

Effects of Examination Oriented Teaching on Academic Aspiration among Secondary School Students in Imenti South District, Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to examine the effects of examination oriented teaching on academic aspiration among secondary school students in Imenti South District of Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design on a target population of 14,847 respondents, comprising of teachers, students and Assistant Education Officers in Imenti South District. Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed to obtain the desired sample. Data was collected using three sets of questionnaires whose reliability was estimated by use of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient using SPSS version 17.0. The study findings indicated that examination oriented teaching negatively affects students' academic aspiration in secondary school. Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings and recommendations of this study will provide valuable reference for curriculum planning, development, administration, implementation and evaluation with a view of providing a holistic educational experience among secondary schools students in Imenti South District, Kenya.

Key terms: Academic aspiration, curriculum, Examination oriented teaching, holistic education

1. Introduction

Learning is not all about passing examinations but a holistic educational experience that imparts desired knowledge, values, attitudes and practical skills. According to [6], the main purpose of education is to produce good citizens who are respectful of the human rights laws and fairness. [13] puts it that education, especially at secondary school, is to prepare learners to make a positive contribution to the development of society and to acquire attitudes of nationalism, patriotism, adoptability, self-respect, self-reliance, cooperation, a sense of purpose and discipline among others. However, due to the high stakes placed on excelling in exams, learning in recent times is about passing examinations. Since the gate way to each level is guarded by examinations, the reward for success and penalty for failure in these examinations is substantial [11]. In the society today, more often than not, examination results decide people's future; forgetting that every individual is unique; some may excel academically while others can rely on hands-on expertise. Grades are all that matters in an examination-oriented education [10]. The major function of examination in an education system is the selection and placement in various institutions and stations in society. It also measures the output of the educational system in which it operates among others. The quality of an education system is judged according to how well its output performs their jobs and the quality of social life they lead [5].

Research has shown that examination oriented teaching is becoming a matter of global concern [3], [14]. In some countries such as Romania, Egypt, India and other Asian countries where education is prized, there appears to be a rising concern on the effects of examination oriented teaching in their education systems [3]. In reference to China's education system, [14] points out that, when test scores becomes the goal rather than self-regulated learning, students invest disproportionate value and effort in examinations. The most fundamental problem with exam-oriented education system is that examination distorts students' motivation and learning; by over emphasizing the importance of the scores as outcomes and measures of students' abilities [14]. Most students may tend to rely on private tutors for everything including home work and exam tips. [5] argues Kenya like many 3rd world countries suffer from a certificate syndrome which is a result of an adopted education system. Due to this, there has been a rising demand to make examinations more relevant to Kenya's needs and the learners' environment. [1] puts it that in Kenya, the perception of efficiency in education is through an examination index. This is because according to many an efficient school is that whose learners perform academically.

[10] posits that in Kenya examinations generally, determine people's future, in that those who pass are assured of joining good secondary schools and proceed to pursue prestigious courses at the university. Those who fail feel useless and this affects their self-esteem. They believe nothing good can come out of their efforts. In fact suicide cases have been reported in Kenya resulting from a failure to pass in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Findings of a task force on the Framework for Education and Training [12] indicates that the current education system is examination oriented as it selects students for higher education and often exclude the majority, depicting them as failures. It also develops wrong attitudes and divides the nation into white-collar workers and labourers, leaving little room for technical education. [11] explains that grades at whatever level are indicators of an individual's academic ability and those who do well are held in high esteem by teachers, pupils, parents and the public at large. For this reason teachers and parents will do anything at their disposal to ensure good grades are attained, thus putting the teachers and students in Kenyan primary and secondary schools under great pressure to produce good results. The importance laid on grades has forced some head teachers into using very unscrupulous methods such as registering weak candidates in other schools or forcing them to repeat a class.

Educational officers also expect teachers to attain good result and in turn the teachers and parents push the learners to optimum ability; especially those in examination classes. For instance during the 2009 Kenya Secondary School Heads Association Conference held in Mombasa education officials speakers, warned head teachers of dire consequences unless they attained satisfactory results in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) [8]. This concern is also brought out by [1] who observe that parents are indifferent to school curriculum, but are concerned with the steps schools and teachers take to improve performance in examinations. In addition, the Ministry of Education and the politicians send direct or indirect signals to schools that children must pass examinations as a sign of a school's efficiency or quality. [10] explains that if the goal is high grades in tests, other activities will have to be sacrificed. Teachers are bound to cut on extra-curricular activities such as sports or discourage creative activities so that the students can study longer. They then concentrate on aspects that are to be examined and skip core values.

