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Effect of Leadership Roles on Academic Performance: A Reflection on Student Council Officials in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya.

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effect of leadership roles on the academic performance of student council officials in public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-county in Kenya. The study was descriptive in nature, adopting a descriptive survey design with a quantitative approach. Kajiado North Sub-County was purposefully selected for the study. Ten public secondary schools were, however, considered for the study in Kajiado North sub-County. A random selection of three (3) boys boarding schools, three (3) girls boarding, two (2) mixed day and boarding as well as two (2) mixed days were done. This study targeted the student council officials (prefects) in positions of leadership. Based on the twenty-nine public schools consisting of twelve (12) boarding schools and seventeen (17) day schools Principals and deputy principals were purposefully selected. The study used questionnaires with both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions ranked on a Likert scale. Data analysis was done using the SPSS program, applying both descriptive and inferential statistics. The authors found out that the roles student council officials play in school affect their character, which significantly raises their academic performance as depicted by ($r=.023$; $p<.05$). The study concluded that a significant relationship between the roles student council officials play and academic performance was statistical. In addition, roles played by student council officials enhance their commitment to academic performance ($r=.014$; $p<.05$).

Key Terms: Leadership, Student Council Officials, Academic Performance, Secondary schools.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite leadership roles and commitments, Lwehabura in Muli (2011) acknowledges that students who were empowered to take responsibility for making administrative decisions perform well in their examinations. Cambridge University report (2003) often defines academic performance in terms of examination results. In this paper, academic performance was categorized in terms of grades achieved in opener examinations (done at the beginning of the term), mid-term tests and end of term examinations. The study focused on student leaders in forms two, three and four because they have been involved in more leadership roles than form ones. While student council officials perform a tremendous role in leadership and administration of secondary schools, if not properly handled, these roles may be a cause of poor performance in their examinations (Ahiatrogah & Albert, 2001). However, a conducive environment for carrying out their duties is a motivation to learn and perform well both in leadership duties and academics. Ahiatrogah and Albert (2001), in their study on the impact of perceived leadership roles on academic performance of distance education students in Ghana, established that high academic performance is not dependent on perceived student leadership roles, let alone their duties and responsibilities.

Three recommendations were made: Distant Education (DE) students should be elected only on merit and not on age, level, employment status and prior leadership experience; DE student leaders should also be given training for the positions they have been elected for, and DE students should strive to combine their studies with the leadership positions they occupy. In consideration of some of the recommendations made in their study, it is possible that leadership roles can become a challenge to students if not well addressed. The authors in the present article focus on student council officials as the respondents because they are generally expected to complement the efforts of faculty in the effective running of the institution. Student leaders also serve as the mouthpiece of students in the promotion of the cordial relationship between students and the faculty (Ahiatrogah & Albert, 2001). This paper, therefore, seeks to establish the effect of student leader roles on their academic performance with a focus on council officials in secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub County.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Muli (2011) in his study, sought to determine the role of prefects in the governance of public secondary schools in Machakos Central Division. The study concluded that schools use different criteria for appointing prefects depending on the culture of the school. Prefects are prepared through training, seminars, and prefects' symposia. This study indicates that secondary school student council officials (prefects) have a big role in the smooth running of the school. Secondary school student council officials are charged with leadership roles over other students in and outside the classroom (Muli, 2011).

According to Galinsky et al. (2003) as well as Anderson and Galinsky (2006), different studies in psychology reveals that power affects an individual in many ways; for example, individuals primed to feel powerful are more likely to take the initiative, more likely to engage in positive risky behaviours and more self-oriented.

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A study conducted in China (by how? And when?) observed that in most schools, leadership positions are rewarded to the most disciplined students. In this case, teachers only have three goals when selecting class leaders: to fulfil the responsibilities of the position, to provide role models for other students, and to reward disciplined students with leadership positions. However, according to Godia (2012), most Kenyan secondary schools give opportunities to students' bodies to nominate and choose their council. This is to enable students to develop a spirit of democracy early in their lives. However, the school administration must have a say in the qualities of students chosen because they portray the school's image.

The significant roles of student leaders are generally to complement the efforts of ineffective faculty running of their institutions. Student leaders have been observed to serve as the mouthpiece of students in the promotion of the cordial relationship between students and faculty (Ahiatrogah & Albert, 2001). The authors give an example of Ghana, where students insist on electing radical and fearless colleagues who would always champion their course, while school administrators advocate for brilliant and moderate student council officials who would not embarrass the school.

