

Effectiveness of Academic Strategies Applied to Enhance Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools: A Case of Ulanga District, Tanzania

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Abstract

The study assessed the effectiveness of academic strategies applied to enhance students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Ulanga District, Tanzania. A mixed-methods research approach with convergent parallel design was employed. Both purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select ten public secondary schools with 110 participants (10 school heads and 100 classroom teachers). Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and documentary review. Qualitative data were analysed by thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed by descriptive and inferential statistics by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0. Findings from the study revealed that the schools used a variety of strategies to enhance students' academic performance including maintaining student's discipline, reinforcement rewards, different assessment methods and teacher-student relationships in the teaching and learning process. The strategies were effective only they were well-formulated and properly implemented to attain the desired goals regardless. It is concluded that there is a positive relationship between effective strategies and students' academic performance.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Academic Strategies, Effectiveness

1.0 Introduction

Education is one of the most promising paths for individuals to realize better and more productive lives (Glennister, Kremer & Takavarasha, 2011). For any education system to be worthwhile, teaching strategies are very crucial because their influence leads to the effectiveness of the

student learning process and their performance (Wong & Wong, 2011). However, there is a concern in many countries about whether teaching strategies used in secondary schools promote quality learning whether students achieve the expected performance; and also, if they are prepared adequately to attain the required skills, attitudes and knowledge to develop as holistic individuals.

In Kenya, the taskforce on realigning education to the country's new constitution documented that the education failed to address holistic development of learners (Glennerster et al., 2011). Kwek (2011) argues that in many countries today, teaching approaches and methods in schools are wanting, given that most teachers apply teaching methodologies that consider students as passive listeners. Accordingly, teachers resort to coaching students for high-stakes testing (Kwek, 2011). The result is that it limits students' abilities for creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

The effort to improve the academic performance of students in public schools has occupied an important debate of the Tanzania education system (Okode, 2013): The management teams of public secondary schools strive to raise their students' academic performance through various strategies including remedial classes, regular tests, academic competitions, rewards to teachers and students performing well in examinations and subject clubs. The education skills and knowledge acquired by students depend on the interaction between the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter and pedagogical ability, which in turn, guarantees better students' performance (Rosenshine, 2012).

Despite the important role that teachers play in enabling students to perform well, reports show a serious lack of a range of skills and

competencies on the part of the students. One may question the effectiveness of the teaching strategies that teachers use in the process. This anomaly has been a concern of many education stakeholders and presumably school heads and classroom teachers, to address the situation, have devised school-based strategies to upscale students' performance. It is against this background that this study sought to assess the effectiveness of strategies in improving students' performance in Tanzanian public secondary schools. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) What types of school-based academic strategies were employed by public secondary school heads and teachers to enhance students' performance?
- b) How effective were the academic strategies employed by heads and teachers in enhancing students' performance?

2.0 Academic Strategies Employed to Enhance Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

The first research question was asked "what types of school-based academic strategies were employed by public secondary school heads and teachers to enhance students' performance?" to answer this question, various empirical literature reviews were consulted. Rosenshine (2012) identified ten research-based principles of effective instruction that teachers should put into practice to improve students' performance. The principles state that a teacher should begin a lesson with a short review of previous learning, present new material in small steps, provide students with an opportunity to practice at each step, ask relevant questions and check students' responses, provide models, guide students practice, check for students understanding, require and monitor

independent practice, and engage students in regular reviews. The importance of students' learning and the outcome of their performance continues to be of global concern.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2008) has emphasized the importance of improved teaching by incorporating 21st century skills that include critical thinking skills, problem-solving, language proficiency, communication and collaborative skills, cognitive skills, adaptability skills and the ability to make judgments. Teaching is successful where there is a teacher-to-student interaction, including availability of material inputs and motivation (Amos et al., 2015). McTighe and Wiggins (2012) argue that teachers are like coaches to students, who ensure that what is taught is assumed to have been learned and understood.

2.1 Effectiveness of Academic Strategies Applied to Enhance Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

School Improvement Network (2014) emphasizes the importance of learning expectations by stating five components in the learning environment that enable students to succeed; setting a vision and high expectations, establishing clear procedures, offering support and cultivating relationships, providing relevant engaging instruction and defining appropriate interventions and strategies. A friendly learning environment should be characterized by dimensions of effectiveness such as; inclusiveness, healthiness, protectiveness and safety (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2015).

According to Kagawa (2003), school-based strategies increase communication and engagement among staff because they engage with the same goals and objectives. In a large organization like schools,

communication is critical so that everyone understands his or her responsibilities and department are effective in coordinating their efforts. The student's ability to behave well influences their growth and positive development in school. Effective students' performance promotes effective classroom management, which imparts to students a sense of responsibility, self-control and realization of optimal learning. From the students' point of view, effective classroom management accounts for 32 per cent of teacher effectiveness (Stoop, 2011; Owoyemi & Adesoji, 2012).