[4] posits that undue emphasis laid on examinations, undermines effective learner assessment. The school overburdens learners with frequent continuous assessment, extra tuition, remedial teachings and loads of assignment. Some learners are enrolled for private tuition by parents over the weekend and holidays. [8] expresses concern in that examination classes are taken through mock past papers, from districts that logged excellent performance in KCSE, in cramming lessons for the sake of passing the exam. Instead of learning for understanding, learners are taken through theoretical knowledge and skills without any time to assimilate and apply what they learn. Practical instructions receive insufficient emphasis, and students have little opportunity to develop technical competencies and problem solving experiences.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to ascertain the effects of examination oriented teaching on academic aspiration among secondary school students in Imenti South District.

3. Methodology

This study adapted a descriptive survey research design. The study targeted a population of 14,847 made up of 660 teachers and 14,184 students from 67 secondary schools as well as 3 Assistant Education Officers from the three division of Imenti south district. A total of 390 respondents were selected by use of stratified random sampling and simple random sampling participated in the study. Questionnaires were used for collection of the desired data whose analysis was done using SPSS version 17.0. Percentages and frequencies were employed in data analysis whose results were presented in tables and pie charts.

4. Results of the Study

The study sought information on methods that teachers use to deliver knowledge to their learners. The findings are presented in Table 1 on a five level likert scale: Not Used (NU), Uncommon (U), Not Sure (NS), Common (C), and Most Common (MC)

Table 1: Teachers' Response on Teaching Method

Statements	NU (%)	U (%)	NS (%)	C (%)	MC (%)
Teacher dictating notes	–	22.2	3.7	66.7	7.4
Student copying notes from textbooks	–	29.6	7.4	59.3	3.7
Students copying notes from the chalk board	3.7	29.6	7.4	55.6	3.7
Answering questions from past papers	–	11.1	–	74.1	14.8
Lecture	18.5	18.5	7.4	44.4	11.1
Discussions	–	11.1	–	81.5	7.4
Practical	7.4	14.8	7.4	66.7	3.7
Rote learning	22.2	33.3	18.5	25.9	–
Research	22.2	40.7	7.4	22.2	7.4
Explanations	3.7	11.1	–	70.4	14.8
Field trips	3.7	55.6	3.7	37.0	–

On the most common teaching methods used by teachers, data analysis indicates that 81.5%, of the respondents acquired knowledge through discussions, 74.1%, through answering questions from past papers, 70.4%, explanation, 66.7% dictation of notes and practical, and 59.3% of the student copied notes from textbooks. 55.6% was recorded for those students who copied notes from the chalk board and those who went for field trips. Data results suggest that many of the method used to teach may deny learner an opportunity to actively experience a learning process. Learning is mainly teacher centred. Findings of the study indicate that knowledge is brought to learners mainly through explanation, teachers dictating note to students, discussion of past papers among students and students copying note from textbooks. This approach to learning may make learning boring, thus, creating a negative attitude towards learning. As a result learners may not achieve their academic aspiration

Teachers were required to indicate their perception on the extent to which examination teaching influences students’ academic aspirations on a five level likert scale: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (U), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA). Data analysis yielded the result presented on Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers’ Rating of Students’ Academic Aspirations

Statements	SD (%)	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
A good grade irrespective of how it is acquired helps students realize their academic aspirations.	37.0	29.6	11.1	14.8	7.4
Examination teaching is an effective method of a holistic educational experience that meets the objective of secondary school curriculum.	18.5	44.4	3.7	33.3	.0
Examination teaching helps students to see appropriate academic goals	11.1	37.0	18.5	33.3	.0
Examination teaching inspires students love and search for knowledge.	11.1	33.3	3.7	51.9	.0
Examination teaching leads to self discovery which helps a student to make appropriate a career choice and plan for it.	11.1	48.1	14.8	25.9	.0

On whether a good grade irrespective of how it is acquired helps students realize their academic aspirations, teachers’ responses were as follows: 37% of the respondents strongly disagree, 29% disagreed, and 14.8% agreed, 11.1% undecided, 7.4% strongly agree. Most of the respondents did not agree with the statement that a grade irrespective of how it is acquired helps students realize their academic aspirations. This indicates that education should not only focus on acquisition of a good grade but also ensure provision of a holistic education that helps learner to gauge their actual strengths.

