

Relationship between Teachers' support and care and students' subject choice in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Teachers' support is defined as the amalgamation of teacher's care, fairness, empathy, helping, challenging and respect towards students. Teacher's support and care is the most effective aspect of a teacher's professionalism because students identify with teachers who care and support them. Supportive and caring teachers enhance creation of positive school climate. A positive school climate fosters students' learning that makes them to later become productive in the society, due to acquired norms, values and expectations that enable them make the right choices. Subject choice is crucial in the life of a learner because the choice they make determine the career path they shall pursue. The essence of this study was to determine whether there is significant relationship between teachers' support and care and students' subject choice in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. Nairobi County has 79 public secondary schools, 316 H.O.Ds and 10,920 Form Three students. Out of this target population, 30 public secondary schools were sampled randomly. All the principals of the 30 sampled schools, 120 Academic H.O.Ds and 390 Form Three students were included in the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling was done to select subject of study from H.O.Ds and Form Three students. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and observation check list. Data collected was coded and computed using version 18 of SPSS. Data analysis was done using Pearson's Chi square test. The study revealed that there was significant relationship between Teachers' support and care and student's subject choice at a p-value of .001.

Keywords: Teachers' support and care, Public secondary schools, Student's subject choice, School climate

1. Introduction

Teachers'-student support and care

Teachers are the implementers of the curriculum developed for students. They are the determinants of how they relate with students during learning. Teacher's support and care have been proved over the years to be the most effective aspect of a teacher's professionalism because students identify with teachers who care and support them. Researches on teacher's support define it as the amalgamation of teacher's care, fairness, empathy, helping, challenging and respect towards students (Education Research International 2012) [1]. When a teacher is said to be supportive, it means he/she applies the above as defined. Teachers play a great role as members of the school community because most of the time in a student's life is spent with a teacher.

Studies done by Deal and Peterson (1999) [2] on school climate show that strong school climate have better motivated teachers who effectively implement formal curriculum. Teachers are the ones that teach the subjects that students choose. They play a key role in supporting reform of a school. They are the major implementers of the curriculum and facilitate other changes required to better a school. This means that they interact more with the students than any other person in a learning environment. Motivated teachers are able to support and guide the students. This means that in cases where student's need guidance the teachers are available for them especially on matters pertaining to subject choice since they know the students better.

In a study done examining the relationship between teacher support, life stress and behavioral outcomes in 103 youth, results revealed a significant interaction between teacher support and life stress, indicating teacher support moderated the effect of stress on externalizing problems. Teacher's sound support facilitates positive outcomes for children faced with risk. Teachers who support students are said to care, have empathy, trust, respect and fairness. (Split, Hughes, Wu and Kwok, 2012) [3]. Teacher's-student support and care is one of the many factors that are considered when a school is said to be effective, thus having enabling environment for student's subject choice.

Levine and Lezotte (1990) [4] said that there are nine characteristics that have been identified through studies done in school culture and performance, which make a school effective. Among these, is productive school climate and culture and faculty cohesion, collaboration, consensus communications and collegiality? Staff members have to work as a team to ensure a sense of unity and consistency in their relation with students. When this is effectively done, students enjoy great support and care. This study finding revealed that there's significant relationship between Teacher's-student support and care and student's subject choice

Levine and Lezotte (1990) [4] continued to assert that the commitment of staff members and the impetus for collaboration and communication has to be directed towards student achievement. Not only do staff members need to be

committed to a shared and articulated mission focused on achievement but also a wide emphasis on recognizing positive performance is indispensable. Teachers need to have a problem solving orientation, a willingness to experiment and actively search for solutions that might overcome obstacles in student learning, especially with respect to low achievers and students' ability to choose subjects. Teachers care is experienced as they assist the student to overcome these obstacles. Due to this great demand on the teaching profession, teachers need to be exposed to frequent training to enhance their efficiency.

Kombo (2006) ^[5], in his work on teacher socialization, asserted that teachers' roles are critical in the teachers' socialization efforts. There is need to adequately educate, train and prepare teachers professionally so as to enable them to carry out the teaching activities satisfactory. The teacher and teaching activities in school are important and require the proper kind of facilitative support, will and power from society. If these are faulty or poorly provided, the society begins to blame the school organization and its components, because the teachers are not able to support and take care of the students. In the long run the students are disadvantaged in their choice of subjects in their schools.

