

Muguka Related Activities on Students' Self-Acceptance Levels in Mbeere South Sub County, Embu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Self-acceptance is a key component of psychological well-being, reflecting on how students perceive and value themselves. In Mbeere South Sub-County of Embu County, Kenya, Muguka is widely grown and turns out to be the main economic activity that involves even children in school going age. However, the psychological effect of student's participation in muguka related activities in Mbeere south Sub County has not been widely researched. This study examined the influence of Muguka related activities on students' self-acceptance levels in day secondary schools in Mbeere south sub county, Embu County, Kenya. The theory of social learning and Carl Ryff six model of psychological well-being were used to guide the study. A descriptive research design and mixed method research design were employed. The study population was, 3,989 respondents, including students, class teachers and HODs guidance and counselling in day secondary schools in this region. Data was collected using questionnaires for the students and class teachers while interview schedules were used for the HODs guidance and counselling. The data collected was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Results obtained were presented using tables. The study findings concluded that involvement in Muguka planting, harvesting, weeding, watering, selling and consumption, greatly affected student's levels of self-acceptance. The findings are significant because they offer guidance on how to balance the commercial interests surrounding Muguka with the need to promote students' self-acceptance.

Key words : Self-acceptance, psychological well-being, muguka.

INTRODUCTION

Self-acceptance is a fundamental component of psychological health. As a concept it underpins psychological health and influences cognitive therapies used to treat a variety of psychological and psychiatric problems. According to Sirgy (2021), self-acceptance as a state of unreserved embrace and agency of oneself. It entailed embracing all facets of the self-including the less desirable and negative parts. In another definition, Gupta (2025) described self-acceptance as the ability to love and respect oneself by fairly recognizing strengths and weakness without being overly vain. The psychological wellbeing model divided self-acceptance into two divisions: high self-acceptance and low self-acceptance. High self-acceptance meant that a person had a positive attitude towards both the good and bad qualities of self. On the contrary, low self-acceptance was characterized by constant feelings of dissatisfaction and negative attitude towards one's life. Experiences in childhood, society, the media, health issues, and family and social support were identified as factors that influence self-acceptance. As noted by Gupta(2025), self-acceptance was a very important aspect of an individual's life. The study identified the two levels of self-acceptance as high and low self-acceptance. This study aimed at determining how participation in Muguka related activities affected student's levels of self-acceptance.

Disinhibition, altered judgment and cognitive deficits were some of the effects of substance use. Self-acceptance required objective reasoning and was therefore undermined by substance abuse as observed in several studies. In a study among college students in Turkey, Arslan (2022) observed that students question their ability and competences when they have to rely on external stimuli to perform. A study from Jazan University in Saudi Arabia found a significant association between khat use and psychological distress especially anxiety among university students. The implication was restlessness and inability to control emotions. It became difficult to think and weigh situations objectively when one had poor emotional regulation capacity, and this hindered self-acceptance. This study noted that substance abuse undermined the level of self-acceptance (Pierpala et al., 2022).

Self-acceptance was better understood by contrasting it with self-depreciation. In a study conducted in New York City, Lisa et al. (2022) noted that self-depreciation involved mislabeling one's overall worth as a person based on certain negative traits or behaviors, often concluding that because one part of a person was bad, the entire person must be bad. This kind of thinking was described as a logical fallacy and was said to stem from focusing only on negative aspects of oneself, leading to false conclusions about one's total value. Self-depreciation played a significant role in the development of low self-esteem, hopelessness, and depression in young people (Gupta, 2025).

According to Ahlgren and Hebeisen (2023) in their study done in Norway, embraced self-acceptance significantly affected mental health as it helped individual's combat negative self-talk and societal pressures, allowing them to cultivate a more compassionate and understanding relationship with themselves. This acceptance led to improved self-esteem, as people become less reliant on external validation. Self-acceptance encouraged authenticity, enabling individuals to express themselves freely without fear of judgment, ultimately enhancing their overall quality of life (Rachel & James, 2023).

