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## Teachers Support on Learners as a Factor to Academic Performance among Secondary School Students in Kiambu County; Kenya

**James Gathungu, Edward Tanui, Alexander Ronoh**

### Abstract

Factor influencing students' academic performance has been widely studied with students' performance in summative examinations being a key variable. Theories have it that learning is progressive and therefore a student's performance in summative examinations significantly relates to the progressive performance during the course. This paper attempts to find out students' academic performance as they progress through the secondary school course and how this performance is influenced by learning support given by the teachers. The study was carried out in Kiambu County in Kenya using Correlation research design. Data was collected from students using questionnaire and from Deans of Studies using the researcher's designed Learners' Examinations Marks Schedule. Respondents were selected from public secondary schools using stratified random sampling technique. The study informs curriculum developers and implementers on the relationship between learning support given by teachers and the students' trend in academic performance as they progress through the secondary school course. The data collected was cross tabulated and a Pearson Chi-Square used to test independence between learning support by teachers and academic performance among the students progressing through the secondary school course. The study identified a relationship between the two variables and thereby generalizing that learning support given by teachers has a direct relationship with students' academic performance.

**Keywords:** Teachers support on learners, trend; academic performance; progress; examination marks

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Education system in Kenya is structured in levels, where upon successful completion of one level, a student transits to the next. At each of these levels, there are sets of activities designed and carried out with the intent of shaping students' learning styles and achieving desired instructional outcomes as measured in examinations marks. The ways these activities are carried out during the instructional process can be referred to as teaching and learning practices [28].

According to [17] one of the teaching and learning practices that influence students' academic performance is the learning support that teachers afford their learners. The accessibility to the support has an influence on a students' academic performance not only in school-based examinations but also in end-of-the-course summative examinations results measured in terms of examinations marks. In managing their academic work especially at the initial stages of a new level of learning, students tend to expect and closely rely on teachers support. Improving the way teachers support their learners at every levels of school is critical in improving academic performance which is a major vehicle for producing educated and skilled manpower [23]. [25] advices teachers to provide learning support by keeping the students aware of the demands of the secondary school curriculum, and encouraging them they are capable of learning better than they could be doing. The teachers should regularly discuss with their students the difficulties they could be encountering in settling down at secondary school

While reviewing records on students' academic performance [22] identified a decline in individual student's marks in examinations taken subsequent to the first test at secondary school. A similar study by [6] identified students' academic performance as significantly relating to the level of learning support given by teachers. This findings informs this study in attempting to understand the trend in academic performance and it relations to the teaching and learning practices in Kiambu County.

Among the many attempts to describe the trend in students' academic performance, [2] found that up to 63 percent of the students found to have scored an average of 70 percent mark in their first test at secondary school, had performed below par in subsequent examinations. According

to <sup>[5]</sup>, 17 percent of the students in a cohort of 1000 had their marks in subsequent tests dropping by up to a third of the marks scored in the first examinations at secondary school. In both studies, students explained that the decline could have been caused by the learning support they were getting from their teachers, which was less than what they expected. These findings are supported in the arguments made by <sup>[17]</sup> that students facing low teachers' support in a learning environment are at higher risk of declining in their academic performance, while those enjoying high teachers' support are more likely to improve.

In a study on learning support and students' academic performance in New Zealand, <sup>[23]</sup> found that students experiencing teachers' support that seemed to significantly differ from what they were used to at primary school tended to score lower marks in examinations taken as they progressed through secondary school. According to <sup>[14]</sup> the effects of the perceived shortfall between the expected learning support and what is provided may continue throughout the course and even influence the students' academic performance in the summative national examinations; an example of which is the KCSE in Kenya

A report by <sup>[20]</sup> record that pupils who topped in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) finds it hard to replicate their KCPE performance right from the first examinations upon transiting to secondary school. The report goes on to suggest that such students may not be getting the support they expect from the teachers, in dealing with the challenges that comes with adjusting to the learning in a new level of schooling. According to the report, the pupils may even find it hard to recover the good performance and eventually performing poorly in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

An analysis of KCSE examinations results shows that academic performance among secondary school students in Kiambu County has remained below the mean grade C+ (6.5 points) which is the minimum requirement for a student to join a public university. Specifically, the performance has declined from a mean grade C- (4.68 points) in 2009 to a D+ (4.32 points) in 2013 (Republic of Kenya, 2014) <sup>[21]</sup>. This lay bare the fact that investigating the teaching and learning practices in the instructional process could partly explain the cause of the poor performance in the county. These study focus on learning support that students get from their teachers as one of the teaching and learning practices as a factor influencing academic performance among students in Kiambu County. Since it was focused on the trend in academic performance, the study was limited to school based exams taken during the course and not the summative KCSE.

