INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SAKHU CONSTITUENCY, MARSABIT COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Academic performance among secondary school students is influenced by a combination of educational, social, environmental and psychological factors. In marginalized settings, students may experience additional challenges that affect their motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and access to psychological support. This study examined the relationship between psychological factors and academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County, Kenya. Specifically, the study examined the level of students' academic performance and determined the relationships between motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem, psychological interventions and academic performance. The study was guided by Self-Determination Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design using a mixed-methods approach was adopted. The target population comprised 2,711 participants drawn from 12 secondary schools. A sample of 393 participants was selected using stratified random sampling, purposive sampling and census approaches. Data were collected using student questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. A total of 322 students and 50 key informants participated in the study, giving an overall response rate of 94.7%. The findings showed that students' academic performance was moderate, with an overall mean of 3.09 (SD = 1.28). Students recorded their strongest performance in completing assignments, while examination performance and confidence during examinations were comparatively lower. Motivation had a significant positive relationship with academic performance and explained 29.2% of its variation ($R^2 = .292$; $\beta = .540$, $p = .001$). Emotional well-being also had a significant positive relationship with academic performance and explained 23.0% of the variation ($R^2 = .230$; $\beta = .480$, $p < .001$). Self-esteem explained 26.2% of the variation in academic performance ($R^2 = .262$; $\beta = .512$, $p < .001$), while psychological interventions explained 24.0% ($R^2 = .240$; $\beta = .490$, $p < .001$). Qualitative findings supported the quantitative results, with key informants highlighting the importance of motivation, supportive relationships, counselling, mentoring and teacher support. However, limited counselling time, shortages of trained personnel and students' reluctance to seek assistance were identified as challenges. The study concludes that psychological factors form an important part of students' educational experiences and are significantly associated with academic performance. Strengthening school-based counselling, examination support, life-skills programmes, teacher and peer support, and access to trained counselling personnel may help schools respond more effectively to students' academic and psychological needs.

Keywords: Academic performance, emotional well-being, motivation, psychological interventions, secondary school students, self-esteem, Sakhu Constituency, counselling

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is an important indicator of students' progress in school because it reflects how well they meet expected learning outcomes through examinations, assignments, classroom participation and other academic activities. Students' performance can influence their progression to further education and future opportunities, while persistent poor performance may limit these opportunities. Despite continued efforts by governments and education stakeholders to improve the quality of education, low academic achievement remains a concern among secondary school learners in different settings (UNESCO, 2021). However, academic performance is not shaped by classroom instruction alone. Students' experiences, attitudes and psychological functioning may also affect how they approach schoolwork, respond to academic difficulties and participate in learning.

Motivation is particularly relevant because students differ in their willingness to invest effort in learning and persist when they experience academic difficulties. Self-Determination Theory proposes that motivation is influenced by psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Students who feel capable, supported and connected to others may be more willing to engage with learning activities. Motivation in education has also been associated with students' effort, persistence and academic engagement (Schunk et al., 2014). Emotional well-being is another important aspect of students' educational experiences. Students who experience persistent worry, emotional distress or difficulty managing academic pressure may encounter challenges in concentrating and participating in school activities. Conversely, supportive relationships with teachers and peers can help learners cope with emotional and academic challenges. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012) observed that pupil well-being is related to educational outcomes, including attendance, participation and achievement.

Self-esteem is also relevant to academic functioning. Students' perceptions of their own worth and ability may affect their willingness to attempt challenging tasks and respond to failure. Orth and Robins (2014) noted that self-esteem develops through interactions between individuals and their social environments and can have implications for adjustment and functioning. In school settings, confidence in one's academic ability may influence classroom participation, persistence and responses to academic challenges.

Psychological interventions provide another potential source of support. School-based counselling, mentoring, life-skills activities, teacher support and peer support can help students address emotional difficulties and develop coping strategies. Evidence from school-based social and emotional learning programmes indicates that psychological and social-emotional interventions can be associated with improvements in students' social and emotional functioning and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011).