Khat consumption in East Africa had deep socioeconomic and health implications, which also affected individuals' sense of self and identity (Besha, 2022). This study highlighted that among khat users, especially in communities where its use was widespread; there was often a struggle with self-acceptance due to the social stigma attached to the habit. Besha explained that while khat chewing was culturally normalized in some areas, users frequently experienced internal conflicts between cultural acceptance and personal feelings of guilt or shame. This ambivalence influenced their psychological well-being and self-esteem, sometimes leading to denial or justification of their behavior as a way to protect their self-worth. The study further emphasized that khat use could contribute to deteriorating mental health, thereby undermining individuals' ability to fully accept themselves.

According to Efrem et al. (2022) there was a 16.3% prevalence of psychological khat dependency among Mettu University in Southwestern Ethiopia students, with factors such as peer influence, family history, and substance co-use contributing to the condition. Similarly, these students had a positive attitude about khat chewing even though their knowledge of khat was poor. These findings suggested that many students turned to khat as a coping mechanism for deeper psychological or emotional struggles including low self-esteem, self-rejection, or an inability to manage internal conflict. Lack of self-acceptance left individuals vulnerable to external pressures and unhealthy behaviors as they attempted to fill internal voids or escape from self-perceived inadequacies (Efrem et al., 2022). Thus promoting self-acceptance where individuals learnt to acknowledge and embrace both their strengths and flaws without harsh judgment could serve as a protective factor.

Kenya was one of the largest Muguka growing zone. A report by Njagi and Foundation (2019) estimated that four out five households in Mount Kenya region, including Embu County, had switched from growing food crops to Muguka as of the year 2019. The switch had mainly been attributed to adverse climatic conditions and cost-benefit considerations in farming. Children who were required to take up responsibility misaligned to their age often lost confidence, self-esteem and were emotionally unstable (Ngina, 2024). Muguka was largely grown in the expansive arid Mbeere area of Embu County where environmental degradation and climate change led to high poverty rates and economic instability.

The boom in Muguka business has resulted in need for cheap labor making school -going children an easy target. As a result, children are forced to either miss school or drop out to help ease the family economic strain (Njuguna, 2020). He also noted that family and social support emerged as key elements that affected students' self-acceptance in Muguka growing zones. The effects of this were high-risk behaviors such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, and alcohol and drug abuse among the dropouts (Mwangi & Irungu,2020). These behaviors undermined self-acceptance. These studies pinpointed the dangers of involving children and adolescents in Muguka related activities.

Statement Of The Problem

Self-acceptance is an important component of psychological well-being that enables students to develop a positive view of themselves, appreciate their abilities, and acknowledge their limitations without excessive self-criticism. Students who possess high levels of self-acceptance are more likely to demonstrate confidence, emotional stability, and commitment to their academic goals. However, in Mbeere South Sub County, Embu County, the growing participation of day secondary school students in Muguka-related activities has raised concerns about their personal and educational development. The demands associated with these activities often compete with school responsibilities, resulting in fatigue, absenteeism, and poor academic performance among some learners. Such experiences may negatively influence students' perceptions of themselves, leading to feelings of inadequacy, reduced confidence, and difficulties in accepting their personal circumstances and abilities. Continued involvement in activities that interfere with schooling may hinder the development of a healthy self-concept and weaken students' self-acceptance. Although various initiatives have been introduced to support students' well-being and academic achievement, limited empirical evidence exists on the relationship between involvement in Muguka-related activities and self-acceptance among secondary school students. This study therefore sought to investigate how participation in Muguka-related activities influences the self-acceptance of day secondary school students in Mbeere South Sub County, Embu County. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of strategies aimed at promoting positive self-perceptions and supporting students' educational progress.

METHOD

This research study focused on the influence of muguka related activities and self-acceptance levels of students in day secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub County, Embu County. The study used descriptive research design. The study was analyzed using frequencies and mean. One-way ANOVA was also used to examine the influence of Muguka related activities on the students self-acceptance levels. To ensure the accuracy of the results a pilot study was carried out in Mbeere North Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The percentage of responders who took part out of those who were invited was used to calculate the response rate. It was a crucial sign of the effectiveness and dependability of the survey. The response from the research was displayed in Table 5.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Sampled	Frequency	Percentage
Teachers	12	12	100.0
HODs	5	5	100.0
Students	334	330	98.80
Total	351	347	98.86

Source: Field Data (2025)

The total response rate was 98.86%, which is adequate for drawing reliable conclusions from the samples, according to Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003). High response rates typically result in greater data quality and dependability of the questionnaire results, according to Mugenda & Mugenda (2003). The high response rate also reduced non response bias and led to the success of the data collection. The Questionnaires were administered during breaks sessions and respondents were given enough time to thoughtfully complete the questionnaire without feeling rushed. This helped to achieve the high response rate. Additionally, respondents were informed in advance about the questionnaire, its purpose and the time it was to be administered to help them be mentally prepare.