Rutter, Manghan, Mortimore, Outon and Smith (1979) ^[6] argued that teachers in schools form social groups with their own rules, values and standards of behavior, which they denote as the ethos of a school. Ethos reflects the teacher's expectations about children's work and behavior and the feedback that students receive on what is acceptable performance of school. Teachers have a great role in creating a positive school climate that can enable the students make the right decisions and in so doing students feel cared for and are confident to confine with their teachers when faced with

challenging situations especially on which subjects to choose. The study findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between Teachers' –student's support and care and subject choice at a $p < .001$.

1.1 Student's Subject Choice

Every country have set goals of education which meet the needs of the nation as formulated in the set objectives that are referred to for development of a curriculum for every level. Apart from the requirements set, there are various factors that influence student's subject choice. A study done on factors influencing young people in education about STEM subject choices in UK revealed that there were four reasons for taking certain STEM subjects (Math, Sciences, Physics or Chemistry); usefulness, ability and complimentary between subjects. It further revealed that young people had three main reasons that made them not to choose certain STEM subjects, difficulty of subjects and lack of Interest (Institute of Education UK, 2006) ^[7].

A study done on student's subject choice in year 12 in Australian secondary schools revealed that the subjects chosen and studied in the senior secondary years have a major influence upon the educational and career options available to young people when they leave school (Ainley, 1990) ^[8]. This study reveals that among other factors, the choice of subjects in a student's life is very important.

Students in Kenyan secondary schools are expected to be exposed to a wider curriculum as much as possible in order to create a greater path for career choice. Students are expected to choose a minimum of two sciences, take all the compulsory subjects-Mathematics, English and Kiswahili and two other subjects from the other groups of subjects as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: K.C.S.E. Subject choice

Option A	Subjects	No. of choice
Group 1	English, Kiswahili and Mathematics	Compulsory
Group 2	Biology, physics and chemistry	Two choices
Group 3	History and government, CRE, IRE, HRE	One choice
Group 4	Home Science, Art and Design, Agriculture, Woodwork, Metal Work, Building Construction, Power Mechanics, Electricity, Drawing and Design, Aviation Technology, Computer Studies	One choice
Group 5	French, German, Arabic, Kenya Sign Language, Music and Business Studies	One choice

1.2 Genesis of Student's Subject Choice in Secondary Schools in Kenya

When Kenya attained independence in 1963, the immediate challenge for the education sector was to formulate policies that would guide it in delivering on human resource needs of the new state. The government set up commissions and task forces that were going to address challenges facing education. Kenya Education Commission of 1964 was assigned the task setting objectives and make recommendations for a relevant curriculum for the newly independent state (Republic of Kenya, 1964) ^[9]. The curriculum developed was geared towards subjects that directly linked to economic activities of the country such as agriculture. This was to boost the agricultural sector and foreign languages for the hospitality industry. It also enhanced capacity building for Kiswahili teachers in order to enhance teaching of Kiswahili in schools (Republic of Kenya, 1972) ^[10]. However, as the country kept growing, economic, social and political needs kept varying thus educational needs kept changing.

Gachathi Committee was appointed in 1975 to review educational policies and objectives. Releasing its report in 1976, the Gachathi report emphasized on the need to expand access, equity and retention rates at basic education level as a means to improve the quality of education (Republic of Kenya 1976) ^[11]. At secondary level, the committee proposed adoption of a science oriented curriculum and an end to hiatus that existed between technical and secondary schools, in a bid to emphasize a technologically oriented curriculum. Students were encouraged to pursue science subjects and at the same time have a language subject and humanity. Despite these changes, educational demands kept increasing.

In 1981, the Presidential working party on second university in Kenya (Mackay Report, 1981) ^[12] was established. It made recommendations that led to the review of the structure of education system thus changing from seven years of learning in primary, four years of learning in secondary, two years of learning in high school and three years of learning in university (7, 4, 2, 3) to eight years of learning in primary,

four of learning in secondary and four years of learning in the university (8, 4, 4). This was adopted and implemented in 1984, but since every curriculum formulated must always be assessed, the commission of inquiry into the education system of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1999) [13] commissioned Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) to conduct a needs assessment on the secondary curriculum. This led to the revision of the curriculum in 2002. The revised curriculum was expected to be manageable, provide the youth with requisite knowledge skills and attitudes, be acceptable to the Kenyan and International communities, promote Nationalism and Patriotism and prepare Kenyans for challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century. The revision was a landmark policy decision that led to the reduction of subjects from 36 subjects to 26. This included Mathematics, English, Kiswahili, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, History and Government, Geography, Agriculture, Business studies, French, German, Arabic, Home Science, Music, Art and Design, Computer studies, physical Education, CRE, IRE and HRE (KIE, 2004, 2005, 2007) [14].