Student-centred instruction in the classroom is imperative in controlling behaviour and realizing students' performance. Wilkinson and Meiers (2007) argued that there is no single solution to managing students' behaviour in the classrooms. However, schools with programmes on behaviour management can create an environment to undertake different classroom tasks. Wright (2012) recommended screening students with social problems and providing intervention measures to address the identified academic and behavioural problems. Mgani (2013) stated that strong leadership is associated with high organizational development, teaching effectiveness, strong organizational culture and positive principal teacher's relationship, more participation in decision-making, and high teacher aspiration and professionalism.

3.0 Materials and Methods

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design. This study was conducted in Ulanga District involving 10 public secondary schools. The respondents of this study consisted of 10 heads of schools and 100 teachers. The heads of schools were purposively selected by virtue of their positions as educational managers so that they have sufficient information on the strategies they use and their

effectiveness in enhancing students' academic achievement. Teachers were randomly selected because of having the character of possessing related information as regards the study questions.

Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and documentary reviews. The instruments were tested for validity and reliability before being administered in the field. Data analysis involved coding, entry and analysis using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics used for quantitative involved frequencies and percentages under the assistance of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. While qualitative data were analysed thematically under the research themes.

4.0 Identification of Academic Strategies Employed by School to Enhance Students' Academic Performance

The first objective meant to gather information was to identify the types of strategies used to enhance student's academic performance. Through face-to-face interviews, heads of schools were asked to share information regarding the types of strategies that they use to raise the academic performance of their students. The identification of school-based strategies was grouped into three aspects: First, schools use reinforcement, rewards and extra time to teach their students. The following sub-themes were identified on what teachers use reinforcement to enhance students' academic performance. Table 1 summarizes the responses.

Table 1: Teachers’ Responses on the Identification of School-based Strategies in Enhancing Students’ Academic Performance

Strategies	Teachers’ responses N= 100	Total Percentage
Use reinforcement	94	94%
Using rewards	84	84%
Using extra hours in teaching	90	90.0%

4.1 Teachers Use Reinforcement in Enhancing Students’ Academic Performance

From Table 1, the findings show that 94(94%) teachers responded that they use reinforcement to influence students to learn. This finding entails that reinforcement is one of the best strategies teachers use to influence students learning. Likewise, during an interview with the head of schools, the majority of them mentioned reinforcement as the most common strategy teachers use to influence students learning. The head of schools mentioned the use of punishment for instance the use of sticks and other corporal punishment like pit digging, or making flour beds. In view of this, one of the interviewed heads of the school had this to say: *“We use punishment to our students to follow school rules and regulations, because when you leave them to do what they want it will not be a school and the academic performance will fall rapidly”* (Interview with Head of School A, 29th March, 2022).

This narration from the head of the school and the answers from questionnaires indicate reinforcement was one of the strategies used by schools to enhance academic performance. The school academic strategies begin with the school setting a direction by articulating a timetable for schools, specific goals consistent with that timetable and a

framework of best practices that heads of schools can use to achieve that vision and meet key goals. The strategies give school management and their teachers the support, the capacity, the resources and the flexibility to meet their goals.

This finding is in line with a study by Rosenshine (2012) who identified ten research-based principles of effective instruction that teachers should put into practice to improve students' performance. The principles state that a teacher should begin a lesson with a short review of previous learning, present new material in small steps, provide students with an opportunity to practice at each step, ask relevant questions and check students' responses, provide models, guide students practice, check for students understanding, require and monitor independent practice, and engage students in regular reviews.

The district education office can assist each school leadership team in developing a school improvement plan and provide the resources, high-quality professional development, technical assistance, coaching and feedback to the school principal and teachers, then the school leadership team should be held accountable for implementing the plan with fidelity and, eventually, for improved student performance.

The strategy should focus on motivating and engaging students in learning and achievement can become an individual mandate that all educators follow from the Education Ministry to the classroom teacher. The focus on students' intellectual and academic growth can become a matter of teachers' self-regulation rather than a response to external pressure as the school establishes benchmarks to ensure that students are on track to graduate from high school prepared for college and careers. This finding lines with a study finding by McTighe and Wiggins (2012)

who argued that teachers are like coaches to students, who ensure that what is taught is assumed to have been learned and understood.

