

The School Prefects', Responsibilities and Academic Work Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Nakuru District, Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Prefects are student leaders elected or appointed and assigned administrative duties in schools. Besides their school responsibilities, prefects are expected to perform their academic work well and attain good grades in class tests and national examinations like other students. According to reports in Nakuru District Education Office, achievement in examinations of public secondary school students decline when they take up prefects' responsibilities. Perhaps this may be due to the influence of school responsibilities on their academic work. This study sought to investigate the influence of school responsibilities on prefects' academic work performance in public secondary schools in Nakuru District. The study used the descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling was used to select the 15 secondary schools that participated in the study. A sample of 15 deputy principals, 45 class teachers and 150 school prefects were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Three instruments; Deputy Head teachers' interview guide (DHTIG), Class teachers' (CTQ) and Prefects' questionnaires (PQ) were used to collect data. The three data collection tools were validated by a team of four experts from the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Management, Egerton University. The reliabilities of CTQ and PQ were estimated using the Cronbach Alpha method. Their reliability coefficients were 0.70 and 0.73 respectively. Data were analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.2. The study established that there were significant differences on prefects' academic work performance by school responsibilities performance category. The study recommended that the teachers provide remedial teaching and academic counseling to prefects so that they can attain good grades in national examinations for entry to higher education.

Keywords: Academic work performance, Prefects, School responsibilities

Education is a fundamental human right, a key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and among countries (Wolfenson, 2000). It ensures an individual a productive future, helps in making decisions and bolsters confidence. Education also provides a ladder for achieving success in life and enables one to utilize skills and caliber in a constructive way. It is a welfare indicator, a key determinant of earnings, an important exit route from poverty and can reduce social and economic inequality (Government of Kenya [GOK], 2005). The role of education is not just to impart knowledge and skills that enable the beneficiaries to function as economies and social change agents in society, but also to impart values, ideas, attitudes and aspirations important for natural development (Nsubuga, 2003).

According to Boit, Njoki and Chang'ach (2012), the purpose of education is to equip the citizenry to reshape their society and eliminate inequality presented in levels of primary and secondary education.

Secondary education is regarded as the most important stage in the educational cycle of a child in Kenya. It is the level at which learners are expected to acquire proficiency in both academic and applied subjects. Secondary school education is important because it is the foundation for further education, training and work (Koech, 2006). It is expected to provide for an all round mental, social, moral and spiritual development and ensure balanced development in cognitive, psycho-motor

and affective skills of students. Secondary education is expected to lead to the acquisition of positive attitudes, self-respect, self-reliance, cooperation, adaptability, sense of purpose, integrity and self-discipline, respect and consideration for others, service to family, society and nation (Bogonko, 1994).

In Kenya, Secondary schools are categorized as either public or private, boarding or day schools. The public schools are further categorized as national, provincial and district schools (Republic of Kenya [ROK], 1988). Secondary schools in Kenya are managed by the Board of Governors (BOG) and the school administration which consists of the principal and his/her deputy. The BOG is in charge of decision-making and policy making whereas the school administration assisted by the senior teachers, head of departments (HODs) and the prefects carry out the day-to-day administrative tasks. The school administration interprets and implements policies made by BOG in addition to undertaking routine and advisory work. Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) also plays a major role in the management of secondary school by raising funds to construct physical facilities and to purchase the required instructional equipment and materials (Wango, 2009).

In secondary schools, prefects are student leaders who are elected or appointed and assigned specific duties and responsibilities by the school administration. Prefects play an important role in the day to day running and maintaining of students' discipline in secondary schools. In many British and Commonwealth schools, prefects have considerable power and effectively run the school outside the classroom. The roles and responsibilities of prefects are to: assist in maintaining acceptable behaviors standards, discipline and order among students in the school (Berger, 2002; Griffin, 1994 & Otieno, 2010). Prefects' responsibilities in Kenyan schools include; giving directions, management of daily routine, presenting students' issues for attention and action as well as enforcing school rules and regulations. The responsibilities and duties for position of school captain, deputy school captain, games prefect, dining hall prefect, library prefect, compound prefect, dormitory prefect, entertainment prefect and class prefect are clearly defined (Otieno, 2010). The role of prefects in school administration in Kenya and other parts of the world is increasingly becoming more complex because of the changes in technology, society, culture, emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS, STDs and drug abuse (Muli, 2012).