In Kenya, attention to learner support has increasingly recognized the importance of students' social and emotional needs. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework identifies guidance, counselling and other learner-support approaches as components of the broader educational process (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2019). Nevertheless, the availability and use of psychological support may differ between schools and geographical areas. Sakhu Constituency in Marsabit County provides an important setting for examining these issues. The area is characterized by an arid environment and communities whose livelihoods include livestock keeping and small-scale farming. Students may encounter challenges related to economic circumstances, distance, school resources and access to counselling services. These

circumstances create a need for locally generated evidence on the psychological factors associated with students' academic experiences. Although studies have examined academic performance and learner well-being in different settings, limited empirical information was available on the relationship between psychological factors and academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency. The present study therefore examined academic performance and investigated the relationships between motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem, psychological interventions and academic performance among secondary school students in the constituency.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of psychological factors on academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County, Kenya.

2.0 Empirical Perspective

Previous studies have examined academic performance among secondary school students from different perspectives, including students' psychological characteristics and the support available within schools. Academic performance has commonly been reflected through examination results, participation in learning, completion of academic tasks and general educational achievement. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012) found that students' well-being and engagement were associated with educational outcomes, while Durlak et al. (2011) reported improvements in academic achievement among learners who participated in school-based social and emotional programmes. These findings show that academic performance is influenced by more than classroom instruction alone. However, evidence on the level of academic performance among students in remote and marginalized settings such as Sakhu Constituency remains limited.

Studies have also reported a relationship between motivation and academic performance. Schunk et al. (2014) found that academically motivated students showed greater effort, persistence and participation in learning and tended to perform better in their schoolwork. Ryan and Deci (2017) similarly reported that motivation supports sustained engagement when students find learning meaningful and experience a sense of competence and autonomy. In Kenya, Mutweleli (2014) found that academic motivation significantly predicted students' grades in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. Highly motivated students demonstrated greater commitment to schoolwork and used learning strategies more consistently. Although these studies support a relationship between motivation and academic performance, most were conducted outside the specific social and educational context of Sakhu Constituency. The present study therefore examined whether motivation was related to academic performance among secondary school students in the area.

Evidence has further linked emotional well-being with academic performance. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012) found that emotional and behavioural well-being was associated with school participation and educational outcomes. In South Africa, Petersen et al. (2019) reported that school-based mental health programmes and counselling helped learners manage emotional difficulties and participate more effectively in classroom activities, with implications for academic performance. Suldo et al. (2014) also linked students' well-being with school engagement and academic outcomes, while Omondi and Kamau (2021) reported a

relationship between students' emotional well-being, academic engagement and performance in Kenya. Despite this evidence, the studies were conducted in settings that differ from Sakhu Constituency. There was therefore a need to examine the relationship between students' emotional well-being and academic performance within the study area.

Previous research has also considered self-esteem and academic performance. Marsh and Craven (2006) found that positive academic self-perceptions were associated with greater confidence, classroom participation and academic achievement. Orth and Robins (2014) similarly associated self-esteem with motivation, persistence and educational functioning. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012) reported that learners with positive self-esteem and emotional well-being were more likely to engage in school activities and achieve better educational outcomes. In Kenya, Ndungu (2024) found that students with positive academic self-concept demonstrated greater confidence in learning, participated more actively in classroom activities and recorded better academic performance in Kirinyaga County. These findings suggest a relationship between self-esteem and academic performance, although evidence from marginalized areas remains limited. The present study therefore examined how self-esteem was related to academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency.

Research has also examined psychological interventions and academic performance. Durlak et al. (2011), in a review of school-based social and emotional learning programmes, found improvements in students' behaviour, emotional well-being and academic achievement. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012) reported that emotional and behavioural support was associated with school attendance, classroom participation and educational outcomes. Petersen et al. (2019) similarly found that school-based mental health programmes and counselling supported learners experiencing emotional difficulties, although shortages of trained personnel and inadequate counselling services limited access to such support. In Kenya, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2019) recognizes counselling, peer mentoring and teacher support as important forms of learner support that can promote motivation and participation. However, there was limited evidence on the relationship between psychological interventions and academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency.

Overall, the empirical literature indicates that motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and psychological interventions are each associated with students' academic experiences and academic performance. However, previous studies were largely conducted in different geographical, social and educational contexts. Few studies examined these four variables together among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County. In addition, limited empirical evidence was available on the level of academic performance in this setting. The present study therefore examined the level of academic performance and investigated the relationships between motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem, psychological interventions and academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency.

2.1 Theoretical Perspective

The study was guided primarily by Self-Determination Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory.

