

Teachers' Academic Demands on Performance and Mental Health among High School Students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya

Henry Kathuri Ndwigah

Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Formal education is common for growing children. Teachers play a very important role in preparing and promoting the academic life of learners. The learners on their part are expected to respond to the efforts of the teachers. Teachers place academic demands to learners which may elicit anxiety to the learners. Many studies have been done on the causes and remedies of low performance of learners in high schools. Little has been done concerning the mental health of learners in relation to academic demands from their teachers. The study adopted a correlational research design with a quantitative approach. The sample population was 300 consisting of 141 males and 159 females aged 13 – 17 from Embu West sub county. Convenience sampling design was used to get the final sample from potential participants. Data was collected using GAD-7 standardized questionnaires on mental health and researcher's designed questionnaire to measure teachers' academic demands on learners. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The study findings indicated a significant correlation between teachers' academic demands and the mental health of the learners. The findings are significant in drawing attention to the gaps in knowledge in low performance among the high school students.

Key words: Academic Demands, Students, Mental Health, Performance, Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a great role in the education of the students in high schools. Besides teaching, the teachers are out to ensure that the students succeed in critical areas like academics, cultural and social standards (Bay Atlantic University, 2022). In this process, there may arise some mental health issues to the students. These issues may affect the capacity of the students to feel, think, act in ways that enhance the ability to enjoy their life and deal with the challenges of life (Abe, 2010). These issues result from the demands that the teachers put on the students driven by the teachers' concern for the welfare of the students as they prepare them for a better future. These expectations sometimes go beyond the students' capabilities and mostly they elicit mental health issues to the students who keep performing lowly academically. The teachers and other stakeholders at times become judgmental and attribute the dismal performance to factors like drugs, bad companies, negative attitudes, too much exposure to media, more leisure time among other factors (Abe, 2010). This work aims at finding out how the teachers' academic demands to the students cause mental health issues to the students leading to low academic performance.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Issues of mental health incorporate a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity (Obeta, 2014). Poor mental health in adolescents is associated with serious long-term consequences, such as substance abuse, lower educational attainment, violence, self-harm, and even suicide (Obeta, 2014). There is a great concern from various educational stakeholders about the dismal academic performance experienced in many areas of

the country, and especially Embu west Sub- County. Many students enter secondary schools with high grades from primary school. These high grades are not reflected as they continue with secondary education. The value addition matrix indicate that a great percentage of high school students perform far much lower than they used to perform in primary school (Mishra, & Bamba, 2012). It is from this background that many factors have been attributed to the low performance. Among the many studies done, there seems to be a gap on the teachers' academic demands on students as causing some mental health issues that may contribute to low academic performance, among other effects in the lives of the students. Though the students cannot be left to decide their performance, there seems to be a gap on transition from primary school education to secondary school education. The common mentality of "this is not primary school" may expose the high school students to a situation where a lot is demanded from them (). Many have different primary educational backgrounds that may require a lot of consideration as they are being oriented to the secondary school education. There appears to be a mismatch between the high school teachers who expect some maturity in education and the new students who expect a gradual transition to secondary education (Mishra, & Bamba, 2012). The students may feel pressured too much by the secondary school teachers and they may end up carrying this pressure all along the four years of their studies. On their part the teachers may feel that the students are putting too little efforts or taking too long to adapt to the secondary school education. It is from this feeling that the high school teachers may place some academic demands on the students as they interact with them daily. This elicits some mental health issues, especially anxiety to the students which adds up to the factors that contribute to the dismal academic performance and other effects experienced in the area of study (Mishra, & Bamba, 2012). This work therefore seeks to find out how the academic demands from secondary school teachers to the students cause mental health issues to the students.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the presence of teachers' academic demands to the high school students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.
- To measure the amount of anxiety among the high school students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.
- To investigate the relationship between the teachers' academic demands on performance and the mental health among the high school students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.

Research Questions

- What are the indicators of teachers' academic demands to the high school students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya?
- What is the level of anxiety among the high school students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya?
- What is the relationship between the teachers' academic demands on performance and the mental health among the high school students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.

Hypothesis of the study

- The secondary school teachers in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya place academic demands on the students they interact with.
- The secondary school teachers' demands on academic performance has significant impact on the mental health of the students in Embu West Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design with a quantitative approach. Convenience sampling design was applied to select participants who would provide vital information related to the study. The sample population was 300 participants comprising of high school students of 13-17 years of age. The males

were 148 and the females were 152. The data was collected using (General Anxiety Disorder) Gad-7 Anxiety standardized questionnaires on mental health and researcher’s designed questionnaire to measure the teachers’ academic demands on performance and the mental health of the students. The data was coded using SPSS version 23 analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The area of study was Embu West Sub- County, Embu County, Kenya. This is an area with many primary and secondary schools which are averagely staffed. The schools have relatively high numbers of students and therefore the data was sufficient for the study.

