

School Psychological Environment, Achievement Goals and Learning Strategies as Predictors of Form Three Students' Academic Achievement in Nairobi County, Kenya

Obura Caroline Atieno

Abstract

Secondary school students' performance in KCSE over the last four years (2013 to 2016) has been skewed towards low grades nationally and Nairobi County specifically. Much research effort has been directed at investigating psychological factors such as weak academic motivation and self-handicapping as possible causes of poor academic performance. Less focus has been on school psychological environment and achievement goals which may contribute towards students' academic performance. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine school psychological environment, achievement goals as predictors of academic achievement of form three students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study also examined the mediating role of learning strategies in the relationship between the school psychological environment and achievement goals. It also determined the gender differences in school psychological environment and achievement goals. The trichotomous achievement goal framework and the self-worth theory of achievement motivation formed the theoretical framework. The study adopted a correlational research design to establish predictive relationships among the variables. The target population was all the year 2016 Form three students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. The study sample consisted of 602 students selected from 13 schools using purposive, stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling procedures. The study used a questionnaire developed to obtain information on students' biographical data. Students' school psychological environment, achievement goals and learning strategies scales were adapted to measure school psychological environment, achievement goals and learning strategies. Students' examination scores obtained from the school records were used as a measure of academic achievement. A Pilot study was conducted on 40 form three students selected from a public secondary school in Nairobi County that was not part of the sample. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyse the data. Specifically, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse data. The results obtained from correlation analysis showed that the school psychological environment as mastery-focused was positively correlated to academic achievement ($r(595) = .17, p < .05$). Mastery goals ($r(595) = .17, p < .01$) and performance-approach ($r(595) = .18, p < .05$) goals were both positively correlated to academic achievement. Performance-avoidance goals, on the other hand, were negatively correlated with academic achievement ($r(595) = -.15, p < .05$). Results obtained from multiple regressions showed that the school psychological environment predicted academic achievement ($F(1, 595) = 17.47, p < .05$). The contribution of school psychological environment as mastery focused in the prediction equation was ($\beta = 0.33, t = 4.18, p < .05$). Personal achievement goal predicted academic achievement ($F(3, 595) = 18.32, p < .05$). All the three achievement goals predicted academic achievement; performance-approach ($\beta = .28, t = 5.03, p < .05$); performance-avoidance ($\beta = -.38, t = -4.14, p < .05$); mastery goals ($\beta = .25, t = 3.40, p < .05$). The mediation analysis indicated a partial mediation of deep learning strategies in the relationship between mastery-focused school psychological environment and academic achievement. There was also a partial mediation of deep learning in the relationship between mastery goals and academic achievement. Partial mediation of surface learning strategy was equally reported in the relationship between performance-approach goals and academic achievement. The findings may help teachers to design mastery-focused learning environments where all learners may feel appreciated.

Full text: <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/20013>