performance and social-economic status. Though principals indicated that social economic status might enhance confidence in student council officials; the student officials did not strongly support the view. Their mean finding of 2.4 was considered low, and therefore, it was perceived that social, economic status does not necessarily influence academic performance. The hypothesis was, however, tested using the SPSS program to verify the findings. The findings of the study were summarized in the table below.

*Table 2: Principals’ Response (n=7)*

Variable	Mean	Std Dev.
High social-economic status enhances confidence among student council officials	4.00	.81
Availability of funds opens access to resources among student council officials	3.71	1.25
High social-economic status encourages competence in academic performance.	3.57	1.13

DOI: [10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248](https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248)

Volume: 03 Issue: 01|July-2021

Received: 10.06.2021; Accepted 14.06.2021; Published: 31.07.2021 at [www.editoncpublishing.org](http://www.editoncpublishing.org)

Mbogo, R. W. & Wekesa, F.C., *Editon Cons. J. Curr. Educ. Stud.*, **Double –Blind Peer Reviewed Journal**

High level of income encourages good performance	3.14	.89	Student council officials from the high social-economic background are likely to build strong relationships, which helps them perform better in academics	.121	.025 <sup>c</sup>
Social-economic status favours student council officials' academic performance	3.14	1.77	Availability of funds open up privileges for student council official to access resources which may not be available in school	-	.240 <sup>c</sup>
Trips and retreats are offered to student council officials	3.00	.81	Student council officials from high socio-economic families are confident to pursue challenging situations, including academic achievements	.123	.248 <sup>c</sup>
Availability of funds enhances student councils' performance	3.00	1.52	Student council officials from high social-economic status are competent and courageous in their studies	.543	.240 <sup>c</sup>

The study verified the hypothesis which stated that “Socio-economic statuses influence academic performance of student council officials.” The analysis was done using Spearman’s rho correlation. According to students’ responses, only one variable test indicated a significant relationship out of the seven variables examined to test the hypothesis. There was a relationship between academic performance by student council officials from a high social-economic background in relation to strong relationships they build with each other for purposes of good performance in examinations ( $r=.025$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

The table below indicates the students' responses on the influence of socioeconomic status on the performance of student council officials.

**Table 3: Student Councils’ Response (n=94)**

Variable	R	Approx Signif.
High social-economic status affects student council official's academic performance	.141	.177 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high income earning families are likely to perform highly in their final examination	.141	.175 <sup>c</sup>
Availability of funds motivate a student council official to get high grades in examinations	.234	.540 <sup>c</sup>

On the same hypothesis, the authors sought the opinions of the School Principals using the same research questions assigned to the student council officials. The test results indicated a statistically significant relationship between student council officials from high social-economic status and their ability to build strong relationships with their peers for the purposes of academic performance ( $r=.04$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

The School Principal’s views were in agreement with student council officials who affirmed the significant relationship between the effect of socio-economic status and academic performance. The summary of the test results is shown on Table 4.

**Table 4: Principals’ Response (n=7)**

Variable	R	Approximate Significance
Social-economic background favours student council official's performance in examinations	.529	.222 <sup>c</sup>

DOI: [10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248](https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248)

Volume: 03 Issue: 01|July-2021

Received: 10.06.2021; Accepted 14.06.2021; Published: 31.07.2021 at [www.editoncpublishing.org](http://www.editoncpublishing.org)

Mbogo, R. W. & Wekesa, F.C., *Editon Cons. J. Curr. Educ. Stud.*, **Double –Blind Peer Reviewed Journal**

Student council officials from high income earning families are likely to perform highly in their final examination	-.125	.366 <sup>c</sup>
Availability of funds motivate a student council official to get high grades in examinations	-.542	.649 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high social-economic backgrounds are likely to build strong relationships	-.421	0.04 <sup>c</sup>
Availability of funds open up privileges for student council official to access resources which may not be available in school	-.210	.324 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high socio-economic families are confident to pursue challenging situations, including academic achievements	-.345	.379 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high social-economic status are competent in studies	-.432	.271

A similar questionnaire was administered to the ten (10) secondary schools' deputy Principals for their opinions. Out of the seven (7) variables tested, three results were statistically significant at a value less than alpha 0.05. The first variable, which examined the possibility of student council officials from high income earning families performing better in their final examinations, reported values of ( $r=.023$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The second variable, which tested whether student council officials from high social-economic backgrounds were likely to build strong relationships was significant, ( $r=.025$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

The third variable that tested on whether the availability of funds from high-income families opened up privileges for student council official to access academic resources which were not available in school was significant ( $r=.023$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The other four variables tested were insignificant with

values greater than alpha 0.05, as shown on Table 5. The authors, therefore, partially rejected the hypothesis. The study had the objective of examining the influence of the socio-economic status of student council officials on their academic performance. Seven questions were asked to solicit information from secondary school Principals, Deputy Principals and student council officials on whether social-economic status influences their academic performance.

