

# Strategies for Enhancing Self-Esteem among Students in Mixed Secondary Schools in Soweto Embakasi East County, Nairobi, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Self-esteem is significant for psychological and physical growth of adolescents. It is the time when adolescents find their identity as they negotiate through life. It is a time that they lay the foundation for their academic life and their future. The UNICEF and other Non-Governmental Organizations have come with numerous programs that aim at building self-esteem of adolescents. However, adolescents in schools continue to manifest low self-esteem in Soweto, Embakasi East Sub-County, Nairobi, Kenya. The study aimed at exploring the strategies of enhancing self-esteem among students in mixed secondary schools in Soweto, Embakasi East County, Nairobi, Kenya. The study employed exploratory research design. Through purposive sampling, a sample size of 15 participants which comprised of 10 students and 5 Key Informants were selected to participate in the study. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that the strategies of enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students in Soweto, Embakasi East Sub-County, Nairobi included guidance and counselling, the availability of teachers to students, positive thinking, self-awareness and self-acceptance. The study recommends the schools to strengthen guidance and counselling to promote self-esteem among adolescents in secondary schools. Also, the Government may need to employ qualified counsellors and psychologists in secondary schools to help students towards handling problems that cannot be addressed by paraprofessionals.

**Key Words:** Low self-esteem, self-esteem strategies, Secondary school students

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, studies have shown that parental support plays a critical role in enhancing adolescents' self-esteem. For instance, in their study on the effects of parental support on Russian and US teenage populations, Ryan and Deci (2001) showed that perceived parental autonomy support was a significant predictor of high self-esteem. Russian teenagers, who are assumed to have grown up in authoritarian families that did not promote autonomy, have been found to have low self-esteem. A study carried out with parents in US households showed that the adolescents who were encouraged to be autonomous manifested high levels of self-esteem compared to their counterparts (Mburu, Macharia, Muiru, 2016). When parents exercise behaviours that are very restricting, domineering, or interfering in nature without putting an equal emphasis on caring and concern, this is known as parental dysfunctional control or excessive control. The environment that parents create for their kids or teenagers that emphasizes structure, order, and explicit norms is known as parental autonomy support (Bush, et al., 2002).

Adolescent theorists have emphasized that if parents want their kids to grow up to be independent, responsible people, they should be tolerant with them. The more a teenager feels that their parents are

making decisions that directly affect them, the worse they will feel about themselves. When parents make decisions for their teenage children and the adolescents don't live up to their expectations, it's tremendously discouraging and demoralizing for the children (Roberts, 2013). Parents are expected to behave in a way that respects adolescents' privacy and supports their needs for independent expression and decision-making (Myers et al., 2010). Adolescents will understand that they are appreciated and will feel that their boundaries are healthy and appropriate as a result. The home atmosphere that fosters and encourages healthy educational success is not created by parents who are harsh critics and who take ineffective disciplinary measures (Mburu., Macharia, Muiri, 2016).

In a study carried out in Kenya, affirmed that, as students strive to positively contribute to the growth and development of human society, self-esteem is one of the factors that helps students perform well academically (Elum, 2022). Arshad et al. (2015), examined the connection between academic achievement and self-esteem among university students in Pakistan. Students were said to have both high and low self-esteem. Students with low and high self-esteem may both exhibit more initiative, assurance, and academic interest. Afari et al. (2012), assert that students need to have a positive view of themselves in order to succeed. This is so because different facets of human conduct are influenced by self-esteem. This included a person's level of learning and aspiration. Self-esteem is seen as a critical characteristic that affects achievement in the education sphere.

A study conducted by Nabunya, Damulira, Byansi (2020) in Uganda revealed numerous factors at the individual and family levels that have been found to be preventative of depressed symptoms. Self-esteem and depression are inversely correlated at the individual level, and adolescents with poor self-esteem are more prone to experience depression later in life. For hopelessness, similar outcomes have been observed. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between family and community social capital and results for children's and adolescents' mental health. The ability of parents, caregivers, and other family members to provide social support, in particular, is consistently linked to teenage depression prevention. Adolescents who report high levels of family cohesiveness, trust, and intimacy also report improved behavioural and mental health outcomes.

According to Kuboka (2017), low self-esteem has been linked to uncaring, uninvolved parents who don't care about their teenagers. This is true because parental treatment of their children has a significant impact on their self-esteem. Many young people also lack the right parental support, which has a significant impact on how a youngster sees themselves. Past trauma, whether it affected their lives in a sexual, emotional, or physical way, is another factor contributing to low self-esteem. Teenagers who have experienced past trauma may also feel regret and embarrassment (Peck, 2014).

Poole (2017), postulated that, African American families make use of the after-school activities offered by Churches and other community organizations, for example the spirituality and cultural orientations, as an illustration. Several specialists strongly believed that adding spiritual and cultural elements in their self-esteem programs was crucial. According to tradition, rites of passage throughout adolescence are the normal way that African cultures structure the journey from childhood to adulthood. With the help of local elders, the ancestors are invoked upon during these rituals to direct the child throughout life.

When a youthful person is found to be worthy, the community holds a ceremony to mark that person's transition into adulthood. During this ceremony, the initiate makes a commitment to uphold the community and communal life, and the community commits to supporting the initiate in his or her new role. The rites of passage process for young people includes being isolated, taking part in activities that foster social cohesion, exhibiting reverence for seniors, taking part in ceremonies that commemorate significant turning points, and learning life skills (Poole, 2017).

Creating a supportive and caring environment among adolescents helps them feel valued and supported,

which boosts their self-esteem. Biro et al. (2006) explain that this means being available to listen and offer guidance, being respectful and non-judgmental, and providing a safe and supportive space for adolescents to express their thoughts and feelings. In addition, adolescents who feel that they can count on adults for support are more likely to feel secure and confident. Most of studies looking at self-esteem among adolescents have been quantitative in nature and especially focusing on the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem. However, the current study used qualitative approach to explore strategies to enhance self-esteem among adolescent students in mixed secondary schools in Soweto, Embakasi East County, Nairobi, Kenya.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed exploratory research design to explore strategies to enhance self-esteem among adolescent students in mixed secondary schools in Soweto, Embakasi East County, Nairobi. The study employed purposive sampling in selecting a sample size of 20 Participants. The sample size comprised of 5 Key Informants and 15 secondary school students. The Key Informants were the principal, three class teachers and the guidance and counselling teacher. Interview Guide was used to collect data from the student and key informant participants. The Interview Guide for student participants contained two sections. The first section collected data on the demographic details of age, gender, educational level and religion. The second section collected data on the strategies of enhancing self-esteem among the secondary school students.

In addition, Interview Guide was used to collect qualitative data from the Key Informants. The Interview Guide contained two sections. The first section collected data on the demographic details of the key informants which were age, gender, educational level and marital status. The second section collected data on strategies of enhancing self-esteem among the secondary school students. After authorization to collect data was sought, the researcher got informed consent from the participants to collect data including recording with the help of the researcher assistants. The interviews took 45 minutes to 1 hour. The participants were thanked by the researcher for accepting to participate in the study. The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis.

## **RESULTS**

The study was set out to explore strategies to enhance self-esteem among adolescent students in mixed secondary schools in Soweto, Embakasi East County, Nairobi, Kenya. Using thematic analysis, the themes from the data collected was identified and supported by verbatim from the participants. Before presenting the findings in relation to the objective of the study, the demographic details of the participants were provided.

### **Demographic details of the Participants**

The study presented the demographic details of the participants. There were two groups of participants in which one of them composed of secondary students drawn from form one to four and the second one was composed of the key informants which were drawn from the teachers. The demographic details for the students who were interviewed captured their age, gender, form, and religion. The demographic details for key informants captured the age, gender, educational level and marital status. The demographic details are provided for each group separately.

### **Demographic Details of the Students**

The study presented the demographic details of the students that were interviewed. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Details for Students

Participant Number	Age	Gender	Form	Religion
P1	17	Male	4	Christian
P2	17	Female	4	Christian
P3	17	Female	4	Muslim
P4	18	Female	4	Christian
P5	17	Male	4	Christian
P6	14	Male	1	Muslim
P7	17	Male	3	Christian
P8	16	Female	3	Christian
P9	17	Female	3	Christian
P10	16	Female	2	Muslim
P11	15	Female	2	Christian
P12	15	Male	2	Christian
P13	16	Male	2	Christian
P14	18	Male	2	Christian
P15	17	Female	4	Christian

Table 1 show that participants were between ages of 14 years to 18 years. The gender was almost equally represented in the study. Majority of the participants were drawn from form two and form four. Only one participant was from form one while three were from form three. Majority of the participants were Christians compared to the Muslim participants.

### Demographic of the Key Informants

The study presented the demographic details of the Key Informants that were interviewed. The results are presented in table 2

Table 2. Demographic Details for Key Informants

Key Informant	Age	Gender	Educational Level	Marital Status
KI1	48	Male	MA Degree	Married
KI2	36	Female	BA Degree	Married
KI3	34	Male	BA Degree	Married
KI4	39	Female	BA Degree	Married
KI5	40	Male	BA Degree	Married

The age of key informants' ranged between 34 and 45 years. Based on gender men were slightly higher than females. All the participants had a bachelor's degree except one who had attained a master's degree. All the participants were married.

## Presentation of the Key Findings

From the data six themes emerged as the strategies of enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students in Soweto, Embakasi East Sub-County, Nairobi.

### Guidance and counselling

Almost all the participants mentioned guidance and counselling as one of the strategies to enhance students' self-esteem. This was through helping students to accept themselves, journey with them, and supporting them in their needs. This is echoed by student participant who said "My parents, sibling and relatives can help me to improve my self-worth by supporting me in everything and making me accept myself and counselling me to help me keep going on well in my life" (Participant 2). The theme was also supported by another student participant who said "My parents, siblings and other relatives can help me to improve myself-worth by helping me when in circumstances especially when in trouble. They can help me improve my self-worth by providing guidance and counselling" (Participant 2). Moreover, the theme is supported by a Key Informant who said "Teachers in school can help students to improve their self-esteem by guiding and counselling the students, setting time to interact with the students and guiding students on how they can overcome their challenges" (Participant 3).

Likewise, the theme was also expressed by another Key Informant who said "Teachers in school can help students to improve their self-esteem by; administering guiding and counselling classes, interacting with students and knowing their problems, not abusing students, guiding them in everything they do in school and not favouring some students and treating all students equally" (Participant 12). The theme was also supported by two key informants. The theme was mentioned by a Key Informant when said "I usually have group sessions with all classes where I make sure they are comfortable to share their issues without being judged, most of them open up but there are those whom I have to follow up" (Key Informant 2). In addition, the theme was supported by another Key Informant when said "I also act if the student continues to exhibit a significant shift in behaviour occurring over several weeks, or the frequency or severity increases, seek extra support from administration or school mental health professionals. If the student displays similar patterns of behaviour with other subject teachers and if I have concerns about the student engaging in self-harming behaviours" (Key Informant 5).

### Encouragement to students

Most of the participants considered encouragement as one way of enhancing self-esteem among the students. The students would feel encouraged when they are facing challenges in their lives. The students would feel encouraged through listening, understanding, concern, motivation, positive feedback and being friendly to them. This is echoed by student participant who said "When my parents, siblings and relatives encourage me whenever I feel weak and give me support to stand again and can help me when they always be free to speak to me and want to know some of my problems that I am passing through" (Participant 8). The theme was also expressed by participant who said "I think teachers should be more understanding and encouraging us on education how to be with other people and how to control ourselves in every situation" (Participant 9). Moreover, the theme was echoed by another student participant who said "Teachers should not be sending away students when they tell their problems, being concerned of students' problems, coming up with ways to show them that they are more important than the way they think and not talking ill of the students with other teachers while the student is around or with his or her fellow students" (Participant 10).

The theme was also expressed by three Key Informants. The theme was mentioned by Key Informant who said "As the school principal I usually encourage and listen to them and I don't rush sending them home since I know their parents, I also invite former students who have succeeded in



life and have come from the same challenges, this motivates and encourages to work hard and for sure they improve their performances as well as their behaviours” (Key Informant 1). The theme was further supported by another Key Informant who said “As a class teacher, when I notice such behaviours from my students, I give specific and genuine positive feedback on effort rather than outcome, when warranted. For example, “You made a lot of progress on that project in just an hour,” or, “The topic sentence of that paragraph is really strong. I point out concrete signs of progress, even if they are small, showcase accomplishments by displaying students’ work in class or calling parents to tell them how proud I am of the students’ efforts” (Key Informant 4). Likewise the theme was supported by another participant who said “As a teacher, a mentor I engage students in a conversation about their interests, and point out students’ skills privately. I involve them in sharing their interests by setting them up for success: give them specific tasks at which they will excel, such as running things to the front office, posting a math question on the discussion board, or reflecting on their strengths on a particular assignment with a peer in a breakout. I am also mindful of ensuring equity in terms of acknowledging and providing positive feedback to all students” (Participant 5).

### **Availability to students**

The availability of teachers to students came out as a theme to enhancing self-esteem among the students. The availability of teachers to students can be realized through regular meetings with students, teachers and parents to understand the needs of students. It can also be enhanced through participation in extra-curriculum activities with students, listening to the students without judgment and providing them with positive feedback. The theme is expressed by participant who said “Teachers in school can help students improve their self-esteem by; regularly monitoring the students conduct within the school, regular meetings with the students and have both parties’ contribution sessions to know the problems that affect them, calling up on meetings with parents and backing up low-esteemed students and helping them come on the line” (Participant 1).

The theme was also echoed by student participant who said “Teachers in school need to reduce a lot of punishments which will improve students’ self-esteem, they can help students to improve by providing guidance and counselling, they can also involve them in co-curriculum activities which they will improve their self-esteem. Teachers can also give some learning narratives/stories so that it can help students improve their self-esteem” (Participant 5). The theme was also supported by another Key Informant who said “As a measure to support such students as a teacher I take time to know the student may be going through by asking how they are feeling and I listen openly without judging them, spending more time with them by trying to build an environment of warmth, reassurance and support, encourage positive behaviours, I also give them time to express themselves as I invite other professionals to talk to them” (Key Informant 3).

### **Positive thinking**

Some participants expressed positive thinking as a way of enhancing self-esteem among the secondary school students. The participants pointed out that by thinking positively help them in making wise decision and not pleasing others. Also positive thinking would help them to develop self-control and start believing in themselves. The theme was expressed by student participant who said “In order to increase my self-worth, I would be thinking positively about myself, by being wise when making decisions, by not doing things to please my peers, by accepting who I am regardless of the situation and environment and lastly having self-control” (Participant 1). The theme was also echoed by student participant who said “I can increase my self-worth by stopping negative thinking about myself, accepting who I am, increasing my self-control, being prepared to face my challenges and believing in myself” (Participant 2). Moreover, the theme was supported by another participant who said “I think I can start thinking of myself positively also relating with peers who are beneficial to me. To stop listening to people’s words and have my own

decisions on how to improve my self-worth and believing in myself that I can” (Participant 11). Likewise, the theme was supported by a participant who said “I would like to stop negative thinking about myself, accepting who I am, increasing my self-control, being prepared to face challenges and believing in myself”(Participant 15).

### **Self-awareness**

The theme of self-awareness emerged from several participants as a way of enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students. For students to enhance their self-esteem, they need to realize who they are and where they are coming from and what they want to do with their lives. The theme was expressed by participant who said “To increase my self-worth, I need to realize who I really am and what I can really do, being prepared to face the world no matter who I am or where I come from. Getting rid of my fears and being ready to be corrected, always avoid being pessimistic but always be optimistic and also increasing my relationship with others and giving my best” (Participant 3). Moreover, the theme was expressed by a student participant who said “What I can do to increase my self-worth is by knowing myself, believe in myself and what I want to do, have friends that can build my self-worth and I also need to work hard to improve my performance in class” (Participant 4). Likewise, the same theme was supported by another participant who said “I can choose my friends wisely, have good mentors in life, being assertive, being confident in myself, being a good time keeper, not to keep myself idle and not isolating myself from others and appreciating my nature so as to increase my self-worth” (Participant 12).

### **Self-acceptance**

Some participants expressed self-acceptance as key in improving self-esteem among secondary school students. The students can ensure self-acceptance by not comparing themselves with others and avoiding listening to negative comments from others. This was expressed by a participant who said “To increase myself-worth I would ensure that I do not compare myself with others and view myself worth or even alienate some of the friends who do not contribute to my success” (Participant 13). Likewise, the theme was supported by another participant who said “I will not be listening what people say that is not good for me, I will live my own life without copying the life of some people, I will teach myself positive things shall not do negative things and I will make sure everything I shall be doing will bring good results even if some people say that it is bad” (Participant 14).

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The study was set out to explore the strategies in enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students in Soweto, Embakasi East Sub-County, Nairobi. Almost all the participants mentioned guidance and counselling as one of the strategies to enhance students’ self-esteem. This is through helping students to accept themselves, journey with them, and supporting them in their needs. The findings resonated with the findings of Poole (2017), who postulated that tradition rites of passage throughout adolescence are the normal way that African cultures structure the journey from childhood to adulthood. With the help of local elders, the ancestors are invoked upon during these rituals to direct the child throughout life. When a youthful person is found to be worthy, the community holds a ceremony to mark that person’s transition into adulthood. During this ceremony, the initiate makes a commitment to uphold the community and communal life, and the community commits to supporting the initiate in his or her new role. The rites of passage process for young people includes being isolated, taking part in activities that foster social cohesion, exhibiting reverence for seniors, taking part in ceremonies that commemorate significant turning points, and learning life skills. Furthermore, the findings are supported by findings of Biro et al. (2006) who found that creating a supportive and caring environment among adolescents helps them feel valued and supported, which boosts their self-esteem. This means being available to listen and offer guidance, being respectful and

non-judgmental, and providing a safe and supportive space for adolescents to express their thoughts and feelings.

Most of the participants considered encouragement as one way of enhancing self-esteem among the students. The students would feel encouraged when they are facing challenges in their lives. The students would feel encouraged by through listening, understanding, concern, motivation, positive feedback and being friendly to them. The findings of were consistent with the findings of Nabunya, Damulira, Byansi (2020) who conducted a study in Uganda and found a strong correlation between family and community social capital and results for children's and adolescents' mental health. The ability of parents, caregivers, and other family members to provide social support, in particular, is consistently linked to teenage depression prevention. Adolescents who report high levels of family cohesiveness, trust, and intimacy also report improved behavioural and mental health outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

Guidance and counselling is paramount in enhancing secondary school students, self-esteem through helping students to accept themselves, journey with them, and supporting them in their needs. Students needs to encouraged when they are facing challenges in their lives through listening, understanding, concern, motivation, positive feedback and being friendly to them. The availability of teachers to students is also significant in promoting students' self-esteem through regular meetings with students, teachers and parents to understand the needs of students. Self-esteem can also be enhanced through participation in extra-curriculum activities with students, listening students without judgment and providing them with positive feedback. Also positive thinking would help students to develop self-control and start believing in themselves. In addition, self-awareness and self-acceptance is important in building the students' self-esteem. Students need to realize who they are and where they are coming from and what they want to do with their lives and ensure self-acceptance by not comparing themselves with others and avoiding listening to negative comments from others.

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