1.3 Problem Statement

Students' subject choice has been a great problem to administrators of secondary schools because the demand for secondary education has been greater than the available physical facilities and learning resources. In a bid to solve this problem, programmes that control subject choice have been created in many public secondary schools in Kenya. Most public secondary schools are only able to offer 13 to 15 subjects upon which the students do the choice of a minimum of 7 or maximum of 9 as required by KNEC. They do these subjects in Form 3 and 4 until they sit for their final examination.

Secondary education in Kenya is the second level in the formal education system. It caters for the age group of 14-18 years within the school system whose objectives are derived from the national goals of education (M.O.E 2005 – 2010 Support Programme) [15]. Upon admission in Form One, students are ideally supposed to be exposed to a secondary curriculum that has 26 subjects as stipulated by Kenya Institute of curriculum development (KICD, 2011) [16]. However, this has not been the case in most of the public secondary schools. This has been attributed to limitations of physical facilities, teaching and learning resources (KICD, 2011) [16]. Most of the Principals establish rules that limit the students to choosing subjects that can be offered within the available learning facilities and resources in the school while at the same time observing the guidelines from KNEC. The problem of having lesser exposure to subjects jeopardizes the student's future career path. A school that does not have a learning environment that exposes students to a wider curriculum causes the students to end up choosing some subjects at the expense of others. For example, some schools are not able to offer all the sciences while others are not able to offer some humanity and creative art subjects due to shortage of resources.

Many studies have been done on factors that influence choice of specific subjects in secondary schools. Apart from facilities and resources, research findings reveal that interest (Oakes 1990) [17], student's ability (Ainley and Daly 1997) [18], career aspirations, parental advice and job markets are the major factors that make students choose subjects (Ainley,

Jones and Navaratnam 1990) [19]. Despite this, Formal education systems in the world require students to choose subjects that they would pursue at a given level of education. For some students, the passage is smooth, but most of them make inappropriate choices based on inadequate knowledge and distorted perceptions, probably depending on the existing school climate.

Most of the studies done on school climate have been on student's achievement, interpersonal relationships and connectedness to school (Austin, *et al*', 2011, Cohen, *et al*', 2010) [20]. However despite the growing body of evidence of the researches that have been done, there has been a study gap on the relationship between Teachers'-support and care and students' subject choice. This study fills this gap.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The following objective guided the study;
To determine the relationship between teachers'-student support and care and students' subject choice, in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The study sought to find determination to the following hypothesis;

H₀

Teachers' –student support and care has no significant relationship with students' subject choice in public secondary schools in Nairobi County.

2. Methodology

2.1 Instruments used in data collection

Use of questionnaires is deemed applicable in this study because a questionnaire has the ability to collect a large amount of information in a reasonably quick space of time (Orodho, 2004) [17]. It translates research objectives into precise field questions and there by links the research results by becoming the means of obtaining data (Chandran, 2004) [18]. The researcher used three questionnaires; for the Principals, Teachers and Students. They were open ended and structured and they elicited both quantitative and qualitative data. Most of the questionnaire items were from school climate inventory scale (Haynes *et al.* 1993) [19]

2.2 Observation Checklist

To verify the responses of the respondents, the researcher had a formulated observation check list which had items that included learning facilities and resources. Every observed facility and resource was ticked against the list that contained the items. The list had two columns of maintained and unmaintained learning facilities and resources. Data collected was compared with respondent's responses and computed using SPSS version 18 to get frequencies, percentages and means.

2.3 Instrument Reliability

The Principals questionnaire had Cronbach's Alpha of.775, Teachers Questionnaire had Cronbach's Alpha of.773 and the Student's Questionnaire had Cronbach's Alpha of.711. This implied that there was a high degree of reliability of the instruments. Reliability between 0.70 and 1.0 indicate that the instrument is reliable (Carmines & Zeller, 1979) [21].