Self-Determination Theory explains motivation in terms of the psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Within a school environment, students are likely to experience stronger engagement when they feel capable of handling academic tasks, have some sense of control over their learning and experience supportive relationships with teachers and peers. The theory was relevant to the study because motivation was examined as one of the psychological factors associated with academic performance.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory provides another perspective by emphasizing the importance of basic and psychological needs in human functioning. Students who experience safety, belonging, acceptance and esteem may be better positioned to focus on learning. Within schools, psychological support can contribute to students' sense of safety, belonging and self-worth. The theory therefore helped explain the relationship between students' emotional experiences, self-esteem, psychological support and academic engagement(Maslow, 1943).

The two theories complemented one another. Self-Determination Theory emphasized motivation and supportive relationships, while Maslow's framework highlighted the importance of psychological and social needs. Together, they provided a basis for examining psychological experiences within the school environment and their relationship with academic performance.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design using a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between psychological factors and academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County. The mixed-methods approach allowed the study to combine quantitative information from students with qualitative views from teachers and school administrators, providing a broader understanding of the factors examined (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design was suitable because data were collected from the participants at one point in time.

The study was conducted in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County, where the study population was drawn from 12 registered secondary schools. The area is dry and receives limited rainfall, with livestock keeping and small-scale farming forming major sources of livelihood. The target population comprised 2,711 participants, including 2,661 students, 35 teachers and 15 school administrators. Students from Grade 10 to Form 4 were included, while teachers and school administrators were considered because of their regular interaction with learners and their knowledge of students' academic progress and psychological experiences.

The study employed stratified random sampling, purposive sampling and census approaches. Students were first grouped according to class level and gender and then selected randomly from the respective groups. Teachers and school administrators were purposively selected because of their roles and experience in supporting students. Purposive sampling was appropriate because these participants possessed information relevant to the psychological and academic experiences of learners (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study targeted 393 participants, comprising 343 students, 35 teachers and 15 school administrators. During the actual data collection, 322 students, 35 teachers and 15 school

administrators participated, giving a total of 372 respondents and an overall response rate of 94.7%. Ten of the 12 schools participated in the study, while two schools did not take part.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules. Questionnaires were administered to students, while interview schedules were used with teachers and school administrators. The questionnaire covered motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem, psychological interventions and academic performance. Self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). A pilot study was conducted in North Horr Sub-County to assess the suitability and clarity of the research instruments before the main study.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 30. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the responses. Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between each psychological factor and academic performance. Qualitative information obtained from the interviews was analyzed thematically. The qualitative findings were used to provide additional explanations for the quantitative results and to give further insight into participants' experiences.
The study observed ethical principles throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained from participants, while parental or guardian permission and assent were obtained for students below 18 years. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained during data collection, analysis and reporting. Information obtained from participants was used only for the purposes of the study, and participants requiring additional support were referred to appropriate counselling services.

The study had some limitations. Two of the 12 schools targeted for participation did not take part in the study; consequently, the findings were based on the 10 participating schools. In addition, the cross-sectional design allowed the study to establish relationships between psychological factors and academic performance but did not allow causal conclusions to be drawn. The findings should therefore be understood within the context of the participating schools and respondents in Sakhu Constituency.

4.0 RESULTS

The findings are presented in two parts: quantitative results and qualitative thematic findings. The quantitative analysis was based on 322 students, while 50 teachers and school administrators provided qualitative information. The results cover academic performance and the four psychological factors examined in the study.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Students rated the academic performance items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The results are summarized below.

Academic performance indicator	Mean	SD
Overall academic performance was satisfactory	3.09	1.31
Grades reflect effort	3.10	1.30
Assignments completed on time	3.34	1.25
Active class participation	3.12	1.29
Good performance in examinations	2.93	1.25

Confidence in tests and examinations	2.93	1.27
Understanding of classroom learning	3.12	1.28

Overall academic performance had a mean of 3.09 (SD = 1.28). Assignment completion recorded the highest mean (M = 3.34, SD = 1.25), followed by class participation (M = 3.12, SD = 1.29) and understanding of classroom learning (M = 3.12, SD = 1.28). Examination performance and confidence in tests and examinations had the lowest means, both at 2.93. Further, 164 students (50.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they performed well in examinations, while 154 (47.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were confident when taking tests and examinations. Further, motivation was positively associated with academic performance. The regression model was statistically significant, $R = .540$, $R^2 = .292$, $\beta = .540$, $p = .001$, $F(1, 320) = 131.65$. Motivation explained 29.2% of the variation in academic performance.