Perception of Students and Class Teachers on Influence of Muguka related activities on Students’ Self-Acceptance Levels

The study sought to find out the perception of students, teachers and H.O. D’s Guidance and Counselling on the influence of muguka related activity on students self-acceptance level. A five point Likert scale was used: 1 – SD (Strongly Disagree), 2 – D (Disagreed), 3 – N (Neutral), 4 – A (Agreed) and 5 – SA (Strongly Agreed). The results were presented in Table 1:

Table 2: Muguka related Activities and Student’s Self-acceptance Level

Activity	Outcome	Student Responses (N = 330)IF (%)	2F (%)	3F (%)	4F (%)	5F (%)	Mean	Teacher Responses (N = 12)IF (%)	2F (%)	3F (%)	4F (%)	5F (%)	Mean
Planting	Low confidence	45 (13.64)	30 (9.09)	10 (3.03)	115 (34.85)	130 (39.39)	3.77	2 (16.67)	1 (8.33)	1 (8.33)	3 (25.00)	5 (41.67)	3.67
Harvesting	Low self-esteem	30 (9.09)	26 (7.88)	15 (4.55)	117 (35.45)	142 (43.03)	3.95	2 (16.67)	1 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	5 (41.67)	4 (33.33)	3.67
Weeding	Diminished sense of self-worth	50 (15.15)	40 (12.12)	12 (3.64)	102 (30.91)	126 (38.18)	3.65	1 (8.33)	3 (25.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (41.67)	3 (25.00)	3.50
Selling	Increased self-doubt	50 (15.15)	38 (11.52)	22 (6.67)	106 (32.12)	114 (34.55)	3.59	2 (16.67)	2 (16.67)	1 (8.33)	3 (25.00)	3 (25.00)	3.67
Watering	Increased inferiority	30 (9.09)	50 (15.15)	21 (6.36)	103 (31.21)	126 (38.18)	3.74	2 (16.67)	1 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	5 (41.67)	4 (33.33)	3.67
Chewing	Impaired self-image	44 (13.33)	36 (10.91)	8 (2.43)	114 (34.55)	128 (38.79)	3.75	2 (16.67)	2 (16.67)	0 (0.00)	5 (41.67)	3 (25.00)	3.42

Table 2 summarized the findings across six key activities associated with Muguka growing: planting, harvesting, weeding, selling, watering and chewing. Students involved in planting Muguka reported experiencing low confidence, with 65.2% indicating moderate to high levels of such feelings (mean = 3.77). This view was echoed by teachers, whose mean score (3.67) reinforced this observation. The harvesting phase saw an even stronger association with low self-esteem, as 78.4% of students indicated challenges with self-worth (mean = 3.95), supported by a teacher mean response of 3.67. Weeding also stood out, where 69.1% of the students associated this task with a diminished sense of self-worth (mean = 3.65). Teachers noted similar concerns (mean = 3.50), attributing it to stigmatization of children frequently absent from school due to labour responsibilities

Selling Muguka, an activity that may place students in adult social spaces and expose them to social judgment, was linked to increased self-doubt. About 66.6% of students reported experiencing such feelings (mean = 3.59), paralleled by teacher reports (mean = 3.67). Similarly, watering Muguka was associated with feelings of inferiority, with 69.3% of students noting significant negative impacts (mean = 3.74). Alarmingly, chewing Muguka, either experimentally or as a normalized activity among community members, was reported to impair students’ self-image, with the highest percentage (73.3%) of students agreeing to this (mean = 3.75). Teachers corroborated this view (mean = 3.42), noting that students engaged in chewing often exhibited low self-worth, poor grooming, and academic withdrawal.

