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Institutional Dynamics and Academic Outcomes: Analyzing School-Related Determinants of KCSE Performance in Samburu County

Lanyasunya, A. Ropilo⁽¹⁾ 

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(1) Moi University, Kenya.

Main author email: ropilolanyasunya@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the school-related factors influencing students' performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in public secondary schools in Samburu County, with a focus on understanding the challenges in nomadic pastoralist areas. Despite improvements in Kenya's secondary education sector, including increased enrollment and infrastructure development, academic performance in Samburu County remains consistently low. The average KCSE score for the period 2001–2010 was 4.4 (D+), far below other regions like Nairobi, indicating significant educational challenges. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting data through structured questionnaires from Form 4 school leavers and high school principals. The research specifically focused on school-related factors such as the existence of academic performance policies, school facilities, and school fees and their impact on KCSE performance. Data was analysed using means, frequencies, and p-values to identify significant factors. The study identified inadequate learning resources, such as libraries and laboratories, and the absence of academic performance policies as the primary school-related factors influencing poor KCSE performance. Inadequate physical facilities and limited educational exposures were also identified as contributing factors, though to a lesser extent. The study concluded that the lack of essential school resources and academic policies are key school-related barriers to improved KCSE performance in Samburu County. The study recommends that schools enhance academic performance policies, improve resource availability, and increase educational exposure. Additionally, the study suggests further community development initiatives to support educational access and improvement for students in nomadic pastoralist regions.

Key words: Educational trips, leadership styles, learning resources, physical facilities, school distance.



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INTRODUCTION

Secondary education in Kenya has seen notable advancements, including increased enrollment, the introduction of free day schools, and improvements in infrastructure. Despite these positive changes, academic performance, especially in marginalised areas such as Samburu County, has remained a significant concern. Samburu County, primarily inhabited by the Samburu community, faces unique challenges due to its nomadic pastoralist lifestyle. These challenges are reflected in the consistently low performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). For instance, from 2001 to 2010, the average mean score in Samburu was 4.4 (D+), a stark contrast to the higher average scores in more urbanised regions like Nairobi. This persistent low performance calls for an in-depth investigation into the factors influencing the academic achievements of students in the area.

Significant variation in performance between regions has existed. The best school in Nairobi Province in the 1997 KCSE examinations scored a performance index of 10.49, and the best in North Eastern and Coast scored only 3.96 and 4.26, respectively. In Samburu County, an analysis of 2001 – 2010 KCSE results shows chronic low performance in the National exams. In 2004, only 3(1.8%) students, who were all girls, scored B+ and above and 295(100%) male students scored B plain and below compared to 163(98.2%) female counterparts. The mean score was 4.8. In 2005, 4 (1.2%) of male students who sat for KCSE scored B+ and above compared to female students who had 1 (0.63%) student. In the same year, Samburu was ranked No. 53 out of 71 districts with a mean of 4.7, defeating the last district by only 1.5 (Kenya National Examination Council, 2007). There was a slight improvement in 2006, where 3.8 per cent of male candidates scored B+ and above while female candidates had 2.8 per cent.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the school-related factors that contribute to the low KCSE performance in Samburu County's public secondary schools. It focuses on how the lack of academic performance policies, inadequate learning resources, and the financial constraints faced by students affect their outcomes. By analysing these factors, the study seeks to provide insights into the underlying issues that hinder students' success in

their education. Understanding these school-related challenges is crucial in developing strategies to improve educational quality and performance in Samburu County and similar regions with nomadic pastoralist communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sholes (2009) asserted that schools often receive blame for their students' poor academic performance even though the teachers' and principals' work is to provide strong curricula, high expectations, and safe climates. However, there are factors other than those that can easily be controlled by the schools that can affect school performance more than what the teachers and principals do.

In relation to school-related factors, Nsubuga (2008) examined the relationship between leadership styles in general and school performance. He analysed four leadership styles in relation to school performance and concluded that there is a need for head teachers to undergo training on the development of management and leadership skills. He noted that effective school performance requires visionary leadership, amongst others, and that there is a strong relationship between visionary leadership and transformational leadership, which is recommended for education. The results from the study established that young teachers were more aggressive than the older ones, hence good school performance. In their study, Steyn (2002) found that schools that involved stakeholders in formulating school vision, mission and strategic plans were successful. They noted that failure by stakeholders to work as a team led to poor implementation of the school programs and, hence, poor performance. They conclude that teamwork can enhance quality management in schools as teams can utilise resources more efficiently and effectively, increase organisational effectiveness, improve the quality of educational programs and create better learning and working environments.