Kallen and Sabrica (2012) conducted a study on the Girl Scout experience and its link to academic success. The girl scouts serve more than two million girls each year through programs in leadership development, science and technology, community service and environmental awareness in the USA. Their mission is to develop girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place. It was established that Girl Scout participation has a positive impact on girls' leadership responsibilities. Most girl scouts in this study were academically successful. Girl Scout roles influence academic success as much and sometimes more than non-girl scout roles. Girls who gain experience solving problems and seeking challenges in girl scouting are more successful in school than girls who gain less experience in these areas.

A study on the relations of empowerment with student perceived academic performance found out that the empowered students develop their ability, confidence and motivation to succeed academically (Gill et al., 2011). A related study indicated that the empowered students internalize higher-level cognitive skills and assume greater control over setting their own learning goals, which in turn improves student perceived academic performance. Lwehabura in Muli (2011) also asserted that students who were empowered to take responsibility for making educational decisions and for the consequences of those decisions performed well in examinations. In this case, empowerment has been defined as the process of giving someone official or legal authority, freedom or confidence to do something (Cambridge English Dictionary, 1995).

According to Ian and Neil (2001), student leadership enhancement involves giving students opportunities to practice leadership skills in a supportive learning environment. The skills acquired in project planning, problem solving, team building, decision-making, goal setting, time management, diversity awareness and self-confidence are linked to the four academic enabling skills of interpersonal relationships, motivation, study skills and

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engagement. From the foregoing discussion, there is a lack of consensus on how leadership roles conducted by student council officials' impact their academic performance. The authors in this paper, therefore, saw the need to undertake a study that could fill this gap. The study was drawn on the hypothesis that:

H₀1: Secondary school student council officials are not affected in academic performance by the leadership roles they play in school

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper sought to test the hypothesis: “Secondary school student council officials are not affected in academic performance by the leadership roles they play in school.” Based on the student leaders' responses as indicated in the questionnaires, the effect of leadership roles shaping student character was ranked the highest with a mean (M=4.4). The data analysis also indicated that most student council officials are eager to accomplish their work on time at the mean (M=4.0). The rest of the variables, as indicated on table 1, recorded means above 2.5, which indicated that there is a relationship between roles student council officials play in school and their academic performance. The hypothesis was verified using the Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) computer program to ascertain statistical significance. The mean and standard deviation of other variables based on the response by student council officials was summarised in the table below.

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

Variable	Mean	Std Deviation
Leadership roles shape the character	4.45	.98
Eager to accomplish work on time	4.00	1.20
Work together to accomplish set goals	3.98	1.26
High commitment and determination	3.92	1.08
Leadership roles enhance responsibility	3.85	1.19
Exposure to academic resources	3.21	1.40

Based on the response by principals, the highest mean variable of 5.0 was recorded by the variable that tested the effect of leadership roles on student council officials' character. This agreed with what student council officials had suggested at a mean of 3.8, indicating that there is a relationship between roles played by student council officials and character. The least mean finding of 3.2 based on principals' opinions was recorded by the variable that tested how leadership roles expose a student council official to academic resources. This implied that there is little possibility of student leaders accessing extra resources for academic performance better than an ordinary student. However, the study verified the variables using the SPSS program to ascertain statistical significance. Table 2 provides a summary of the mean findings based on the opinions of principals.

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Table 2: Principals' Response on Roles of Student Council Officials

Independent Variables	Mean	Std Deviation
Leadership roles shape the character	5.00	.00
Council officials are always eager to accomplish work on time	4.42	.78
Work together to accomplish a goal	4.29	.48
Leadership roles enhance responsibility	3.57	1.27
High commitment and determination	3.42	.53
Leadership roles expose one to academic resources	3.28	1.11

The same questionnaire was administered to deputy principals, and the highest mean of 4.30 was recorded on the variable that examined the effect of leadership roles on student council officials' character. The authors perceived the highest mean score to indicate that leadership role positively enhanced good character, which was likely to affect academic performance. The opinions of deputy principals were in agreement with students' opinions and principals. The study thus concluded that there was a relationship between the roles of student council officials and their academic performance. The hypothesis was verified using the SPSS program to establish the statistical significance. Table 3 shows the deputy principals' responses.

Table 3: Deputy Principal's Response (n=10)

Variable	Mean	Std Deviation
Student council roles shape the character	4.30	.82
High commitment and determination	4.20	1.31
Leadership roles enhance responsibility	4.10	1.28
Roles played expose the student to academic resources	3.90	.73
Exposure to resources	3.80	1.03
Student council officials are eager to accomplish work on time	3.80	.91

Based on the response by student council officials (see Table 4), two variables tested significantly. The results are reported in Table 4 below. The first variable tested on whether leadership roles shape student character ($r=.073$, $p<.05$). The authors, therefore, concluded that there was a relationship between the roles student council officials play and their academic performance. The second variable tested whether leadership roles enhance high commitment in academic work ($r=.052$, $p<.05$). It was concluded that there is a relationship between the roles student council officials play in school and their commitment to academic performance. The rest of the variable tests were not significant, with p values of more than 0.05.

Since only two variables were statistically significant, the hypothesis was partially rejected.

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Table 4: Students' Response (n=94)

Variable	R	Approximate Significance
Leadership roles shape student character	.073	.023
Council officials are eager to accomplish work on time	.169	.104 ^c
Work together to accomplish set goals	.029	.783 ^c
Enhances high commitment in academic performance	-.052	.014 ^c
Leadership roles enhance responsibility	-.042	.684 ^c
Leadership roles expose a student to academic resources	-.042	.684 ^c

Based on the principal's response, two variables tested statistically significant, with a negative but weak correlation. Table 5 below revealed those results. First, the authors noted that high commitment in fulfilling leadership roles does not motivate a student council official to work hard in academics ($r=-.146$, $p<.05$). It was concluded that there is a significant relationship between commitment in roles played by student council officials and academic performance. It was also noted that there is a statistical significantly negative, but weak, the relationship between leadership roles and their effect on student character ($r=-.070$, $p<.05$). The response of the principals was similar to the one held by student council officials, indicating that there was a weak and negative correlation between roles played by student council officials and academic performance ($r=-.052$, $r<.05$). However, according to students' data, leadership roles had a weak but positive relationship with character ($r=.073$, $p<.05$).

Table 5: Principals' Responses (n=7)

Variable	R	Approximate Significance
Involvement of the student council official in leadership roles enhances their academic performance	-.011	.919 ^c
Leadership role makes a student more responsible in academic work	.103	.325 ^c
High commitment and determination in fulfilling leadership roles motivate a student council official to work hard in academics	-.146	.012 ^c
Student council officials are always eager to accomplish work on time, and their assignments	-.060	.563 ^c
Student council officials can comfortably work together to achieve desired goals, including academic work	-.006	.958 ^c

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Leadership roles expose a person to many different resources, including books and past exam papers	-.060	.564 ^c
Leadership role shapes student council officials' character in terms of diligence and honesty with academic work	-.070	.014

Discussion

The authors tested the hypothesis, which stated that secondary school student council officials are not affected in academic performance by the leadership roles they play in school. The mean of each variable was calculated and descriptive statistics shown on various tables as presented in the previous section. The highest-ranked mean indicates a high effect on academic performance, while the lowest mean indicated a low effect. Student responses indicated the highest mean of 4.45 on the variable that tested whether leadership roles shaped student council officials' character in terms of diligence and honesty in academic work. The same variable scored the highest mean of 5.0 based on principals' opinions and 4.3 based on deputy principals' opinions. The findings indicate the possibility that roles played by student council officials in secondary schools affect the students' character in terms of diligence and honesty in academic performance.

The hypothesis was tested using an SPSS computer program to ascertain the statistical significance. Only two variables based on student response tested statistically significant ($r=.023$ $p<.05$ and $r=.014$; $p<.05$). The study concluded that, according to the students' response, there is a statistically significant relationship between the roles of the student council officials and their academic performance. The study also concluded that there is a significant relationship between the roles student council officials played in school and their commitment to academic performance. The study could not ignore the variables that tested significant and therefore partially rejected the hypothesis. These study findings agreed with the findings of Lwehabura quoted in Muli (2011), who acknowledged that students who were empowered to take responsibility for making academic decisions and for the consequences of those decisions performed well in their examinations.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

First, concerning the roles student council officials play in school, the study confirmed two variables that tested statistically significant. The first variable tested on whether roles played by student council officials shaped student character. The relationship was significant ($r=.023$; $p<.05$). It was concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between the roles student council officials play and their character. The study also confirmed a significant relationship between the roles student council officials play in school and their commitment to academic performance ($r=.014$; $p<.05$). The study concluded that roles played in school enhance commitment to academic performance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that stated: "Secondary school student council officials are not affected in academic performance by the leadership roles they play in school" was partially rejected.

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