

Influence of Assessment Services on Academic Performance among Pupils in Kenyan Public Primary Schools

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Abstract Many pupils do not perform well in school despite the concerted efforts to push the course forward. The study investigated the influence of assessment services on academic performance of class eight pupils in public primary school in Kisii South Sub-County Kenya. The researcher used a concurrent triangulation design. Target population was 2670 class eight pupils, 500 class eight teachers, 58 head teachers and 1 QASO. A sample size of 100 class eight teachers and 300 class eight pupils, 10 head teachers and 1 QASO were selected. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed through thematic framework. Validity was ensured by expert judgment by university lecturers and reliability of the instrument was checked using Cronchbar reliability test, where an index of 0.77413 was obtained. The study found out that that assessment services significantly influenced academic performance of class eight learners. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education should staff primary schools with qualified guidance and counseling personal to dedicate their services to enhance academic achievement. Teacher counselors should provide comprehensive counseling programs to the learners in school to help them enhance academic achievement.

Keywords Influence, Assessment services, Performance, National examinations, Pupils, Kenyan, Public primary schools

1. Introduction

In the world, guidance and counseling services are not a new phenomenon as it is a movement that was started in America at the beginning of 20th Century as a reaction to change process in an industrialized society. Guidance and counseling services were set up within the department of education in September 1968 when the recommendations made by Louis, a consultant sent over to Malta by United Nation's Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), were taken up (Offor, 2008). In Nigeria, for instance, the services started to be incorporated into some school systems way back in 1959. The essence of incorporating guidance and counseling into the school system was to eliminate overwhelming ignorance of many young people on their academic performance and personality maladjustment (Egbochuku, 2008). In Malawi the need for guidance and counseling was recognized when a survey was done of 20 school counselors in southern and central regions. It was proven that, there was great need for a clear rationale

and guidelines for Guidance and Counseling programmes (Collins, 2007).

In 1976, guidance and counseling was introduced in Kenya, in primary schools and the purpose was to help students understand themselves and to discover their abilities and limitation from their environment (Cherese & Mugalavai, 2012). Although guidance and counseling was introduced to Kenya formally in 1967, under the Ministry of Education, it had been engraved in the African traditional society since time memorial. Kimathi, (2012), established that without sound guidance and counseling, many students loose direction and engage themselves in bad behaviors such as drug abuse and alcohol indulgence, missing classes and dropout. Therefore they lack both focus and direction resulting to total failure in life. In this regard, students mostly, primary school pupils need guidance and direction to study and lead a decent life.

The study was informed by two theories; the Social cultural Theory advanced by Levi Vygotsky (1978) and Reinforcement Theory by B.F Skinner. Socio-cultural theory is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. According to Vygotsky (1978), "Every function in the child's

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cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (McLeod, 2014). This theory was found relevant to the proposed study because guidance and counseling services are social aspects that can improve pupils' academic performance, but if the services are not offered, they may impact negatively to pupils' participation in education.

Reinforcement theory of motivation was proposed by BF Skinner and his associates. It states that individual's behaviour is a function of its consequences. It is based on "law of effect", i.e, individual's behaviour with positive consequences tends to be repeated, but individual's behaviour with negative consequences tends not to be repeated (Surlin, and Gordon, 1976). Additionally, this theory focuses on the behavior to consequence connection within the ABC model (Wheless, 1974). Therefore, the reinforcement theory was applicable for this study because it explains in detail how a student or pupil learns behaviour as influenced by guidance and counseling services. Teacher counselors and teachers who are making attempt to motivate their learners through various talks must ensure that they do not reward all learners simultaneously. They must tell the learners what they are not doing correct and how they can achieve positive reinforcement.

Several studies have been carried on the role of Guidance and Counseling Programme in decision making in Schools. For example, Whiston and Quinby (2009) reported that early elementary-age students who attend the same school for three or more years do better academically when there is guidance and counseling program, even if it is not fully implemented. Phillips (2008) study indicated a significant difference between treatment and comparison groups on reading and mathematics scores. These results provide very strong support for the conclusion that school counseling interventions that focus on the development of cognitive, social, and self-management skills can result in sizable gains in student academic achievement.