On whether examination is a holistic educational experience that meets the objective of secondary school curriculum; 44.4% of the respondents disagreed, 18.5% strongly disagreed while 33.3% agreed and 3.7% remained neutral. 62.9% of the respondents were in agreement. In response to whether examination teaching helps students to set the appropriate academic goals, teachers responded as follows; 37.0% disagree, 11.1%, strongly disagree, 33.3 %, agreed and 18.5% were undecided. 47.1% of the respondents felt that examination teaching did not help students set appropriate academic goals while 33.3% agreed. Asked whether examination teaching inspires students love and search for knowledge teachers responded as follows 51.9% of the teachers agreed, 33.3% disagreed, 11.1% strongly disagreed while 3.7% were undecided. There is a considerable difference between those respondents who agreed and those who disagreed which rated at 51.9% and 44.4% respectively. In response to whether examination teaching leads to self discovery, appropriate career choice and planning, 48.1% disagree, 25.9% agreed, 14.8% was undecided and 11.1% strongly disagree. Most of the respondents felt that examination teaching did not lead to self discovery, career choice and planning rating at 59.2% while 25.9% agreed.

Teachers indicated the level at which students are guided towards knowledge inquiry and exploration approach to learning. Data analysis results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Knowledge Inquiry and Exploration Approach to Learning

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	2	7.4
Rare	5	18.5
Sometimes	13	48.2
Most of the times	7	25.9

Knowledge inquiry and exploration approach to learning data analysis was as follows: 48.2% of the respondents indicated it was used sometimes, 25.9% most of the time, 18.5% rare and 7.4% not used. Although teachers indicated a presence of knowledge inquiry and exploration approach to learning, methods used for teaching and a large number of students who indicated that they only listen to teachers and make notes, may not encourage knowledge inquiry and exploration approach to learning.

An item required the teachers to indicate the purpose of extra tuition. Data analysis results are shown on Figure 1.

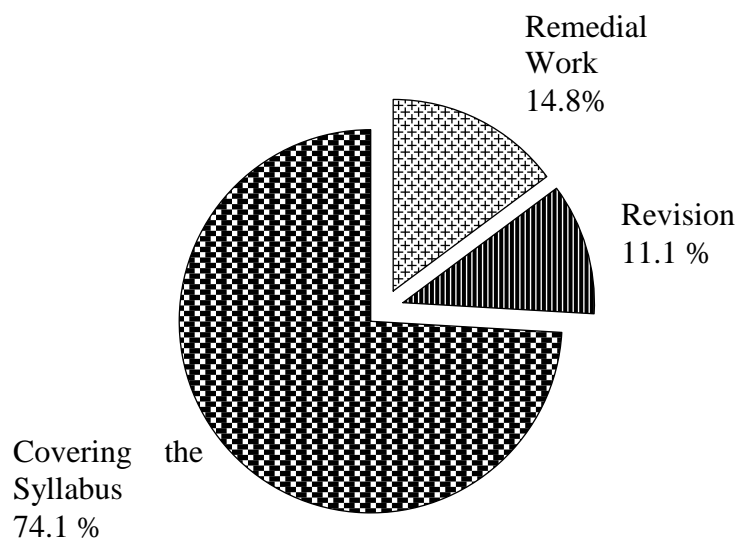


Figure 1. Purpose of Extra Tuition

From the data analysis, extra tuition teaching is mainly used to cover the syllabus rated 74.1% while 14.8% is used for remedial work and 11.1% for revision. Data analysis indicates extra tuition is mainly used to cover new content. This means that students are not given time to assimilate, internalize and apply what they learn. Learning therefore is reduced to an activity of passing examinations. Due to this Kenyans secondary school learners may be graduating with a lack of practical skills and desired values and attitudes. Students may not be taken through a holistic educational experience to enable them understand their abilities to realize their academic aspirations because of over-concentration on theoretical knowledge and skills. Study findings indicate extra-tuition lessons are used to cover the syllabus other than remedial teaching. Teachers are under pressure to complete the syllabus in time to leave enough time for revision in preparation for national exams, to ensure a good grade. This means that if the syllabus is to be completed in good time at form four, there must be a pull down effect from form one; implying that extra-tuition has to be done from form one. This leaves little or no room for students to absorb, internalize and conceptualize what they learn at all levels. This may hinder them from achieving their academic aspiration.