Prefects like other students are expected to attain good grades in class tests and national examinations besides their responsibilities as prefects. The KCSE results of 2008, 2009 and 2010 of 82% of public secondary schools in Nakuru district,

reveal that less than 50% of prefects attain grade C+ which is the minimum requirement for the entry to quality courses in tertiary institutions and universities in Kenya (KNEC, 2008, 2009 and 2010). Good grades can only be attained if they perform their academic work diligently. Prefects are supposed to observe academic discipline by handing in homework on time, being attentive in class, preparing adequately for examinations and other activities related to academic pursuits (Bakhda, 2006). According to Bogonko (1994), poor performance in KCSE for any student means that one will likely miss the opportunity for higher education or gainful employment. Therefore, the study sought to investigate the influence of school responsibilities on prefects' academic work performance in public secondary schools in Nakuru District, Nakuru County.

Research Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The design was chosen because it is suitable for collecting information that describes an existing phenomenon by asking individuals about their perceptions and opinions (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Kathuri and Pal (1993) recommended the design in situations when the purpose of a study is to explain or explore the existing status of a situation at a given time. The study was carried out in public day secondary schools in Nakuru district.

The population of study included 22 deputy head teachers, 135 class teachers and 450 school prefects in public secondary schools in Nakuru District. Nakuru District has 22 public secondary schools (Nakuru District Education Office, 2010). Out of this number 20 are day schools and the rest are boarding schools. Only day schools participated in this study since there are variations in responsibilities between prefects in boarding and day schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 15 public day secondary schools in Nakuru District. All the deputy head teachers of the 15 public day secondary schools participated in this study. The sample sizes of class teachers and prefects were determined using the recommendation of Kothari (2004) which asserts that one third of the total population is considered a representative of the population under study. On the basis of the recommendation, a sample of 45 class teachers and 150 school prefects were drawn from the populations. Proportional sampling technique was used to determine number of class teachers and prefects by class. A list of class teachers and school prefects was obtained from the deputy head teachers. Simple random sampling was used to select 3 class teachers and 10 school prefects from each school.

Two questionnaires, the Class Teachers' Questionnaires (CTQ) and Prefects' Questionnaires (PQ) on five-point Likert- scale and the Deputy Head Teachers' Interview Guide (DHTIG) were used to collect data. The CTQ, PQ and the DHTIG were checked for content and face validity by a team of four experts from the Faculty of Education and Community Studies Egerton University. Piloting was done in order to check the reliability of the research instruments. The reliability of CTQ and PQ was estimated using the Cronbach alpha method. The CTQ and PQ questionnaires had a reliability of 0.70 and 0.73 respectively; hence, the questionnaires were accepted as reliable.

A code book was prepared and the codes in the book were then used to code the collected data. A data sheet was prepared using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.4 computer application. The coded data was keyed into the computer and analyzed. Data was described and summarized using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. Classification of the mean rating was done using ranking of the index on a scale of 1 to 5 where 2.33 and below was ranked poor, 2.34 to 3.66 average and 3.67 to 5.00 good. The influence was determined by comparing the after appointment academic work performance means scores with school responsibility performance category (poor, average and good).