In addition, emotional well-being recorded an overall mean of 3.37 (SD = 1.28). It had a statistically significant positive relationship with academic performance, $R^2 = .230$, $\beta = .480$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 320) = 95.84$, accounting for 23.0% of the variation in academic performance. Similarly, self-esteem had an overall mean of 3.75 (SD = 1.14). Students recorded relatively high scores on the belief that self-esteem could improve academic performance (M = 3.93, SD = 1.08), ability to succeed academically (M = 3.91, SD = 1.07), and confidence in their ability to succeed (M = 3.90, SD = 1.08). Self-esteem had a statistically significant positive relationship with academic performance, $R^2 = .262$, $\beta = .512$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 320) = 113.79$, explaining 26.2% of the variation.

Finally, psychological interventions recorded an overall mean of 3.44 (SD = 1.28). Counselling availability had a mean of 3.68, while perceived benefit from counselling and mentoring had a mean of 3.35. Students identified limited counselling time, shortage of trained personnel and reluctance to seek help as barriers to accessing support. Regression analysis showed a statistically significant positive relationship between psychological interventions and academic performance, $R = .490$, $R^2 = .240$, $\beta = .490$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 320) = 100.25$. Psychological interventions explained 24.0% of the variation in academic performance.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The interviews provided further information on students' academic experiences and the psychological factors examined. Thirty-two key informants described students' overall academic performance as satisfactory, although some students were performing below the expected level. Twenty-nine reported differences in academic performance among students, while 31 referred to assignment completion and classroom participation. Examinations were identified as a particular challenge by 35 key informants. These observations corresponded with the student responses, where examination performance and examination confidence received the lowest mean scores.

The interviews also showed differences in students' motivation and engagement with schoolwork. Key informants described some students as more willing to participate in lessons, complete assignments and persist with academic tasks, while others showed less effort or interest in schoolwork. Emotional well-being was also raised as an issue affecting students' concentration, participation and ability to cope with academic demands. Self-belief emerged strongly from the interviews. Thirty-eight key informants linked students' belief in their

abilities with participation, effort and academic results. Students who had confidence in their abilities were described as more willing to participate and persist with academic work.

Counselling and other psychological support were also identified as important sources of assistance. Key informants reported that counselling gave students an opportunity to seek help with personal, emotional and academic concerns. However, limited counselling time, inadequate numbers of trained personnel and reluctance among some students to seek help were identified as barriers.

Overall, the quantitative findings showed statistically significant positive relationships between academic performance and motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and psychological interventions. The qualitative findings supported these results by highlighting differences in students' effort, emotional experiences, confidence in their abilities and access to counselling support.

5. DISCUSSION

The study examined the influence of psychological factors on academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County. The findings showed that students' academic performance was moderate, with an overall mean of 3.09 (SD = 1.28). Assignment completion recorded the highest mean (M = 3.34, SD = 1.25), followed by class participation and understanding of classroom learning, both of which had a mean of 3.12. In contrast, performance in examinations and confidence in tests and examinations recorded the lowest means, both at 2.93. This pattern suggests that although students were generally able to engage with routine classroom activities and complete assigned work, examinations presented greater difficulty. This was also reflected in the qualitative findings, where 32 key informants described overall academic performance as satisfactory but noted that some students performed below the expected level. In addition, 35 key informants identified examinations as a particular challenge. The finding is consistent with Gutman and Vorhaus (2012), who associated students' well-being and engagement with educational outcomes. In the present study, the lower scores for examination performance and confidence indicate that academic performance involved challenges beyond completing routine schoolwork.

The study further established a significant positive relationship between motivation and academic performance. Motivation explained 29.2% of the variation in academic performance, with the regression model being statistically significant, $R = .540$, $R^2 = .292$, $\beta = .540$, $p = .001$, $F(1, 320) = 131.65$. The qualitative findings provided a similar picture, with key informants reporting differences in students' willingness to participate in lessons, complete assignments and persist with academic tasks. Some students were described as showing greater interest and effort, while others were less engaged in their schoolwork. This finding agrees with Schunk et al. (2014), who linked academic motivation with effort, persistence and participation in learning. Ryan and Deci (2020) similarly explain that students are more likely to remain engaged when they experience learning as meaningful and feel capable of performing academic tasks. The finding is also consistent with Mutweleli (2014), who found that academic motivation significantly predicted students' grades in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. The present study extends this evidence to students in Sakhu Constituency, where motivation accounted for a substantial proportion of the observed variation in academic performance. Emotional well-being was also significantly related to academic performance. Students recorded an overall mean of 3.37 (SD = 1.28) on the emotional well-being measures, while regression analysis showed that emotional well-being