Collins (2007) demonstrated that students improved their awareness of how to succeed in school after the intervention through guidance and counseling. Offor (2008) observed physically aggressive behaviour decreased significantly in playground and cafeteria settings and that observed neutral/pro-social behaviour increased significantly in the same settings. Dollarhide and Saginak (2008) reported that, classroom guidance can improve elementary school students' behaviours but most students did not believe in counselors' advice which was often based on an individuals' academic performance. Brooks and Cole (2012) findings reflected that most students had negative perceptions about counselors. Portman (2009) found out that most counselors and teachers were able to provide leadership in the development, promotion, facilitation and dissemination of school

counseling research to demonstrate the connection between school counseling programs and student success.

Creager, (2010) concluded that most counselors were not sensitive to the career need of many students but instead advised them according to their academic performance. Oigara, (2011) revealed that two techniques are effective in the improvement of learners' vocational maturity. Fleisch, Shindler and Perry (2010), in South Africa revealed that assessments of literacy levels have placed South Africa among the least performing countries, with most children scoring below the lowest overall international benchmark. Taylor and Derek, (2009) showed that pupils in Cape Town, South Africa receive insufficient support and the effect is that many do not perform well in academics. Odongo and Njiru (2010) reported that counseling programs though not well developed, had the propensity to motivate pupils to set clear social and career objectives after school. Nyaegah (2011) found out that most pupils did not believe in the counselors for lack of privacy in the counseling rooms.

According to capital news agency, in 2009 K.C.P.E results, the top 10 positions in KCPE performance in the country were taken by other counties, with Kisii County of Kenya taking the eleventh position. In the year 2011, KCPE performance of Kisii County performed poorly again, trailing other counties at position 33 out of the 47 counties in Kenya. The government of Kenya has made notable progress in expanding access to primary education largely by providing learning resources such as stationery, earning infrastructural facilities and teaching staff. As a result of this, both boys and girls have been able to join primary school. However, there is evidence that standard eight pupils' performance in K.C.P.E was still below average. Analysis of K.C.P.E from the office of the Quality Assurance and Standards Office showed that pupils' performance in Kisii South sub-County public schools were declining over the last four years (Mwema, 2010).

The poor academic performance could be attributed to a number of factors that include lack of resources which greatly affect the performance (Kimathi, 2012). Another factor that has been reported is that Kisii South Sub-County does not have adequate number of teachers to effectively handle the standard eight pupils whose behaviour when approaching the national examinations. A part from the aforementioned factors, it was be critical to understand how assessment services influence academic performance since there is scanty information on this in the study locale.

2. Methodology

This study used concurrent triangulation design within the mixed method approach of collecting data. Cresswell (2014) opined that using mixed methods is imperative in capturing the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, an aspect commonly known as triangulation. The qualitative data was collected through interview schedules, while quantitative data was collected through the issuance of

questionnaires. There were 58 public primary schools head teachers in Kisii South sub-County. The Sub-County has population of 500 class eight teachers and 2670 class eight pupils and 1 DQASO (DEO Kisii South Sub County, 2015). The sample of the study comprised 17 public primary schools which represented 31%, 100 class eight teachers who represented 20%, and 300 class eight pupils who represented 11% of the target population through simple random sampling and 1 DQASO. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the public primary schools, teachers and pupils to participate in the study. Simple random selection is choosing a sample where every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected (Oso and Onen 2009). The study used questionnaires and

interview schedules. The validity of the instruments was evaluated by supervisors who are experts at University. The reliability of the current study was therefore tested using Cronchbar Reliability test and a reliability coefficient of 0.77413 was reported.

3. Findings & Discussion

The study investigated the influence of assessment services on academic performance of class eight pupils. Various aspects of assessment were tested on the 5- point LIKERT scale for both teachers and pupils, analyzed and tabulated below.

Table 1. Influence of assessment services on academic performance

Student Responses	SA	A	U	D	SD	TA	U	TD	TR	% A	% U	% D	Mean
Volunteering in assessment services enhance development in learners	43	64	13	62	96	107	13	158	278	38.5	4.7	56.8	2.626
Provision of progress records services enhances excellence in academic outcomes	37	52	22	78	89	89	22	167	278	32.0	7.9	60.1	2.532
Regular assessment services enhances children's behaviour management	17	42	29	94	96	59	29	190	278	21.2	10.4	68.3	2.245
Proper nurturance on record keeping of children enhances children's attitude towards education	76	98	46	32	26	174	46	58	278	62.6	16.5	20.9	3.597
Active participation in school reforms enhances excellence in learners	86	101	21	36	34	187	21	70	278	67.3	7.6	25.2	3.608
Regular attendance of school meetings enhances resilience of learners to life	84	113	23	40	18	197	23	58	278	70.9	8.3	20.9	3.737
Monitoring of progress records enhances children's moral development	29	59	31	92	67	88	31	159	278	31.7	11.2	57.2	2.608
Teacher's Responses													
Volunteering in assessment services enhance development in learners	21	28	15	17	8	49	15	25	89	55.1	16.9	28.1	3.416
Provision of progress records services enhances excellence in academic outcomes	31	28	9	14	7	59	9	21	89	66.3	10.1	23.6	3.697
Regular assessment services enhances children's behaviour management	14	8	7	24	36	22	7	60	89	24.7	7.9	67.4	2.326
Proper nurturance on record keeping of children enhances children's attitude towards education	23	24	7	16	19	47	7	35	89	52.8	7.9	39.3	3.180
Active participation in school reforms enhances excellence in learners	37	29	5	14	4	66	5	18	89	74.2	5.6	20.2	3.910
Regular attendance of school meetings enhances resilience of learners to life	44	25	11	7	2	69	11	9	89	77.5	12.4	10.1	4.146
Monitoring of progress records enhances children's moral development	13	20	11	19	26	33	11	45	89	37.1	12.4	50.6	2.719

Source: Researcher's Analysis (N = 278 for students; N = 89 for teachers)

In Table 1, the study found that there was divergent opinion regarding the availability and effectiveness of assessment services between teachers and pupils. Majority of the teacher respondents agreed (54.1%; 3.416) that volunteering in assessment services enhance development in learners. Similarly, teachers agree that Provision of progress records services enhances excellence in academic outcomes (66.3%; 3.697) while pupil respondents disagree (60.1%; 2.532). This is because teachers understand the significance of the assessment records on planning pupils work, assessment and revision to ensure each student grasps and keeps up with the learning pace. On the other hand, students do not consider the records as part of the learning process and thus are unable to rate its significance on their academic performance/ achievement. These findings support that of Whiston and Quinby (2009) who also observed that early elementary-age students who attend the same school for three or more years do better academically when there is assessment programs and services, even if it is not fully implemented. Additionally, students who remained in the same school for multiple years with a well-implemented assessment services, counseling services and guidance services obtained higher academic achievement test scores than students who attend schools without such programs. Similarly, Ondima, Mokogi, Ombaba & Nyaboke (2013) in their study found that school career information was effective in enhancing students academic, career and personal competencies. This was also echoed by Collins (2007) in his study at California where he also found that students improved their awareness of how to succeed in school after the intervention through guidance and counseling.

However, the study found a unanimous opinion from both teachers and pupils as to whether regular assessment services enhance children's behaviour management with both of them agreeing. Majority of the pupil respondents disagree with this statement (68.3%; 2.245) the same as teachers who also disagree at 67.4% and a mean of 2.326. Similarly, Offor (2008) in his study found that students accessing assessment services developed aggressiveness towards academics and this behaviour could compel them to good academic performance. Further, Dollarhide and Saginak (2008) found that classroom guidance could improve elementary school students' behaviors although, the study found that most students did not believe in counselors' advice which was often based on an individuals' academic performance. In the same vein, a study in Netherlands by Brooks and Cole (2012) found that most students had negative perceptions about counselors as good assessment services providers for good academic achievement.