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for the Questionnaires

Questionnaire	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
Principals	30	.775	.391
Teachers	120	.814	.839
Students	390	.713	.673

2.4 Data Analysis

Collected data was sorted by inspecting the data from the questionnaire items in order to identify items wrongly responded to and any blank spaces left unfilled by the respondents. Data was categorized according to Principals, teachers and students responses to the items on the questionnaires. Data analysis was done following the four phases normally used in research; data clean up, reduction, differentiation and explanation. Data clean up involved editing, coding and tabulation in order to detect any anomalies in the responses and assign specific numerical values to the responses for further analysis.

The study generated both quantitative and qualitative data from Principals, Teachers and students. Data coding was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software version 18. After this process the data was counter-checked for possible erroneous entries. Frequencies, percentages and means obtained were used to interpret the findings. Pearson Chi square test was done to establish whether there was significant relationship between Teachers' support and care and students' subject choice.

The information collected using observation check list was also edited and analyzed as qualitative data. The information collected that was qualitative was edited and "cleaned up" in the process of organization. Such a procedure is said to be good for qualitative analysis. (Marshall & Rossman 2011)^[22]. Both qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 18.

3. Results And Discussions

3.1 H0: Teachers'–Student Support and Care Has No Significant Relationship With Students' Subject Choice In Public Secondary Schools In Nairobi County.

Pearson Chi-square test was done using data collected from students on teacher's support and care in order to determine whether there was significant relationship between Teacher's –student support and care and student's subject choice. The findings revealed that χ^2 value was 96.851 at degree of freedom of 16 and a p value of $p < .001$ (Table 3). This is less than the level of significance of $p < 0.05$. The statistical interpretation of this is that there is a significant relationship between Teachers'–student support and care and student's subject choice. This means null hypothesis (H0) which stated that there was no significant relationship between teachers'-student support and care and students' subject choice was rejected and the alternative (HA) was accepted. From these findings, one can infer that as teachers support and care for students, they influence their choice of subjects. It also reveals that they contribute to a positive school climate that has a significant influence on student's subject choice.

Table 3: Pearson Chi-square test on Teacher's- student support and care and student's subject choice

	χ^2 value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	96.851	16	.001
Likelihood Ratio	92.168	16	.001
Linear-by-Linear association	60.152	1	.001
N of varied cases	390		

The findings of the study agree with findings from a study that was done which is found in the collection of scholarly and creative works for Minnesota State University in Mankato, on support, life stress and behavioral outcomes in 103 youth (Huber, Sifers, Houlihan and Youngblow, 2012). The results revealed a significant interaction between teacher support and life stress, indicating teacher support moderated the effect of stress on externalizing problems. Teachers' sound support facilitates positive outcomes for children faced with risk. Teachers who support student are said to care, have empathy, trust, respect and fairness. Similarly the study at hand revealed a significant relationship between teachers' support and care and student's subject choice.

A study that was done examining the relationship between teacher support, life stress and behavioral outcomes in 103 youths revealed that there was a significant interaction between teacher support and life stress, indicating that teacher support moderated the effect of stress on externalizing problems. Teacher's sound support facilitates positive outcomes for children faced with risk thus those that support students are said to care (Education research international volume 2012)^[1]. Similarly, having a positive and supportive relationship with teachers has been shown to influence students' academic success (Parker and Asher, 1987; Wentzel, 2002). These findings show that teachers'-student support is vital in a student's academic journey. It leads to the development of a social and academic climate that gives students a strong feeling of belonging because they feel wanted and nurtured by their teachers. This enables them to develop life skills of decision making, thus can wisely navigate to the right choice of the subjects to pursue as a result of positive influence by school climate.

3.2 Conclusions of the Study

The following conclusions were drawn from the study findings:

1. Teachers-student support and care has significant influence on student's subject choice.
2. The evidence of their support and care is interpreted when they stay back to tutor students.
3. When they advice students on personal problems especially on subject choice, students feel supported and cared for.
4. Teacher's help students to perform in the subjects they teach thus encouraging the students to choose the subjects.
5. Teachers maintain positive relationship with students, significant relationship is established which influences their subject choice. All this implicates a positive school climate which enhances student's subject choice,

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