accounted for 23.0% of the variation in academic performance, $R^2 = .230$, $\beta = .480$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 320) = 95.84$. The qualitative findings indicated that emotional experiences affected students' concentration, classroom participation and ability to cope with academic demands. This finding is in line with Gutman and Vorhaus (2012), who found a relationship between emotional and behavioural well-being and educational outcomes. Suldo et al. (2014) also linked students' well-being with school engagement and academic outcomes. Similarly, Omondi and Kamau (2021) reported a relationship between emotional well-being, academic engagement and performance among students in Kenya. Petersen et al. (2019) further observed that school-based mental health programmes and counselling can help learners manage emotional difficulties and participate more effectively in school activities. The present findings suggest that students' emotional experiences formed an important part of their academic functioning in the study setting.

Self-esteem showed a similar pattern. The overall mean for self-esteem was 3.75 (SD = 1.14), with students reporting relatively high levels of belief in their ability to succeed academically. The belief that self-esteem could improve academic performance had a mean of 3.93 (SD = 1.08), while perceived ability to succeed academically recorded a mean of 3.91 (SD = 1.07), and confidence in the ability to succeed had a mean of 3.90 (SD = 1.08). Regression analysis showed a statistically significant positive relationship between self-esteem and academic performance, $R^2 = .262$, $\beta = .512$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 320) = 113.79$. Self-esteem therefore accounted for 26.2% of the variation in academic performance. The interviews supported this finding, as 38 key informants linked students' belief in their abilities with participation, effort and academic results. Students who believed in their abilities were described as more willing to participate and persist in academic work. The finding corresponds with Marsh and Craven (2006), who associated positive academic self-perceptions with confidence, participation and achievement. Orth and Robins (2014) similarly linked self-esteem with motivation, persistence and educational functioning. In Kenya, Ndungu (2024) reported that positive academic self-concept was associated with greater confidence and participation in learning. The findings from Sakhu Constituency therefore suggest that students' perceptions of their own abilities were closely connected with how they approached academic work.

The study also found a significant positive relationship between psychological interventions and academic performance. Psychological interventions recorded an overall mean of 3.44 (SD = 1.28), while counselling availability had a mean of 3.68 and perceived benefit from counselling and mentoring had a mean of 3.35. The regression model was statistically significant, $R = .490$, $R^2 = .240$, $\beta = .490$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 320) = 100.25$, indicating that psychological interventions accounted for 24.0% of the variation in academic performance. The qualitative findings showed that counselling provided students with an avenue for addressing personal, emotional and academic concerns. However, limited counselling time, inadequate numbers of trained personnel and reluctance among some students to seek help were identified as barriers. These findings are consistent with Durlak et al. (2011), whose review found that school-based social and emotional programmes were associated with improvements in students' behaviour, emotional well-being and academic achievement. Gutman and Vorhaus (2012) similarly reported links between emotional and behavioural support, school participation and educational outcomes. Petersen et al. (2019) found that school-based mental health programmes and counselling could support learners experiencing emotional difficulties, while also noting challenges related to the availability of trained personnel. The findings are also consistent with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2019), which recognizes counselling, peer mentoring and teacher support as forms of learner support within the school environment.

The findings can also be understood in relation to the theories that guided the study. Self-Determination Theory explains the importance of motivation, competence and meaningful engagement in students' learning experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The positive relationship between motivation and academic performance, together with the qualitative evidence on effort and persistence, fits within this perspective. Students who were more engaged in their schoolwork appeared to participate more actively and persist with academic tasks. The findings on self-esteem also relate to students' sense of competence and confidence in their ability to succeed.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides another perspective by emphasizing the role of psychological needs in human functioning. The theory proposes that needs such as safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization influence human motivation and behaviour (Maslow, 1943). The findings on emotional well-being, self-esteem and psychological interventions can be viewed within this framework. Students who experience emotional difficulties or lack confidence may face challenges in concentrating on academic tasks, while access to counselling and other forms of support may help address some of the personal and psychological concerns that interfere with learning. The theory therefore provided a useful basis for understanding the links observed between students' psychological experiences and their academic performance.