On a positive note, the study found that teachers and students believe that proper nurturance on record keeping of children enhances children's attitude towards education. In this regard, majority of the pupil respondents (62.6%; 3.597) agree while a slight majority of teachers also agree (52.8%; 3.180). This suggest concurrence that as pupils are guided into proper record keeping, they develop interest into what

they do thus enhancing their performance in the particular subjects and overall performance. In similar vein, Odongo and Njiru (2010) found that offering assessment services to learners could motivate pupils and develop positive attitude towards learning and at the same time, set clear social and career objectives after school.

The study found that active participation in school reforms enhances excellence in learners as majority of the respondents agree with this statement where 67.3% of the pupils (mean = 3.608) and 74.2% of the teachers (Mean = 3.910) agree, giving a resounding positive belief and agreement with the statement. Further, the respondents believe that regular attendance of school meetings enhances resilience of learners to life with 70.9% of the pupils (Mean = 3.737) agreeing while a majority of teachers at 77.5% also agree (Mean = 4.146). This is because through active participation, pupils are able to share their problems and get solutions for the challenges facing them. This concurs with the findings of Phillips (2008) who also found that academic assessment interventions that focus on the development of cognitive, social, and self-management skills can result in sizable gains in student academic achievement. However, on the flip-flop side, Nyaegah (2011) found out that most pupils did not believe in the counselors for lack of privacy in the counseling rooms hence the availability of these programs were not meaningful in their academic life. However, Portman (2009) found out that most counselors and teachers were able to provide leadership in the development, promotion, facilitation and dissemination of school counseling research to demonstrate the connection between school counseling programs and student academic success. A study in Kenya by Oigara (2011) also found that guidance and counseling services were effective in the improving the learners' vocational and academic maturity. Moreover, Taylor and Derek (2009) study underscored the effectiveness in guidance and counseling strategies as a way of improving the academic performance of standard eight pupils.

During the interview with the head teachers, one of the outstanding themes on the issue of assessment services was significance of assessment services on academic performance of the pupils. Assessment services are programs for gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. It was found that assessment services bring about benefits for learners. Assessments services therefore, should have a clear benefit either in direct services to the child or in improved quality of educational programs. In an interview with the head teachers, one of them said:

"Assessment services offered at school is very significant to the learners' academic outcome because students and teachers can use the information gained from assessment to determine their next teaching and learning

steps. Significant student learning occurs when there is a change in knowledge, skills, and dispositions” [Head Teacher, 4]

When interviewed on this, the QASO official also said that:

Assessment in learning helps teachers gather information to: plan and modify teaching and learning programs for individual students, groups of students, and the class as a whole, pinpoint students' strengths so that both teachers and students can build on them and identify students' learning needs in a clear and constructive way so they can be addressed [QASO official]

It can therefore be interpreted that assessment services is very helpful for pupils' academic outcome and performance. This is also supported by Odongo and Njiru (2010) who found that assessment services unlock the approaches used by students and help them to become more aware of not only what they are learning, but how they are learning it. This empowers students to take control of their own learning, by developing their skills of self-regulation. Similarly, Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) reiterated that when students actively participate in assessing their learning by interpreting their performance, they are better placed to recognize important moments of personal learning. Although, Nyaegah (2011) seems to contract these findings when he found out that most pupils did not believe in the counselors for lack of privacy in the counseling rooms.

4. Conclusions

The study also found a unanimous opinion from both teachers and pupils as to whether regular assessment services enhance children's behaviour management with both of them disagreeing. Further, it was established that proper nurturance on record keeping of children enhances children's attitude towards education. However, it was found that monitoring of progress records does not enhance children's moral development. From the study findings, it was recommended that Teachers counselors should design proper facility, and effective access to information so as to enhance pupils' academic performance. This should be done through use of libraries and resource centers, information discussion forums and visual media. Further studies could focus on a longitudinal research should be conducted to investigate specific learners subjected to counseling services and its effect on their individual academic performance.

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