These findings aligned with empirical studies on the psychological implications of child involvement in culturally sensitive or stigmatized economic activities. For instance, Temesgen (2022) reported that children involved in cash crop labour in Eastern Kenya, particularly in khat (Miraa/Muguka) regions, often suffered from reduced self-esteem and internalized social stigma. Similarly, findings by Pierpalo & Giusi (2022) showed that adolescents involved in Miraa-related work had lower self-perception and were more prone to school dropout, mental health challenges, and deviant behaviour. The implications of these findings are profound. These research agree to the findings of this study.

Repeated exposure to Muguka-related responsibilities at a young age not only shifted students' focus away from academics but also subjected them to emotionally distressing experiences that lower their self-perception (Njuguna, 2020). Over time, such negative self-evaluation may evolve into chronic stress, anxiety, depression, or behavioural disorders. Furthermore, the normalization of Muguka consumption among students entrenched unhealthy coping mechanisms and substance dependence from an early age. These results suggested a pressing need for targeted psychological interventions, policy reforms, and community education to mitigate the negative effects of child involvement in Muguka related activities. Enhancing parental guidance, promoting school-based counselling services, and regulating underage participation in cash crop activities could help restore and support healthy self-acceptance among affected students.

To establish the influence of Muguka related activities on students' self-acceptance levels, the study performed One-Way ANOVA to test whether the mean self-acceptance levels significantly differed across Muguka related activities. Analysis yielded the data captured in Table 12.

Table 3: ANOVA Results on Influence of Muguka related activities on Students' Self-Acceptance Levels

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Value	p-Value
Between Groups	1.582	5	0.316	3.214	0.009
Within Groups	20.124	324	0.062		
Total	21.706	329			

$p < 0.05$ indicates a statistically significant difference

Results showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the perceived influence of Muguka related activities on students' self-acceptance levels. To determine which specific Muguka related activities differ significantly in their influence on students' self-acceptance levels, a Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test was performed. Post-Hoc Test Results were presented in Table 4 .

Table 4: Post- Hoc Test Mean Differences Results on Perceived Influence of Various Muguka Related Activities on Student's Self-Acceptance Levels

Comparison	Mean Difference	p-Value	Interpretation
Harvesting vs. Selling	0.36	0.006	Significant
Harvesting vs. Weeding	0.30	0.041	Significant
Harvesting vs. Chewing	0.20	0.261	Not Significant
Harvesting vs. Planting	0.18	0.318	Not Significant
Chewing vs. Selling	0.16	0.049	Significant
Weeding vs. Selling	0.06	0.815	Not Significant
Planting vs. Selling	0.18	0.304	Not Significant
Chewing vs. Weeding	0.10	0.621	Not Significant
Watering vs. Selling	0.15	0.381	Not Significant

$p < 0.05$ = statistically significant

The findings from the Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis reveal that harvesting Muguka has a significantly stronger negative influence on students' self-acceptance levels compared to both selling and weeding activities. This suggested that involvement in the harvesting process exposed students to more psychologically distressing experiences or social stigma, thereby lowering their self-esteem and confidence more acutely than other tasks (Gupta, 2025). Results of the analysis indicated that, chewing Muguka was also perceived to have a significantly greater negative impact on self-acceptance than selling, implying that direct consumption was associated with impaired self-image or increased self-doubt among students. No statistically significant differences were found among the other activity comparisons, indicating that while all activities are perceived to negatively influence self-acceptance to varying degrees, these differences are not strong enough to be statistically meaningful beyond those that have been noted.

A summary table of the statistically significant pairwise differences in students' self-acceptance levels across various Muguka related activities, based on the Tukey HSD post-hoc test were presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Post Hoc Test Results Showing Activities that have Stronger and Weaker Influence on Students' Self-Acceptance Levels

Activity with Stronger Negative Influence	Activity with Weaker Influence	Statistical Significance
Harvesting	Selling	Yes ($p < 0.05$)
Harvesting	Weeding	Yes ($p < 0.05$)
Chewing	Selling	Yes ($p < 0.05$)
All other comparisons	–	No Mean Difference

The data in Table 5 emphasizes that harvesting and chewing Muguka were perceived to have a more detrimental effect on students' self-acceptance compared to some other activities, particularly selling, while the rest of the activity comparisons did not yield significant differences. The finding that harvesting and chewing Muguka had a more detrimental impact on students' self-acceptance compared to selling was explained through existing empirical evidence and psychological understanding. For example, Temesgen (2022) had shown that chewing Muguka impaired emotional and psychological well-being. Chewing Muguka was associated with anxiety, depression, poor self-image and social withdrawal all of which undermined self-acceptance thus agreeing with the findings of this study.

Harvesting, on the other hand, often involved child labour, was physically demanding and socially stigmatized. Research in rural Kenyan communities by Omolo and Ngesa, (2020) highlighted that youth involved in Muguka harvesting face community judgment, absenteeism from school and peer exclusion experiences that erode self-worth and confidence. In contrast, selling Muguka was generally perceived as a less stigmatized, income-generating activity. According to Wekesa, (2020), youth engaged in selling often see it as entrepreneurial, which may even enhance their social status rather than diminish it. From a developmental perspective, adolescents are highly sensitive to social evaluation and identity formation. Activities like chewing and harvesting, which are closely associated with social stigma and behavioural risks, are more likely to conflict with positive self-identity and reduce self-acceptance, unlike selling, which may carry fewer negative social or psychological consequences.

Teachers who interact with students regularly are well-positioned to observe behavioural and emotional changes. Interview responses from HODs guidance and counselling who interact with students regularly is provided to deepen and validate the quantitative results.

“Students involved in Muguka harvesting often appear withdrawn and tired in class. Some even avoid group activities, likely because they feel judged by others.” (Kinyua, O.I. 2025)

“We’ve noticed that students who chew Muguka tend to be aggressive, inattentive, and less confident in themselves academically and socially.” (Muriuki, O.I. 2025)

“Students that help with Muguka harvesting during weekends, soon became isolated and ashamed. He avoids social gatherings now.” (Kagendo, O.I. 2025)

“Harvesting Muguka often involves underage children. It’s known to affect their morale and school participation.” (Kagendo, O.I. 2025)

“Chewing Muguka among youth has been rising. We see more cases of low self-esteem and lack of discipline, especially in schools.” (Murithi, O.I. 2025).

The implications of these findings are profound. Repeated exposure to Muguka-related responsibilities at a young age not only shifts students’ focus away from academics but also subjects them to emotionally distressing experiences that lower their self-perception. Over time, such negative self-evaluation may evolve into chronic stress, anxiety, depression, or behavioural disorders. Furthermore, the normalization of Muguka consumption among students could entrench unhealthy coping mechanisms and substance dependence from an early age. The findings agree with Arslan (2022) research findings that suggest students involvement in labour intensive. These results suggest a pressing need for targeted psychosocial interventions, policy reforms, and community education to mitigate the negative effects of child involvement in Muguka growing activities. Enhancing parental guidance, promoting school-based counselling services, and regulating underage participation in cash crop activities could help restore and support healthy self-acceptance among affected students.

This is seen in their inability to make independent decisions, following their peers in risky behavior and always conforming to group behavior among others

CONCLUSIONS

The study established that learners involved in Muguka-related activities, especially chewing and selling, exhibited lower levels of self-acceptance. These learners often-internalized stigma, showed signs of low self-worth, and demonstrated difficulty in expressing themselves confidently in social and academic settings. On the contrary, students engaged in less socially sensitive activities such as harvesting and weeding demonstrated relatively higher levels of self-acceptance. Statistical analysis confirmed that there was a significant relationship between the type of Muguka activity and the degree of self-acceptance among learners. These findings highlighted the urgent need for focused psychosocial support, policy changes, and community education to address the harmful impacts of child participation in Muguka related activities.

RECOMMENDATION

It was recommended that schools establish targeted psychological support programs such as counselling, mentorship and confidence-building activities. These initiatives should aim to rebuild the self-esteem of learners, particularly those involved in stigmatized activities like chewing and selling Muguka. Moreover, parents and caregivers should be sensitized through community outreach programs on the psychological harm their children may experience due to such involvement. Reducing children's exposure to these roles can help preserve their sense of self-worth and promote healthier self-perceptions.

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