Taken together, the findings show that motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and psychological interventions were each positively and significantly related to academic performance among the students who participated in the study. The qualitative evidence strengthened the interpretation of these relationships by showing how effort, emotional experiences, confidence and access to counselling were experienced within the school setting. At the same time, the cross-sectional design means that the findings demonstrate relationships between the variables rather than establishing that any one psychological factor directly caused changes in academic performance. The findings should consequently be interpreted within the context of the participating secondary schools in Sakhu Constituency.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, this study recommends stronger attention to motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and access to psychological support. For secondary schools, academic and psychosocial support should be strengthened, particularly around examinations, since examination performance and confidence recorded the lowest mean scores. Schools should provide regular study-skills and examination-preparation sessions, encourage active classroom participation, and create opportunities for students to receive individual guidance when they experience academic difficulties.

For school administrators and counsellors, counselling services should be made more accessible and responsive to students' needs. The findings identified limited counselling time, inadequate trained personnel and reluctance to seek help as barriers. Schools should therefore allocate sufficient time and appropriate spaces for counselling, strengthen referral arrangements, and increase awareness of counselling services among students. Counselling should address academic concerns alongside emotional and personal difficulties, including examination-related challenges, low motivation and reduced confidence.

For teachers, closer attention should be given to changes in students' motivation, participation, emotional well-being and confidence. Teachers should work closely with counsellors to identify students who may require additional support and provide constructive feedback that encourages effort and participation. Parents and guardians should also maintain communication with schools and support students who experience academic, emotional or confidence-related difficulties.

For the Ministry of Education and relevant education authorities, there is a need to strengthen the availability of qualified counselling personnel in secondary schools, particularly in underserved areas. This may be supported through appropriate staffing, professional development and functional referral systems for students requiring specialised assistance. Education authorities should also strengthen monitoring of school-based counselling services to ensure that available support is accessible and responsive to students' needs.

At the student level, learners should be encouraged to make use of counselling, peer-support and academic-support services available in their schools. Students experiencing examination difficulties, low motivation, emotional challenges or reduced confidence should be encouraged to seek assistance early. Future researchers should extend this work to other areas of Marsabit County and use longitudinal or other appropriate designs to examine how psychological factors and academic performance change over time and to provide further evidence on the contribution of school-based psychological interventions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between psychological factors and academic performance among secondary school students in Sakhu Constituency, Marsabit County. It focused on motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and psychological interventions. The study found that students' academic performance was moderate, with an overall mean of 3.09 (SD = 1.28). Students reported stronger performance in completing assignments, participating in class and understanding classroom learning than in examinations. Examination performance and confidence in tests and examinations had the lowest mean scores, both at 2.93. Key informants also identified examinations as a major area of difficulty for some students.

The study found significant positive relationships between academic performance and each of the four psychological factors examined. Motivation accounted for 29.2% of the variation in academic performance, emotional well-being accounted for 23.0%, self-esteem accounted for 26.2%, and psychological interventions accounted for 24.0%. The interview findings supported these results. Key informants linked students' effort and participation to motivation, connected emotional experiences with concentration and coping, and associated confidence in personal abilities with participation and academic results. Counselling was also identified as a source of support for personal, emotional and academic concerns.

The findings also identified gaps in the availability and use of psychological support. Limited counselling time, inadequate numbers of trained personnel and reluctance among some students to seek help affected access to counselling services. These issues are important because counselling was positively related to academic performance in the study. Strengthening school-based psychological support may therefore provide students with additional assistance in managing academic and personal challenges.

The study concludes that academic performance among students in Sakhu Constituency was associated with their motivation, emotional well-being, self-esteem and access to psychological interventions. The findings point to the need for schools to address academic difficulties alongside students' psychological needs. Attention to examination challenges, student confidence, emotional well-being and accessible counselling services may support students' participation and academic progress.

The findings should be interpreted within the limits of the study. The cross-sectional design established relationships among the variables but could not determine cause and effect. In addition, two of the twelve targeted schools did not participate, so the findings reflect the ten participating schools and the respondents included in the study. Further research involving more schools and longitudinal designs could provide additional evidence on changes in psychological factors and academic performance over time.

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