Research in the US has found that SES variables continue to influence educational attainment even after controlling for different school types; the school context tends to affect the strength of the relationship between SES and educational outcomes (Portes & MacLeod, 1996).

Lebcir (2008) in their finding asserted that school teaching style (student-centred), English language emphasis for those using it as a medium of communication, and assessment methods affected academic performance positively. Rivkin et al. (2005) undertook research on the impact of schools and teachers in influencing achievement. The research findings indicated that teachers had a significant effect on reading and mathematics achievement, though little of the variation in teacher quality was noted by observable characteristics such as education and experience. In another school-related study, Gordon and Straub (2007) conducted a study in Mexico and found that entry grades to high school determine the performance of students. He, however, mentioned that the difference in performance due to grades tended to disappear with schools that have remedial lessons for those students lagging behind. Yang (2003) found that congested

and monotonous curricula had negative effects on academic achievement.

Caldas and Bankston (1997) noted school factors affecting academic achievement are school climate, size of the school, lack of counselling for at-risk students, alienated teachers, and low participation in extracurricular activities. Similarly, research in Britain shows that schools have an independent effect on student attainment (Sparkes, 1999).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The school related factors were Teaching/learning resources, Physical facilities, and adequate number of teachers, educational trips, school academic performance policy, and distance to school.

Results of the school related that were considered to influence academic performance in the study area are presented in Table 1.

Table 11: School-Related Factors

School related factor		KCSE performance		Total N=100(100%)	P value
		Average N=46(46%)	Low N=54(54%)		
Physical facilities	Yes	4(4%)	16(16%)	20(20%)	0.085
	No	42(42%)	38(38%)	80(80%)	
Educational trips	Yes	4(4%)	16(16%)	20(20%)	0.065
	No	42(42%)	38(38%)	80(80%)	
Learning resources	Yes	12(12%)	30(30%)	42(42%)	0.035
	No	34(34%)	24(24%)	58(58%)	
Shortage of teachers	Yes	14(14%)	28(28%)	42(42%)	0.126
	No	32(32%)	26(26%)	58(58%)	
Performance policy	Yes	26(26%)	40(40%)	34(34%)	0.092
	No	20(40%)	14(14%)	66(66%)	
Distance to school	Yes	30(30%)	30(30%)	40(40%)	0.487
	No	16(16%)	24(24%)	60(60%)	

The results established that inadequate learning resources had a significant association (at a 5% significant level) with academic performance (p -value = 0.035). The school's physical facilities were marginally significant (p -value = 0.085). This concurs with the findings of Jagero (2011), which showed that the significant problems faced by boarding students were the lack of adequate reading facilities and inadequate boarding facilities. This is also seconded by the findings of Jekayinfa (2006), which revealed that schools with adequate material resources in history showed superior achievements on the history test compared to schools without adequate material resources. Academic exposure, which was represented by educational trips, was also marginally significant (p -value = 0.065).

Shortage of teachers and distance to school had no significant association with academic performance. The insignificance of distance was probably because secondary schools were boarding. Distance was found to affect primary schools because most were boarding (Lanyasunya, 2002). The interviews with school principals showed that the teacher-to-student

ratio was 1:18. Performance policy was also found to be significant. Research indicates that school conditions contribute significantly to students' performance (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Inadequate learning resources like textbooks, libraries, laboratories and school academic policy were found to be major school-related factors affecting academic performance in the study area. Schools' physical facilities, availability of adequate teachers, distance, and educational exposure were marginally significant.

Recommendation: With respect to school-related factors, there is a need to avail and utilise teaching and learning resources such as libraries and laboratories. Students, when interrogated, further mentioned that there were few student-learner-centred approaches being applied in schools and that practicals were rare. Schools should also have strategic academic plans and policies so that they are able to benchmark and evaluate performance based on defined indicators.

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