The study was therefore carried out to establish the relationship between teaching and learning practices and students' academic performance upon transition to secondary schools in Kiambu County of Kenya

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to find out whether there is a relationship between learning support given by teachers and the trend in academic performance among secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya.

This study was based on a null hypotheses (Ho) that there is no relationship between learning support given by teachers and the trend in academic performance among secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Teaching and learning practices are the collection of activities and elements that teachers and students encounter and get involved in during an instructional process. It is through these practices that knowledge, attitude and skills are imparted and acquired <sup>[6]</sup>. Among the teaching and learning practices is the learning support that teachers accord their students.

### 2.2 Teachers' Support on Students

Learning support is the teachers deliberate, appropriate and timely effort towards solving the challenges a student could be facing in the instructional process and aimed at encouraging the students to improve in their academic performance <sup>[6]</sup>. Students experience some anxiety as they adjust to the secondary school academic life, which may adversely affect their individual academic performance and progress <sup>[11]</sup>. At such times it is instrumental to help learners cope with the challenges, whether they seem to need help or not. According to <sup>[3]</sup>, students adjusted better if teachers regularly helped in solving the problems they encountered in learning, helped set learning goals, and encouraged students develop greater accountability in their learning. The teacher's support the deliberate effort by the teachers towards solving the challenges his or her students could be facing in the course of study <sup>[12]</sup>.

Many students are those who transit to secondary school holding certain expectations that emanates from their experiences at primary school <sup>[16, 27]</sup>. Apart from hoping that their academic performance would remain equally better as they were performing at primary, they expect the teachers to support them in adjusting to the challenges of learning at secondary school <sup>[6]</sup>. The more the students are supported, the more they like school and the better they emerge on measures of academic performance <sup>[10]</sup>.

In a study carried out by <sup>[17]</sup> it was found that students' perception towards teachers' support in their learning served as a good predictor of the student's performance in examinations taken as the student progress through the secondary school course. In the same study, students who reported as being less supported by teachers also tended to score progressively lower marks as they progressed through the secondary school course. The same students were also reported as having poorer work habits. Those who reported high support by their teachers were found to score increasingly higher marks; were more self-directed and actively engaged in learning. Similar studies by <sup>[1]</sup> in Mexico, and <sup>[22]</sup> in Malta, show that teachers' support on their students at junior secondary level positively correlates with students' academic performance.

According to <sup>[6]</sup>, students cope with learning better when teachers acknowledge the learning challenges they may be facing, which in essence teachers should do as part of supporting their students learn. Teachers should deliberately identify the students' prior knowledge and experiences and use this information in structuring their teaching in ways that support students' efforts to succeed <sup>[15]</sup>.

Teachers also need to regularly checking with the students how helpful the support they are giving is, and what more might help the students learn more effectively. A study by <sup>[27]</sup> on education achievements among secondary school students note that secondary school teachers rarely invest their time in guiding students on how to learn better or helping them identify and get prepared for the challenges they are to meet as they progress through the secondary school course of

learning. [15] suggest that teachers should consistently communicate to students that they are capable of learning. They need to go further and help their students identify ways in which they could meet those expectations [10].

Studies point out what teachers should do in supporting their students learn but without reporting whether teachers actually do it. It is also evident that there is much that a teacher needs to do to support students' learning but to what extent the teachers are aware of the strategies is vague. Further, the studies do not clearly show whether teachers are aware of the role that their support play especially on students' academic performance upon transition to secondary schools.

### 2.3 Academic Performance

Academic performance is measurable in terms of marks a student scores in examination. The trend in academic performance for an individual or a cohort of students can be drawn by comparing sets of marks the individual or the cohort of students scored in sets of examinations taken at different point in time [13]. The trend may be explained as being caused by variety of factors, among them the teaching and learning practices in use within the learning environment.

A research study by [5] on the academic performance of a cohort of students, found that the students' average marks in examinations progressively taken in the secondary school course dropped by a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 0.30 to 0.50. A study on students' academic achievement upon transition to secondary schools carried out by [22] found 40 percent of students participating in the study to have registered lower marks in examinations taken in subsequent school terms than they had scored in the term before.