An item required Assistant Education Officers to rate students' desire towards search for knowledge beyond what is learnt in class. Analysis results are displayed in Figure 2.

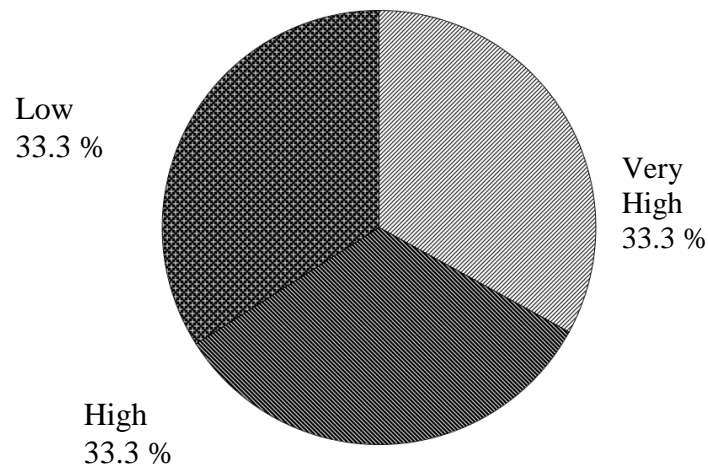


Figure 2. Desire towards Search for Knowledge

On students' desire towards search for knowledge beyond what is taught in class, data analysis indicated 33.33% on the three levels; very high, high and low. A total of 66.6% responded in the positive which contradicts the teachers' responses of 59.6% on the negative.

5. Discussion of Results

This study indicated that learning is skewed towards cognitive knowledge neglecting affective, psychomotor and social domains of knowledge. [13] maintains that secondary school education is meant to prepare students to make a positive contribution to the development of society. This may not be achieved if instructions stress on cognitive knowledge and basic skills or a situation where taught facts and theoretical skills are rarely applied in real-life situations. Data analysis showed that a large number of schools in Imenti South District had more than the 9 recommended lessons a day, by the Ministry of Education, Kenya. Most of the respondents indicated that they had other lessons outside normal learning time that is between 8am and 4pm. They also have holiday tuition lasting two, to three weeks. The finding confirms [9] suggestion that the curriculum found in Kenyan schools today stresses on the teaching of the subject matter forgetting that the child's needs are paramount. This approach to teaching and learning may hinder students from achieving their academic aspirations.

The findings indicated that extra-tuition is used to cover the syllabus. This confirms [7] argument that teachers' covers new topics and concepts either before or after teaching hours in the name of remedial teaching, subjecting the entire class to teaching outside the recommended time. According to this study, teachers are able to cover the syllabus in good time, to enable them prepare students for the national examination. This is in line with the [12] observation that teachers still teach beyond the recommended time because of the need to finish the syllabuses early, so as to leave room for revision and drilling; in preparation for national examinations; despite the reduction of the curriculum load and the number of subject offered both at the standard eight KCPE and the form four KCSE levels.

Results on learning methods indicates that teachers use methods, such as dictating notes, asking learners to copy notes from textbooks and explanation. This indicates that teachers deliver knowledge and information to students as passive recipients. In an examination oriented education system practical instructions receive

insufficient emphasis, as indicated by responses on learning method. As a result students may have little opportunity to develop technical competencies and problem solving experiences [8]. This study also indicates that students are prepared for national examinations through examination drilling. This supports findings of a task force on students discipline and unrest in secondary schools report that, teachers are more pre-occupied in testing and examining learners at the expense of moulding [12]. Due to drilling for good grade in national exams, students may not be able to realize their academic aspiration or set appropriate career goals.

This study observed that to cover substantial ground in the syllabus, in a short time teachers use the expository approach or strategy. For common and most common responses on teaching methods, most responses by students, teachers and Assistant Education Officers indicated that teachers brought knowledge to the student through explanation. These are direct instructions with the teacher mostly telling the learners while the learner passively listens and takes notes. This deprives learners an opportunity to take charge of their studies. This is supported by [2] who puts it that, a human being has an inherent desire to self-actualization and that learners should be able to realize their full potentials if their teachers provided them with a right learning environment; where the learners are empowered to have control of their learning, in such a way that the teacher relinquishes a great deal of authority and become a facilitator.

