

Ability Beliefs, Achievement Goals and Fear of Negative Evaluation as Predictors of Academic Achievement among Form Three Students in Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract

Low academic achievement remains a major concern among all stakeholders in Mombasa County. This study sought to explain academic underachievement from a self-worth protection perspective. Specifically, the study sought to establish the extent to which ability beliefs, achievement goals and fear of negative evaluation predict academic achievement. The study also sought to determine gender differences in ability beliefs, achievement goals, fear of negative evaluation and academic achievement. The study employed an ex post facto research design and was anchored by Covington's Self-worth Motivation Theory. The target population were form three students and class teachers in public secondary schools in Mombasa County. The sample comprised a total of 431 respondents; 421 students and 10 teachers selected using stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Questionnaires for students and semi-structured interview schedules for teachers were used. Students' academic records provided data on academic achievement. Questionnaires for students included items from the Implicit Theories of Intelligence Scale, the Achievement Goals Questionnaire - Revised and the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS. Linear regression analysis and t-tests were used to test hypotheses at $\alpha = 0.05$. Qualitative data was analysed thematically in line with the objectives of the study. Ability beliefs significantly predicted academic achievement. Entity beliefs significantly and negatively predicted academic achievement while incremental beliefs insignificantly and positively respectively predicted academic achievement. Achievement goals significantly predicted academic achievement with mastery and performance goals positively and negatively respectively predicting academic achievement. Fear of negative evaluation insignificantly and negatively predicted academic achievement. As a single model, ability beliefs, achievement goals and fear of negative evaluation significantly predicted academic achievement. Significant gender differences were found in performance goals and academic achievement. Qualitative analyses showed that students set their goals in line with overall schools' targets; goal monitoring was done by class teachers and parents; students feared the subsequent evaluation because previous results were publicly displayed and discussed and girls were at an elevated risk of undervaluing academics because of cultural socialisation. The study recommended that learning should be a more holistic process encompassing both performance mastery domains and that parents should not peg their children's overall worth solely on academic achievement. In the same line, diverse programs should be developed to ensure that students find worth in other domains that are also socially valued.

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