In reference to students academic performance in Kenyan secondary schools, [21] states that some of the top pupils find it hard to replicate their KCPE performance right from the first examinations upon transiting to secondary school, a phenomenon that eventually builds up to the low performance at KCSE. This implies that students tend to score progressively low marks as they go through their secondary school course. Few of them recover from this trend even as they sit for their KCSE.

Academic progress is influenced by a host of compound factors which are a challenge to analyze in their integrated form [26]. Apart from learning support on students, other teaching and learning practices that could influences students academic performance are teaching and learning methods, learning workload, teachers' and learners' motivation.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

The study is conceptualized in the presumption that there exists a relationship between learning support given by teachers and students' in academic performance at secondary school. The dependent variable is the students' academic performance as they progress through the secondary school course, while learning support from teachers is the independent variable. The academic performance is a comparison between the percentage total marks a student scores in the first End-of-Term examinations taken in Form One Term One as the baseline performance to the percentage total mark scored in each of the subsequent exams. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the independent and dependent variables used in this study.

### 3. Research Methodology

The research design used was Causal Correlation which allowed the researcher to observe and describe the variables as

they were. It is suitable for studying variables whose effects have already occurred and therefore cannot be manipulated since the researcher has no direct control [19]. The design also allow for the use of the Pearson Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test of independence thereby proofing the presence or absence of relationship between the variables in mathematical terms [18, 19].

The target population of the study was the 80,047 students in district and county schools in Kiambu County at the time of the study. The population is unevenly distributed in the four districts namely Gatundu, Kiambu West, Kiambu East, and Thika in the county.

### 3.1 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample was made up of three strata namely schools, teachers and students. The sample size for the 243 school in Kiambu County was determined using the 10 percent as recommended by [18]. The sample sizes to represent the 3605 teachers ( $n = 347$ ) and 80047 ( $n = 382$ ) students drawn from the 243 ( $n = 25$ ) schools were separately determined using [4] sample size formula [1].

### 3.3 Research Instruments

The study used a students' questionnaire and a "Learners' Examinations Marks Schedule" for data collection. The students' were required to agree or disagree that learning support thy received from their teachers influenced their academic performance as they progressed through their secondary school course. The Learners' Examinations Marks Schedule was used to collect the students' examinations marks from the Deans of Studies in the sampled schools.

### 3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation Techniques

The data was summarized in frequency tables and using modes and percentages. The bivariate analysis between the students' academic performance and learning support given by teachers was done through cross tabulation. Test for relationship was done using the Pearson Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ).

### 4 Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Students' Academic Performance

In establishing the student's trend in academic performance, the End-of-Term exams marks in Term One Form One was used as the baseline performance and then compared with the marks in subsequent examinations. The End-of-Term One Form One examination marks were standardized by equating it to a performance index of 100 for each student. A performance index for each of the marks a student scored in subsequent examinations was then computed by taking the performance index in Term One Form One as the baseline. The differences in the performance index between subsequent terms were then summed up to arrive at the total change in performance index for each student.

The total changes in performance indexes for all students were tallied and then grouped into frequency distribution of class width of 10 marks each and then tabulated. For the purpose of this study a change in performance index of less than, plus or minus 10 was taken as not significance, hence interpreted as no change. Table 1 shows the frequency distributions of the resulting changes in performance indexes for the 382 students. Among the 382 students, 147 (38.5 percent) had their End-of-Term exams marks decline by a performance index of 10 to 19. This was the most populated change in performance index. The least populated was the 30 to 39 range.

For the purpose of this study, a performance index within positive and negative nine was classified as “unchanged” performance, below negative nine was classified as a “downward” trend and above nine taken as an “improved” trend. There were 226 (59.2 percent) of the 382 students had a downward trend in their academic performance, compared to 53 (13.9 percent) whose trend had improved. It is the observation of this research study that a high number of students reported their academic performance to have declined than those who reported the as to have improved or remained constant.

#### 4.2 Learning Support by Teachers

Table 2 shows that 162 (42.4 percent) of the 382 students strongly agreed that learning support from teachers was a contributing factor to students’ academic performance, while 128 (33.5 percent) agreed. On the other hand 32 (8.4 percent) of the students disagreed while 26 (6.8 percent) strongly disagreed that learning support was a contributing factor to students’ academic performance. The total of 290 (75.9 percent) students more or less agreed while 58 (15.2 percent) more or less disagreed that learning support given was a contributing factor to their academic performance. There were more students more or less agreeing than those more or less disagreeing that teachers support on learners was a contributing factor to the students’ academic performance.