The Findings of the Study

The Demographic representation of the participants was as follows:

AGE:	13-15	59	19.7%
	16-18	241	80.3%
GENDER:	Male	148	49.3%
	Female	152	50.3%
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION			
	Christian	294	98%
	Muslim	4	1.3%
	Hindu	2	0.7%

The indication was that the majority of the participants at the age of 16 to 18 had sufficiently gone through secondary education and therefore they gave sufficient information. The female participants were more than male participants. The religious affiliation of the participants was mainly Christianity with small representation of Islam and Hindu.

The descriptive statistics of teachers’ academic demand was as follows:

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers’ Academic Demands	300	.22	3.67	1.9707	.54495
Valid N (listwise)	300				

The indication for this was that there is evidence of teachers’ academic demand on the participants shown by a positive deviation of .54495. This meant that the participants felt that the teachers imposed some demands upon them in terms of academic performance.

The descriptive statistics of mental health was as follows:

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mental Health	300	.00	2.86	1.1314	.57879
Valid N (listwise)	300				

The indication here was that the participants felt that they had significant mental health issues especially anxiety. This was shown by the positive deviation of .57879. this meant that the participants felt that while at school they experience some significant levels of anxiety.

The correlations of teachers’ academic demands and mental health was as follows:

Correlations			
		Teachers’ academic Demands	Mental Health
Teachers’ academic Demands	Pearson Correlation	1	.140*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015
	N	300	300
Mental Health	Pearson Correlation	.140*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	
	N	300	300

This indicated that the Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This meant that there is a significant link between the teachers’ academic demands and the mental health of the participants.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study found that there is a significance connection between the teachers’ academic demands on students and the mental wellbeing of the students. This was indicated by the statements that pointed the anxiety feelings among the students. They pointed out that they were feeling nervous, anxious and not being able to stop or control worrying about different things. There were indications of trouble in relaxing, being so restless and easily annoyed and fear that something awful might happen.

This resulted from very high academic goals and demands by the teachers which are mostly not achievable. Others indicated that their teachers punish them physically after getting low grades. Many felt that they are not enough to meet the academic expectations by their teachers and this makes them to stress themselves too much to get high grades. The general cause of anxiety was the fact that the teachers want the students to follow the performance path they had in primary school.

CONCLUSION

The teachers’ demands on academic performance on students has significant impact on the mental health of the students. The expression of anxiety which is a major element in mental health indicates that the students have mental health issues resulting from what is expected of them academically by their teachers. This work found that as the teachers ensure that the performance path in primary school is maintained by the students, there may arise some anxiety which leads to further dismal performance in high school. This has continuously led to students conflicting with teachers and at times this conflict spilling over to the parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The students need to be encouraged to work for better academic progress. These students need to be encouraged from their uniqueness and individual abilities without imposing too much academic demands upon them. Though this does not mean that the students be allowed to perform conveniently as they like, they also need to be assisted without the teachers being judgmental. They need to be guided on how to handle high school academic programs which differ significantly from that of primary school.

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APPENDIX

A: QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: Demographic Information Instructions:

Please read the following questions carefully and fill in the blank spaces or put a tick (✓) in the brackets where appropriate:

1. Age ()
2. Gender: Male () Female ()
3. Religious Affiliation: Christian () Muslim () Hindu ()

SECTION B: TEACHERS' ACADEMIC DEMANDS

Below is a list of experiences you could have encountered in your education. Please read each experience carefully and tick one of the boxes to indicate how accurate the statement is.

In my education....

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My teachers have set very high academic goals for me					
The academic demands by my teachers in me are achievable					
I am motivated to study hard because of my teachers' academic expectations.					
My teachers punish me physically when I get low grades.					
My teachers want me to follow the performance path I had in primary school					
I think that I am not enough to meet the academic expectations my teachers throw at me					
I stress myself too much to get high grades.					
My teachers communicate with my parents regularly about my performance					
My teachers help me in my studies					

SECTION C: GAD-7 ANXIETY

In your studies, how often are you bothered by the following problems?

(use ✓ to indicate your answer)

		Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1	Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge				

2	Not being able to stop or control worrying				
3	Worrying too much about different things				
4	Trouble relaxing				
5	Being so restless that it is hard to sit still				
6	Becoming easily annoyed or irritable				
7	Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen				