Influence of Learner Involvement on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Kenya

Paul Oduor Ndiewo[1], Peter J. O. Aloka[2,*], Pamela Raburu[3]

[1]Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya
[2]Psychology and Educational Foundations, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya
[3]School of Education, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya

Abstract   Academic performance among students may be a function of many factors such as their abilities, socio-economic background and pedagogical beliefs. This study investigated the influence of learners' involvement on academic performance of secondary school students. The study was guided by Locke and Lotham's achievement theory which claims that setting goals and targets allow individuals to be focused and provides a sense of direction which enables individuals achieve their aims without distractions. Correlational design was adopted in the study. The target population of students was 2500. Stratified sampling was used to select 12 secondary schools while simple random sampling was used in this study to select 387 students. Content validity of the research instrument was enhanced through a pilot study using students not under the study. Reliability was determined by internal consistency method in which coefficient alpha of = 0.777 was obtained. Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse quantitative data with the aid of SPSS version 22. A statistical significant relationship r = .17, p ≤ .05 was established between learner involvement and academic performance. The study recommended that teachers and school counselors should inculcate target setting skills on learners and that school counsellors should enhance peer tutoring to help students adjust to learning environment.

Keywords   Learner involvement, Academic performance, Counselling, Secondary schools, Students

1. Introduction

Academic performance is a function of many factors, some of which are within the student and the class room while others are out of the class room (Bell, 2011). In United States of America, Allan (2014) noted that while academic goals are important to students' success in academic achievement, goal commitment is vulnerable to moderating factors such as hope, particularly agency hope and confidence in one's abilities.

Learner involvement is the ability of an individual to take charge of his or her own learning implying being responsible for aspects of learning such as goal setting and self-monitoring process (Little, 2007). In a study conducted in United States of America, Derrick, Ponton, Confessor & Carr (2007) argued that learner involvement is a manifestation of desire, resourcefulness, initiative and persistence in learning. According to Derrick et al (2007), autonomy learning manifests itself in people who feel that success is ultimately dependent on individuals own efforts. Thomas (2013) described learner involvement as a pedagogical approach in which the learner is responsible for

identifying and addressing gaps in their knowledge. Thomas (2013) noted that many students are reluctant to take responsibility for learning and as a result they face stress, uncertainty and use ineffective learning strategies.

Iraki (2009) observed that most students in public schools go to school with no particular academic goal, no plan for future and may resort to non-academic activities. In Bondo Sub-County, there is still low academic achievement among secondary school students as the mean grade is below the expected C+ grade entry point of University. Low academic performance results in class repetition, poor retention rate, truancy, school dropout and hopelessness in life (Republic of Kenya, 2011). In some extreme cases, teachers have been molested by parents, stopped from entering school compounds when students don't perform well in national examinations while some students have committed suicide (Republic of Kenya, 2011). However, in a much as such external variables have been identified, it would be helpful to establish the influence of learner involvement on academic performance of secondary school students.

The study was based on Edwin Locke & Gary Lotham's (1990) goal setting theory which states that the process of setting goals and targets allow an individual to be focused to provide a sense of direction and enables one to achieve aims without distraction. The theory is linked to a learned style of goal directed thinking (autonomous) which is fostered by both pathway and agency thinking (Locke & Lotham, 2002).

* Corresponding author:
jairopeteraloka@yahoo.com (Peter J. O. Aloka)

According to the theory, so long as a person is committed to the goal, has the requisite ability to attain it, and does not have conflicting goals; there is a positive, linear relationship between goal difficulty and task performance.

Valleyrand, Bonnevile & Therese (2012) found that engagement has two constructs that is the drive to perform a certain action and turning motivation in concrete behaviour. Similarly, Derrick, Rovai, Ponton, Confessore & Carr (2007) established that learner autonomy is characteristic of individual who exhibit agency or intentional behaviour with respect to their learning, autonomous learners exercise self-control skills and influence their personal life through processes related to freedom, power and change. Thomas (2013) also established that self-regulated learners are active seekers and processors of information and they instigate, monitor and modify learning through goal setting. The study found that learners can demonstrate increase in cognitive, meta-cognitive functioning and self-efficacy through engagement with programmes that support self-regulated learning in problem based learning. Azurdee (2010) established that students learn more when they are involved in all aspects of college life and that an involved student devotes energy to academics, spends a great deal of time in campus, participates in students' organization and activities and interacts well with members of the faculty. Azurdee (2010) argued that when students feel connected to college through involvement, they feel better and tend to stay through to graduation. The study argued that involvement has positive impact for persistence and degree competition. On a similar vein, Gibbs & Poskitt (2010) reported that engaged students seek out activities inside and outside the classroom that lead to academic success.

Judd (2005) indicated that high test scorers used more self-regulatory processes to enhance test preparation and performance compared to low performers and that self-regulation positively affected test performance. In Turkey, Burcu (2008) established that high achievers have a sense of responsibility and therefore are less dependent on their peers and teachers for direction on what to do. On the contrary, Ebanks (2010) established that learner centered effectiveness is not significantly related to academic scores. Similarly, Lachman (2014) established that performance climate had a weak negative correlation with task score. Huang (2008) established that students should acquire communication, problem solving and social integration skills in order for them to be responsible. In addition, students should have clear learning goals while teachers should compliment students for work well done.

Salami (2010) established that increasing level of learner control increases level of self-determination, thereby increasing overall motivation in academic performance. Idowa, Chibuzoh & Madueke (2013) showed that performance in English language was enhanced among participants exposed to goal setting intervention compared to those in control group. In Kenya, Onyango (2012) found that meaningful involvement of students in decision making increase their self-esteem and academic performance.

Wangeri, Kimani & Mutweleli (2012) established that many students have average autonomy and therefore don't settle fast enough for academic work. The present study investigated the influence of learners' involvement on academic performance of secondary school students. The independent variable was learner involvement while the depenmdent variable was academic achievement.

2. Methodology

The researcher used correlational research design because it is based on variables measured with numbers and analysed with statistical procedures (Amin, 2005). The target population consisted of 2,500 form four students drawn from Bondo Sub County, Kenya. Sample size was 387 students from boys, girls and mixed schools. The study employed questionnaires and document analysis to collect data. The content and face validity of research instruments was ensiured using expert judgment by the university lecturers and research supervisors. A reliability coefficient of 0.777 was obtained after pilot study. Sub-County examination results (document analysis) were used to determine academic performance of students. The null hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of Pearson product moment correlation while hierarchical regression was used to test significance of the relationship of the variables.

3. Findings

Pearson product moment correlation was applied to determine the relationship between learner involvement and academic performance of secondary school students. The results are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation of Learner Involvement and Academic Performance

	Learner Involvement
Academic Achievement	0.170
Achievement Sig (2 tailed)	0.001
Number	347

Significance at $P \leq 0.05$

The findings indicated in table 1 was that, there was statistically significant relationship between learner involvement and academic performance of secondary school students as the (r = 0.170 $p \leq 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that secondary school students with higher levels of involment in academic activities performed better than those with lower levels of learner involvement.

The researcher administered hierachical regression and the results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error
1	.225	.510	.40	1.86124

Table 2 indicates that R is .225 showing a positive relationship between the variables. The adjusted R² is .40 (unstandadised R was .51 showing the variables shared variability between them. The results of the analysis yielded a co-efficient of multiple regression of .51 and a multiple regression square (adjusted) of .40. This shows that learner involvement predicted 40% of variation in academic performance.

The correlation was significant as shown in table 3.

Table 3.

Model	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig
1 Regression	63.390	4	15.847	4.575	001
Residual	1184.766	342	3.469		
Total		347			

In determining the level of significance between the criterion measures learner involvement and academic performance, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed and its calculated value was 4.575 and was significant at 0.01 level (F4, 342) = 4.475: p=≤ 0.05 hence learner involvement predicted academic performance of secondary school students.

The direction of relationship between the variables is determined from signs of beta value of each of the variables in SPSS coefficient output. The direction of the relationship is shown in table 4.

Table 4. Coefficients

| Model | Unstandardised Co-efficient | | Standard Co-efficient | | |
	Beta	Standard error	Beta	t	Sig
1 Constant	1.218	.0948		1.285	.020
Involvement	.026	.019	.087	1.361	.017

The result of learner involvement was (β = 0.087). The implication of this is that learners should be engaged in class work in order for them to perform well in examinations. The results show that lack of learner involvement negatively affected secondary school students' academic performance. The implication of the study is that students should be actively involved in the learning process.

4. Discussions and Conclusions

The study findings established learner involment had direct significant influence on academic performance of secondary school students. The results of the study confirm Moon's (2013) findings that goal setting impacts students positively, driving them to engage in beneficial behaviour to reach self-determined goals. The current findings buttress results of a study conducted by Maxis (2011) in U.S.A which established that school counselors should instill in students coping resources required to adjust in face of challenges. Similarly, Bakari and Balarabe (2013) in a study in Ghana established that school teachers should create a collaborative environment where there is good inter student relationship. Coetzee (2011) in a study conducted in South Africa

established that self-assessment and self-determination are responsible for academic performance. Similarly, in Kenya, Onyango (2012) established that meaningful engagement of students in learning increases their self-esteem and academic performance. Wango (2006) argued that there was need to there was need for school counselors and teachers to put in place comprehensive programmes that are friendly to learners. Similarly, Oundo (2013) established that counselors need to deal with psychological and social aspects of learning such as study skills, motivation, attitude and learning environment.

Contrary reports were obtained from Carbonaire (2005) in a study in U.S.A which established that self-evaluation accounts for modest portion in students learning. Similarly, in South Africa, Goff (2009) established that there was no significant relationship between learner resourcefulness and academic performance. The study concluded that learner involvement contributes positively towards academic performance of secondary school students. The limitation of the study was that the design was both time consuming and expensive, as both quantitative and qualitative methods were equally adopted. The study recommends that schools should encourage learners to participate in learning activities while teacher counselors should inculcate social skills on secondary school students. In addition, teachers and teacher counselors should teach secondary school students study skills as well as target setting techniques. Finally, school counselors should enhance peer tutoring to help students cope with learning environment. Future research could focus on promoting learner involvement among primary school learners.

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