4.2 Schools Use Rewards in Enhancing Students' Academic Performance

From Table 1 the results show that 84(84%) teachers responded positively to the use of rewarding strategies as a means to enhance students' academic achievement. This implies that teachers use reward methods to encourage students to study hard aiming at doing better in their exams. In the same vein during interviews with teachers, the majority of them have a view that rewarding strategy is one of the best strategies that influences positive responses from students. Some of the mentioned rewards given to students include learning materials like books, exercise books, money and a promise that when they will pass the given examinations, they will be given a tour visit to one of the national parks. Given this, one of the interviewed academic masters from school B had this to say:

We give regular examinations to our students, these include weekly tests, monthly tests, mid-term tests and annual examination whereby the first, second and third students in each class are given gifts to motivate them to maintain or increase their academic performance, also, teachers are provided with reward when they produce "A" grade of his or her subjects, this reward includes money and pieces of clothes (Interview with Academic Master, School B, 30th March, 2022).

Through documentary review, the researcher noted there is a positive relationship between teachers and heads of schools in fulfilling their daily routine, particularly in implementing school strategies to make sure that the school met the target which they made to increase the pass

mark average in their National examinations of Form IV (CSEE), Form Two (FTNA) and Form Six (ACSEE). Teachers work together to attain those objectives in relation to head of schools who's his responsibility is to supply all necessary teaching and learning materials which will lead to meeting the target.

The findings concur with the study by Kwaslema and Onyanyo, (2021) which found that teachers are committed to implementing strategies such that teachers construct various examinations for their students to achieve higher. On the other side, Okode (2013) stressed that strategies help teachers and students to be committed to the teaching and learning process toward a specific target, strategies in a school system give a focus and direction for the future by continuously guiding toward a specific direction. Every school member should work according to the duty provided. The school administrator should ensure that all required teaching and learning materials are provided on time and the rewards established to attract students to meet the target, teachers should provide an education which meets the needs of the students and students should study hard. This guarantees the fulfilment of the specified plans that are made in the school.

Based on the study done by Franskus et al. (2021), the results of annual evaluation indicate that nine schools (69.2%) implement strategies consistently in their annual plans, while four schools (30.8%) design annual programmes that differ from the strategies. The four schools only involved the teacher and staff. Participation of the stakeholders provides a vehicle for schools to engage in a dialogue to formulate certain goals. The education stakeholders must be involved in initiating the school programmes for the student's academic improvement; these stakeholders include parents, guardians and school board members.

There are choices but the most important that school has to agree on the common needs of their students. Besides, the forum of the stakeholders becomes both a moral support and a control mechanism for the school to implement the intended goals (Moeng, 2014; Syahrul, 2017). If the school does not involve the stakeholders most probably it will not implement the plan consistently. 9(69.2%) out of 13 schools acknowledged that they did not involve external stakeholders, such as parents, alumni, and school board members.

The practice relates to its background of the local tradition that all the decisions are drawn by those who have authority and higher social status. This elitist approach has been a custom and in common view, the leaders have a responsibility to construct the plan and make decisions. Therefore, it is important to understand the interests of key stakeholders to manoeuvre an organization or a project with a minimum of conflict. Stakeholder analysis is particularly useful in mapping key stakeholders of a project and identifying their respective interests in the project.

4.3 Teachers Use Extra Time in the Teaching and Learning Process

Regarding teachers using extra time as one of the strategies to ensure students perform well in academics, it is revealed that 90(90%) teachers' responses indicated that teachers use the extra time to teach the students for the sake of raising their students' academic performance, this extra time includes time after normal time table to finish and the time before normal time table to start and the weekends they use to teach their students. Likewise, during interviews with heads of schools, the study findings show that remedial class is one of the strategies schools have to ensure good academic results for their students. The common time the heads of schools mentioned is after normal class hours whereby teachers

use to volunteer themselves help students learn and accomplish lesson content within the timeframe. In this view, one of the interviewed academic masters in school C had this to say:

Our school tends to use the extra hours to teach our students because we all know that some of the students are slow learners so they need extra time to grasp the materials, and indeed I thank the teachers of this school they teach this extra time without complain and they don't claim any payment, that is a good culture we made. Such remedial time is often after normal routine class hours and it is usually for students who are prepared to sit for a national assessment (Interview with Academic Master, School C, 1st April, 2022).

The findings reveal that teachers were in good order to take their time and teach the students as views from academic master and the results from the questionnaire answered by teachers on the effort to use their extra time in teaching their students. This finding is in line with a study by Amos et al. (2015) who found teaching is only successful where there is a teacher-to-student interaction; including the availability of material inputs and motivation. In this case, for teachers to spare extra time with their students is to increase a teacher-student interaction. For instance, students who are slow learners get more time to digest various concepts they failed to understand during normal class hours.