*Table 5: Deputy Principals' Response (n=10)*

Variable	R	Approx. Signif.
Social-economic background favours student council official's performance in examinations	.326	.358 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high income earning families are likely to perform better in their final examination	.705	.023 <sup>c</sup>
Availability of funds motivate a student council official to get high grades in examinations	.213	.478 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high social-economic backgrounds are likely to build strong relationships	-.110	.025 <sup>c</sup>
Availability of funds open up privileges for student council official to access resources which may not be available in school	-.312	.023 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high socio-economic families are confident to pursue challenging situations, including academic achievements	-.232	.132 <sup>c</sup>
Student council officials from high social-economic status are competent and courageous in their studies	-.234	.478 <sup>c</sup>

The test results indicated a significant relationship between academic performance by students from a high social-economic background in relation to strong relationships

they build with each other for purposes of good performance in examinations ( $r=.025$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

According to the Principals' response, the test results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between student council officials' social-economic status and their ability to build strong relationships with their peers for the purposes of academic performance ( $r=.04$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The Principal's views were in agreement with those of student council officials who affirmed the significant relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance.

Based on the deputy Principals' response, the variable which examined the possibility of student council officials from high income earning families performing better in their final examinations was significant ( $r=.023$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The second variable, which tested whether student council officials from high social-economic backgrounds were likely to build strong relationships, was significant ( $r=.025$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The third variable that tested whether the availability of funds open up privileges for student council officials to access academic resources not available in school was significant ( $r=.023$ ;  $p<.05$ ). In the descriptive statistics, it was noted that three variables recorded a mean of 2.5 and above which was considered high based on student council opinions.

The first variable at a mean of 3.0 was perceived to indicate that the availability of funds enables a student council official to have access to more academic resources. The second variable at a mean of 2.7 was perceived to indicate that the availability of funds motivates student council officials to perform better in examinations. The third variable at a mean of 2.7 was perceived to indicate that student council officials from high socio-economic backgrounds were competent to pursue good grades in examinations.

The findings of this study agree with Kyoshaba (2005), who conducted a study on factors affecting the academic

performance of undergraduate students at Uganda Christian University. She revealed that parent's social-economic status is significantly related to the academic performance of undergraduate students. The findings indicated that the higher a parents' social, economic status, the higher the academic performance of those students. Considine and Zappala (2002), who found that families where the parents are advantaged socially, educationally and economically foster a higher level of achievement in their children, also supported the findings of this study. Although the study findings did not directly factor in additional responsibilities, specifically for student council officials, socio-economic factors have been revealed to have an effect on academic performance. In this case, student council officials cannot be left out.

However, these findings disagreed with the results found by Pedrosa et al. (2006), who established that students coming from disadvantaged social economic and educational homes perform relatively better than those coming from higher socio-economic strata do. This study was consistent with Hansen and Mastekaasa (2006), who argued that low socio-economic status negatively affects academic achievement because low social-economic status prevents access to vital resources and creates additional stress at home. Apart from the influence of socio-economic status, student council officials have an obligation of fulfilling added administrative responsibilities in school, which may be stressful to many students.

In as much as the study findings indicated statistical significance in their relationships, the study hypothesis that stated "social-economic status affects the academic performance of student council officials" was partially rejected because other variables in the model tested statistically insignificant.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: The study confirmed that there was a significant relationship between academic performances by student council officials from a high social-economic

background in relation to strong relationships they build with each other for purposes of good performance in the examination. The authors used various study variables, and these included: testing whether the availability of funds open up privileges for student council official to access academic resources which were not available in school, results of which were significant. Descriptively, it was noted that three variables recorded a mean of 2.5 and above which was considered high based on the opinions of the student council officials. The findings indicated that the availability of funds enables student council officials to have access to more academic resources; availability of

funds motivates student council officials to perform better in examinations, and that student council officials from high socio-economic status were competent to pursue good grades in examinations. However, the study hypothesis was partially rejected.

Recommendation: The authors recommend that public secondary schools should try to reduce the gap between students from the high social, economic background and low backgrounds.

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DOI: [10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248](https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.248)

Volume: 03 Issue: 01|July-2021

Received: 10.06.2021; Accepted 14.06.2021; Published: 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

Mbogo, R. W. & Wekesa, F.C., *Editon Cons. J. Curr. Educ. Stud.*, **Double –Blind Peer Reviewed Journal**

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