Results and Discussion

The study sought to provide an answer to the influence of prefects' school responsibilities on performance of their academic work. Two sets of data were required: i) Prefects' performance of school responsibilities. ii) Prefects' performance of their academic work after appointment as prefects. Prefects' self evaluation of performance of their school responsibilities was sought. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Prefects' Performance of School Responsibilities Grading

Rating	Frequency	Percent
Poor	21	14.0
Average	10	6.6
Good	118	79.4
Total	149	100

As indicated in Table 1, a majority 118 (79.4%) of the prefects rated their performance of school responsibilities as good while 10 (6.6%) rated it average and 21 (14%) rated their performance of school responsibilities as poor.

The study sought further information on prefects' performance of school responsibilities from the deputy head teachers. Deputy head teachers' rating was important because they are in charge of discipline in secondary schools and frequently interact with prefects. The results are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Deputy Head Teachers' Rating of Prefects' Performance of School Responsibilities

Responsibilities		
Rating	Frequency	Percent
Average	1	7.1
Fluctuates	2	14.3
Good	11	78.6
Total	14	100

The study revealed that a majority 11 (78.6%) of the deputy head teachers rated prefects' performance of school responsibilities as good, 1 (7.1%) rated performance as average and 2 (14.3%) indicated that prefects' performance of school responsibilities fluctuates.

The study established that prefects' performance of school responsibilities was good. This is consistent with Bakhda (2006) who contends that prefect body is composed of students who are reliable and effective. The prefects make sure that school rules are observed by all students at all times and are able to communicate with those who do not follow school rules. Bakda observes that regular meetings are organized to discuss the prefects' duties and their effectiveness. The findings are also in line with Wango (2009) who asserts that a good prefect is responsible, respectable, self-disciplined, mature, a role model and has positive leadership qualities. The findings are also consistent with Griffin (1994) who observed that in Starehe Boys', most of the routine day to day organization and discipline of the school, outside of the classroom, is done by the prefects who do it extremely well. Griffin asserts that a sound prefect system is a splendid thing and time invested in producing it pays rich dividends. The findings are also consistent with Harry (1994) assertion that a prefect is a member of a student body who is deemed more responsible than other students, and as such is given additional powers and responsibilities. The study further sought to determine prefects' performance of academic work after appointment as a prefect. Prefects' responses were scored and results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Prefects’ Performance of Academic Work after Appointment as a Prefect.

Performance of academic work	After appointmentN	Mean	S.D
Set academic goals with realistic chances of success	135	3.90	0.94
Develop interest in learning	135	4.16	0.89
Attend lessons regularly	134	4.37	0.91
Actively participate during lessons	136	4.17	0.97
Perform my laboratory assignments	132	3.84	1.03
Visit the library whenever the need arises	133	3.50	1.14
Develop good study skills and habits	135	3.87	0.98
Prepare personal study time	136	3.91	1.07
Follow the prepared study time	136	3.71	1.09
Do all the class assignments on time	134	4.00	1.05
Sit for all the tests/exams as scheduled	137	4.61	0.73
Use the tests/exams results to plan for academic progress	133	4.02	0.99
Manage time well(balance academic, co-curriculum and my responsibilities as a prefect)	135	3.89	1.04
Overall mean of academic work performance after appointment as a prefect	141	3.82	0.74

The study revealed that prefects’ academic work performance after appointment as a prefect that had highest mean (4.61) was sitting for all the tests/exams as scheduled. The study also found that prefects’ performance of their academic work after appointment as a prefect was good in: following the prepared timetable; performing laboratory assignments; developing good study skills and habits; managing time well; preparing personal study time and setting academic goals with realistic chances of success. Others included; doing all class assignments on time; using the tests/exams results to plan for academic progress; developing interest in learning; actively participating during lessons and attending lessons regularly. The study further found that prefects’ academic work performance after appointment as a prefect that had the lowest mean (3.50) was visiting the library whenever the need arises. The study found that the overall mean of academic work performance before and after appointment as a prefect was 3.67 and 3.82 respectively. The performance index was relatively higher after appointment as a prefect. This indicates a good performance of academic work. This implies that appointment as a prefect led to improved performance of academic work as in Table 3.