4.4 The Assessment of School Strategies in Enhancing Student's Academic Performance

In the second question, the study sought to assess the effectiveness of school strategies in enhancing student's academic performance. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' Responses to the Effectiveness of School Strategies

Effective school strategies	Teachers' responses N=100	Total Percentage
Promote social-emotional development	77	77%
Promote positive teacher-students relationship	90	90%

Data presented in Table 2 imply that the strategies promote social-emotional development of students' behaviour through developing various learning styles and helping each other for the sake of seeking academic achievement for every student in that particular school. 77(77%) teachers ascertained that teaching and learning strategies provide opportunities for students to explore various inputs in cognitive skills because they have an opportunity to strive for themselves in their studies in the steady of waiting to be taught by teachers. In this view, one of the heads of school B said:

It is very important to induce different teaching and learning strategies in our students because relying on one strategy makes some students hang behind, I know our students have different learning abilities, other are fast learners, moderate and others are slow learners, therefore, the teachers must use as much as possible strategies to accommodate all students' needs (Interview with Head of School, School B 30th May, 2022).

The findings from the interview and questionnaire reveal that a variety of teaching and learning strategies encourage the students' social-emotional development and promote a sense of helping each other in all

difficulties concerning the academic. Also, they convey that some students are capable in one subject while others are not capable so they are encouraged to help one other. This concurs with the findings by McFarlane (2010) who noted that due to the changing learning environment arising from the advent of the digital age, teachers should increasingly update their teaching strategies. This will address the needs of diverse students, increase students' participation in learning and assist in reflecting on ways of increasing teachers' motivation while addressing emerging teaching and learning challenges in the classroom. The study finding further agrees with Strobel (2010) and Lai (2011) who suggested that exposure to academic efficacy leads to improved student performance.

Secondly, the study findings also reveal that employing different teaching and learning strategies influences the promotion of positive relationships between teachers and students in terms of the teaching and learning process where students will be confidently asking and answering questions provided as presented in Table 2, 90(90%) teachers said that a positive relationship between teachers and students harmonizes students' learning spirit in the sense that the students will not fear their teaching-learning process. One of the heads of schools interviewed in school E explained:

I used to insist the relationship between teachers and students should fall under condition and it should be on academic issues only because when teachers are left alone to engage in relationships with students other will create negative relationships like sexual relationships with female students. So, I strongly discourage the close relationship, it should be a relationship with boundaries (Interview with Head of School E, 29th March, 2022).

Through the documentary review, the researcher observed that all teachers observe the pre-caution given by their heads of schools on the interaction made between teachers and their students, the relationship should focus on the teaching and learning process only, this finding is in line with the study by Rabea (2017), on his study of social distance teachers' beliefs and teaching practices in a context of social disadvantage, who contended that teachers tend to favour the good students and can rarely adapt the practice to help remove disadvantages for low-performing children or those from marginalized backgrounds.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In view of the research findings, the following conclusions can be made; first, teachers have developed management strategies for coping with the school management to use the set school-based strategies, particularly for the favour of their students in enhancing their academic performance. Some of the strategies developed were common to most teachers and have great potential to facilitate effective teaching-learning if well-nurtured and facilitated by the school management including the provision of required teaching and learning materials, which focus on the large important needs needed by their students.

Teachers should also review more teaching and learning strategies like using student-centred methods rather than using teachers-cantered and employ teaching and learning assessments to counterbalance to which extent the teaching and learning influenced teaching and learning are effective and bring positive outcomes in academics. In addition, teachers should link the strategies and the co-curricular activities and the teaching and learning process on how they contribute to the students' academic performance.

Second, the school management should set their strategies which are “SMART”, which means they should be specific, measurable, attainable (achievable), relevant and time-bound, through setting their objectives and goals they should bear in mind that those plans must fall under the above criteria for the success of their school-base strategic plans. The study further concludes that through strategies schools should plan on how to have adequate teaching and learning resources for every department, adequate infrastructure for use for curriculum delivery, the required number of teachers for the subjects in every department, and allocation of finances to every department to run its programmes.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the strategies must reflect the improvement of academic performance and more teaching and learning strategies to apply by the school management to influence academic performance. Also, the school-based strategies must be assessed by the education officers, who are available at the ward level, district level, and regional level for further implementation and making general conscious for amendment from the education stakeholders as well. On the other hand, it is recommended that the government should provide enough teaching and learning materials for the schools to meet the target of enhancing students’ academic performance.

The government, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, should provide regular teachers’ workshops, seminars and in-service teacher development programmes and equal distribution of incentives to both science teachers against social science teachers. The government must increase the budget of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, which will accommodate all plans sought by the government including workshops and other related activities for the

career development of teachers for the excellent performance of their students.

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