An effective learning process is where learning activities are designed to allow students to learn by doing, because it promotes thinking and discovery. [5] argues that learners should be guided to take responsibility of their education and their learning. Majority of the students pointed out that they just listen or take notes during lessons. This leads to the transfer of basic information for the learner to memorize and produce later in exams. Expository strategy is responsible for shallow learning claims (Ornstein, 1990). This supports [8] who posits that knowledge and information delivered to students as passive recipients may not be relevant to the specific problems they confront outside the classroom.

Teachers tended to rate themselves high in their response on whether students were guided towards knowledge inquiry and exploration approach to learning. This is because if this approach was used, it would influence students' desire to search for knowledge which teachers rated low. Methods of teaching used by teachers may not be effective in encouraging students' to desire and search for knowledge. [9] feels that students who only receive knowledge from their teachers may become individuals who have no desire to further educate themselves. If this happens learners may not work hard towards academic achievement and realization of their academic aspiration

Learning should arouse curiosity of the learner, which in turn encourages the student to seek for knowledge [2]. A teacher should provide support for students to explore their world and discover knowledge thus giving inquiry and exploration approaches a chance [11]. Findings of this study indicate that examination oriented teaching may not achieve this because learners are not actively involved in search for knowledge. As a result learners are not able to discover their abilities. Responses by teachers and Assistant Education Officers suggests that examination oriented teaching does not give learners a holistic educational experience. Due to this students may not set appropriated academic goals, or get inspired to love and search for knowledge. Teachers and Assistant Education Officers also indicated that students were not able to choose appropriate careers based on their abilities.

A sound education system is one that seeks to nurture the recipients of that education, to be able to release their potential for national development and cohesion. Therefore education should not only focus just on acquisition of a good grade but also ensure provision of a holistic education, which involves impartation of appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that helps learner identify and develop their actual strengths. Respondents in this study indicate that a good grade if not acquired through a holistic educational experience did not help students realize their academic aspirations. According to [8] Kenya has a wasted generation of idlers and muggers yet they have university degrees.

Based on the foregoing one would conclude that a good grade that is not acquired through appropriate educational experience may not help students to achieve their academic aspiration. This is because students may rate their intellectual abilities very high. This observation is supported by [4] who says that “an excellent grade gotten through rote learning is a “fake” it gives use half baked students who pass off as genius, when they are in the final analysis very average”. Therefore examination oriented teaching may not be an effective method of helping students realize their academic aspiration.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that examination oriented teaching may not help secondary school students to achieve their academic aspirations. This is because teachers concentrate on the cognitive domain; equipping learners with knowledge and theoretical skills through examination oriented teaching which would enable them pass examinations instead of providing a holistic educational experience. Additionally, students spend much time in academics, leaving them with little or no time to build social skills away from books. Worse still, the students rely on teachers wholly to provide knowledge because learning is basically teacher centred. Unfortunately, the students are drilled through past examination papers and assessment tests for them to reproduce the acquired knowledge during national examinations. This means that the major task of the teacher is to enable students acquire a good grade at the expense of imparting desired knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Hence, the learners become passive recipients of knowledge as they only listen to the teacher, or take notes without reading widely for more knowledge beyond what is brought to them by their teachers. Therefore, learners may not realize their academic aspiration when teachers fail to provide an appropriate learning environment where students are empowered to take control of their own learning.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations emanated from the finding of this study:

- i. Curriculum planners, developers and designers should evaluate content to be taught, its method of delivery and testing to ensure that learning and testing covers the four domains of knowledge.
- ii. The Ministry of Education should ensure that secondary school curriculum implementation is done appropriately within the time frame of each level. At the same time, teachers should adhere to the appropriate implementation of Secondary School Curriculum in order to avoid examination oriented teaching.
- iii. Achievement of schools, teachers and students should not only be pegged on a grade but also on how well students excel in other areas such as sports or discipline which results from a holistic educational experience of moulding an all round individual.
- iv. Learning should be made as natural as possible with the learner being allowed to get actively involved in the learning experience so as to make learning enjoyable.

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