The findings agree with Otieno (2010) who noted that a prefect should be hardworking in class and that a prefect who does well in class commands respect from other students. The results also agree with Muriithi (2007) and Sadker (1994) assertion that achievement in examinations is affected by the extent to which a student has covered the topics that are being examined, attends all classes, actively participates in class and diligently completes assignment on time. The results also agree with Hudley and Gottfried (2008) who noted that being liked

and appreciated by others is likely to result to in more academic help and assistance from teachers and peers, which in turn lead to higher grades and academic achievement. The results also agree with Ahiatrogah & Koomson (n.d) who noted that some student leaders are always seen performing their leadership duties and yet end up with very good grades. Student leaders are looked to as model students as such, it is important that student leaders exemplify a balance between academics and leadership.

The study further sought to determine influence by comparing the after appointment academic work performance means scores with school responsibility performance category (poor, average and good). The academic work performance of prefects by school responsibilities categories is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Academic Work Performance of Prefects’ Mean of Means after Appointment.

School responsibility category	Frequency	Percent	Academic work mean	S.D
Poor	21	14.0	3.53	0.84
Average	10	6.6	3.56	0.79
Good	118	79.4	3.94	0.65

The study revealed that good school responsibility performance category comprised 118 (79.4%) of the prefects and had the highest academic work performance mean score of 3.94; average school responsibility performance category comprised 10 (6.6%) of the prefects and had academic work performance mean score of 3.56 while poor school responsibility performance category comprised 21 (14%) of the prefects

and had academic work performance mean score of 3.53. The results revealed that prefects who perform their school responsibilities well also do well in their academic work. To compare the means of academic work performance, ANOVA was carried out. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison of Academic Work Performance by School Responsibility Performance Category (ANOVA)

Scale	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F ratio	α-value
Between groups	3.541	2	1.770	3.73	0.026*
Within groups	62.608	132	0.474		
Total	66.148	134			

*Significance at 0.05

The study revealed that the difference in mean scores amongst the 3 groups of school responsibility performance; poor, average and good was significant at the 0.05 level, $F(2,132) = 3.73$, $p = 0.026$ in favour of good performance. This means that prefects who perform their school responsibilities well also do their academic work well. The results in Table 4 however, did not reveal where the differences were. There was need to perform the multiple comparisons “post-hoc tests”. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Multiple Comparisons “Post-Hoc Tests” of Academic Work Performance Mean

Groups	Mean difference	P-value
Poor verses Average	-0.031	0.994
Poor verses Good	-0.41	0.058
Average verses Good	-0.38	0.320

*Significance at 0.05

The study revealed that differences between the groups were not significant at $p = 0.05$. The ANOVA test showed that difference was significant. This implies that school responsibilities influence prefects’ academic work performance. It was also noted that prefects who perform their school responsibilities well also perform well in academic work as shown in Table 5.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that 118 (79.4%) of the prefects and 11(78.6%) of deputy head teachers’ were in general agreement that prefects’ performance of school responsibilities was good. The study concluded that prefects perform school responsibilities well.

The study revealed that the difference in mean scores amongst the 3 groups; poor, average and good was significant at the 0.05 level, $F(2,132) = 3.73$, $p = 0.026$ in favour of good performance. This means that prefects who perform their school responsibilities well also do their academic work well. This implies that school responsibilities influence prefects’ academic work performance. The study concluded that school responsibilities enhance academic work performance.

In view of the above conclusion, this study makes the following recommendations:

- i) There is need for the school administration to train prefects (after their appointment) on leadership and study skills.
- ii) There is need for the school administration and teachers to provide more motivation (incentives, rewards, issuance of learning materials) to prefects.
- iii) There is need for the teachers to provide remedial teaching and academic counseling to prefects so that they can attain good grades in national examinations for entry to higher education.

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