#### 4.3 Teachers’ Support to Learners and Students Academic Performance

Table 3 shows the cross-tabulated distribution of students agreeing that learning support by teachers is an important factor to academic performance against the trend in the students’ academic performance. Among the 226 (59.2 percent) students reporting their academic performance to have declined, 78 (48.1 percent) strongly agreed while 76 (59.4 percent) agreed that learning support given is a factor to academic performance. There were 28 (7.3 percent) students who disagreed while 20 (5.2 percent) strongly disagreed. Combining each of the two categories gives us a 184 (81.4 percent) of the 226 (59.2 percent) students agreeing and 30 (13.3 percent) disagreeing. Therefore there were more students more or less agreeing that their academic performance had declined due to receiving less support from their teachers. A similar observation was made among the students who reported their academic performance to have improved and those whose performance had remained the

same. From this observation it is the finding of this study that there are many students who takes the learning support they get from their teachers as a factor contributing to their academic performance, than those of a contrary opinion.

The data on learning support by teachers as a factor of academic performance collected from the teachers and students was used to test the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) that; There is no relationship between learning support given by teachers and the trend in academic performance among secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya.

A Pearson Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistics test relationship was computed based on the data supplied by the students on teachers support on learners and academic performance as provided by the Dean of Studies. The results was an observed value of  $\chi^2 = 26.138$ ,  $n = 382$ ,  $df = 8$  and  $p = 0.001$ . The observed value of  $\chi^2$  (16.403) is greater than the critical value (15.507). The observed  $p$  value (0.001) is less than the accepted rejection threshold of 0.05 in social science research [24]. Table 4.20 shows the output of the Pearson Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistics test of relationship between academic performance and teachers support on learners.

The Chi-square test of relationship on teachers support on learners and academic performance returned  $\chi^2 = 26.138$ ,  $n = 382$ ,  $df = 8$  and  $p = 0.001$ . In this case the observed value of  $\chi^2$  is greater than the critical value ( $\chi^2 = 15.507$ ) and the  $p$  values is less than the accepted rejection threshold of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected. Conversely, the alternate hypothesis that there is a relationship between teachers support on learners and the students’ academic performance upon transition from primary to secondary school is accepted.

The identified relationship between teachers’ support on learners and the students’ academic performance among the students in secondary schools in Kiambu County bear a resemblance with what was observed in a study by [17]. A further similarity is that students indicating as being less supported by teachers also tended to decline in academics performance in terms of End-of-Term exams marks in Form One and Form two. The findings are also similar to those reported by [10] that the more the learning support, the more the students like school and the better they emerge on measures of academic performance. The findings confirms the report by [3] that teachers are instrumental in supporting learners cope with challenges they encountered in learning upon transition to secondary school, whether they seem to need help or not.

## 5. Tables

**Table 1:** Change in Students’ Examinations Marks as they progressed through Form One and Form Two

Change in Performance Index	Trend in academic performance	<i>f</i>	%	Cumulative <i>f</i>	Cumulative %
-39 to -30	Downward	16	4.2	16	4.2
-29 to -20	Downward	63	16.5	79	20.7
-19 to -10	Downward	147	38.5	226	59.2
-9 to 0	Unchanged	58	15.2	284	74.3
0 to 9	Unchanged	45	11.8	329	86.1
10 to 19	Upward	33	8.6	362	94.8
20 to 29	Upward	17	4.5	379	99.2
30 to 39	Upward	3	.8	382	100.0
Total		382	100.0	382	100.0

**Table 2:** Extent to which students agreed that learning support from teachers was a contributing factor to academic performance

	<i>f</i>	%	Cumulative %
Strongly Agreed	162	42.4	42.4
Agreed	128	33.5	75.9
Undecided	34	8.9	84.8
Disagreed	32	8.4	93.2
Strongly Disagreed	26	6.8	100.0
Total	382	100.0	

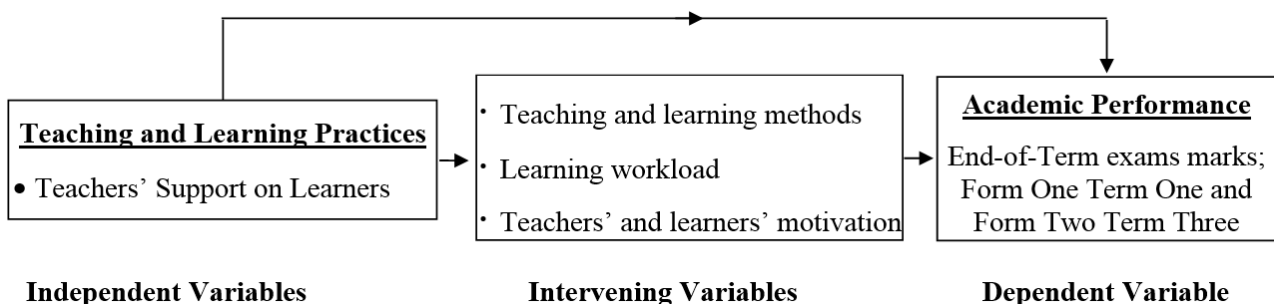
**Table 3:** A Cross-Tabulation on Teachers' Support on Learners as a Factor in Academic Performance as Reported by Students

			Learning support as a contributor to academic performance					Total
			Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Un-decided	Dis-agreed	Strongly Disagreed	
Academic performance	Upward	Count	31	14	3	2	3	53
		Expected Count	22.5	17.8	4.7	4.4	3.6	53.0
		% within Academic performance	58.5%	26.4%	5.7%	3.8%	5.7%	100.0%
		% within Learning support	19.1%	10.9%	8.8%	6.3%	11.5%	13.9%
		% of Total	8.1%	3.7%	.8%	.5%	.8%	13.9%
	Unchanged	Count	53	38	7	2	3	103
		Expected Count	43.7	34.5	9.2	8.6	7.0	103.0
		% within Academic performance	51.5%	36.9%	6.8%	1.9%	2.9%	100.0%
		% within Learning support	32.7%	29.7%	20.6%	6.3%	11.5%	27.0%
		% of Total	13.9%	9.9%	1.8%	.5%	.8%	27.0%
	Downward	Count	78	76	24	28	20	226
		Expected Count	95.8	75.7	20.1	18.9	15.4	226.0
		% within Academic performance	34.5%	33.6%	10.6%	12.4%	8.8%	100.0%
		% within Learning support	48.1%	59.4%	70.6%	87.5%	76.9%	59.2%
		% of Total	20.4%	19.9%	6.3%	7.3%	5.2%	59.2%
Total	Count	162	128	34	32	26	382	
	Expected Count	162.0	128.0	34.0	32.0	26.0	382.0	
	% within Academic performance	42.4%	33.5%	8.9%	8.4%	6.8%	100.0%	
	% within Learning support	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	42.4%	33.5%	8.9%	8.4%	6.8%	100.0%	

**Table 4:** Output of the Pearson Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) Statistics Test of Independence between Academic Performance and Teachers Support on Learners as Reported by Students

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.138 <sup>a</sup>	8	.001
Likelihood Ratio	28.661	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	17.006	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	382		

**8. Figure**



**Fig 1:** Relationship between selected teaching and learning practices and students' academic performance upon transition to secondary school

## 6. Equation

$$n = \frac{NZ^2pq}{E^2(N-1) + Z^2pq} \quad (3)$$

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to find out the relationship between learning support given by teachers and students' academic performance as they progressed through the secondary schools course. This was done by comparing the students' End-of-Term One exam marks in Form One to performance index computed out of the marks scored in subsequent exams throughout the secondary school course. The study identified a significant change in students' marks between the End-of-Term One in Form One, and subsequent examinations. More than half the students were found to have scored lower marks in subsequent exams than they had scored in the End-of-Term One Form One.

The study observed that many students more or less agreed that learning support by teachers was an important factor in their learning. This implies that learning support by teachers is a crucial factor in students' academic performance. The study identified that there was a relationship between teachers' support on learners and students' academic performance as the students progressed through in secondary school in Kiambu County. The more the students are supported, the more likely they are to perform better in their examinations, as they progress through secondary school.

The study concludes that there is a relationship between students' academic performance and teachers' support that students experience as the progress through the secondary schools. Therefore students are better placed in adjusting to the learning challenges at secondary school if they got learning support that is more or equal to what they expected. Students who are less supported by their teachers are more likely to find it difficult coping with learning once in secondary school, hence more likely to drop in their academic performance.

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