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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF JUJA SECONDARY SCHOOL, KIAMBU, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to explore students' perspectives on the factors that impact strongly on their performance in exams. The study probed the students' factors that lead to poor academic performance in the school through a descriptive qualitative study. Probability sampling was applied to ensure the results reflected the entire school population. Data was collected using survey questionnaires, structured interview, focused groups, observations and documents analysis. The research data was thematically analysed with frequency tables. Measures were put in place to enhance the validity of the study. The results revealed that the students factors such as negative attitude toward education, teachers and the school, lack of confidence, drug abuse, coupling, use of poor study methods and inability to set targets and goals among others impacts negatively on their performance in exams. Further the study found that teachers attends their lessons and are committed to their work, but their relationship with the students is weak. Many students therefore don't consult teachers for academic assistance and guidance. The study findings indicate weakness in the school policies dealing with discipline, exam and fee collection. Finally the study revealed lack of students' involvement and negotiation in policies making and programs development processes. The study suggests recommendations to be considered in rebranding the school and developing students' centred programs to revitalize the students' academic performance in KCSE exams.

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INTRODUCTION

Kenya is among the countries that are offering free basic education at primary and secondary levels, but underachievement in the national exams has been an issue of great concern among the stake holders in education. It has been established that in Kenya examination is a valid measure of academic performance (Maiyo and Ashioya, 2009). This explains why students' performance in national examinations is of paramount concern. Research on causes of poor performance in KCSE exams in Kenya is enormous. However many students with relatively good results in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (K.C.P.E) continues to perform below their potential in secondary school as reflected by their results in both internal and national exams. This is an issue of great concern for the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in education.

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The government increased funding on basic education in secondary schools in Kenya in an effort to realize the vision 2030 requires justification through improved performance of the learners. The school students' academic performance has been minimal as illustrated by their results in exams. For the last three years the school has been registering minimal mean grade in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education with a slight improvement in 2014. A critical analysis of the exam results and students entry behaviour shows great disparities. Most students have 200 -380 marks out of a maximum of 500 marks. The wastage is enormous and little value addition achieved in KCSE for the past four years. This study sought to establish deep underlying issues that affect students' academic performance leading to academic value erosion from student' perspective and the level of students involvement in school policies development and implementation processes. One of the major query among the researchers worldwide is the question why students with great ability sometimes fall short of their potential while students with apparently limited potential

exceeds expectation Melloroy (2005). It's on the basis of the same question that this study was carried out.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive survey design so as to allow an in-depth investigation that would bring about deeper insight and better understanding of the factors that influence students' academic performance. Descriptive survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The research targeted 143 students out the entire population of 450 students. Simple Random Sampling was used to ensure each student had an equal chance of being included. Sampling was done across the classes to ensure the information obtained was a representation of the entire school population. Data was collected through structured questionnaires with closed ended and open ended questions to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the issues under investigation. More data was collected through observations, group focus interviews and analysis of some official documents. The data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods which include frequency tables and thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main aim of the study was to establish students' perspectives on various factors that are alleged to affect their academic performance. The factors investigated by this study included students characteristics, parents' educational level, parents' occupation, students discipline, school routine and availability of school fees.

Respondents' Characteristics

The respondent characteristics assessed by the study were age, gender, participants' birth order, level of student's admission to the school, participants' family status, respondents' place of residence, duties performed before coming to school, reasons for attraction to the school

Age of the Respondents

As shown in Table 1, the ages of students ranged from 14 to 20 years. This shows that all of the participants (100%) were adolescence. This should be an eye opener in trying to understand the general behaviours of the students in relation to their discipline, developmental challenges, and relationships with the parents, teachers and peers. This should form the basis for developing effective guidance and counselling programs to empower the students overcome many challenges affecting their personality and character developments and in general their discipline and academic performance.

Researches support the fact that many adolescents can negatively be affected by peer pressure. It is expected that all students at secondary level are aged 18 years and below. However, due to free secondary education initiated a few years ago even those older than eighteen years got a chance of continuing with their education.

Table 1. Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
14	14	10%
15	24	17%
16	35	25%
17	36	17%
18	25	18%
Above 18	8	6%
Total	N= 143	100%

Gender of the Respondents

The study also assessed the gender of the students and the results are shown in Table 2. The results indicated that out of 143 students sampled for the study, boys in the upper classes (29) were relatively fewer than girls (34) despite the fact that students were randomly sampled according to their numbers per class. The analysis of students' internal exam results indicated that the girls are performing better than boys.

Table 2. Gender of the respondents

Gender	Number of participants
Girls	
1A	20
2A	20
3A	14
4A	20
Sub-total	74
Boys	
1B	20
2B	20
3B	15
4B	14
Sub-total	69
TOTAL	n = 143

Level of Student's Admission to the School

The results in Table 3 indicate that majority of the students (111) were admitted to the school at form one level. None of the students was admitted at form four. Generally the number of new students admitted to the school reduced from form one to form four. The results further indicate that most of the students transferred to other schools at either form one or form two levels. This was due to fact that most schools rarely admit students in form three or form four levels. The results also show that most of the transfers were prompted by either discipline issues or minimal academic performances.

Table 3. Level of students' admission

Entry class	Frequency	Percent
Form 1	111	77.6
Form 2	16	11.2
Form 3	16	11.2
Form 4	0	0.0
Total	143	100.0

Participant's Birth Order

The results (Table 4) also indicate that majority of the respondents (76%) were middle born children. Birth order can help in understanding personality and general behaviours of the

students in school and at home. This information can assist in explaining students' behaviours. Middle born children may develop low self-esteem, shyness and lack of uniqueness. They become rebellious due to lack of attention by parents and more open and adventurous about sex. They are also good in risk taking and try new things. They are unwaveringly loyal to friends and may find it difficult to say no. The first born due to fear are more likely prone to risk behaviours. They easily become neurotic, alcoholics, criminals and may engage in sexually deviant behaviours. The last born are dependent, irresponsible, immature, rebellious, manipulative, impatient, self-centred and lazy. They may also resist accepting responsibility and have less confidence in decision making. The knowledge about birth order can guide in developing behaviour focused guidance and counselling programs for the students. However the birth order trait should not be assumed to be absolute truth but an eye opener in understanding students' behaviours.

Table 4. Respondents' birth order

Birth Order	Frequency	Percentage
First born child	28	24%
Middle born child	109	76%
Last born child	6	4%
Total	n = 143	100%

Participants' Family Status

Most of the participants come from intact families (54%) and single parents' families (42%) as shown in Figure 1. The family status can give an insight on the students' behaviours and discipline. Studies comparing children raised in single parents families to those raised in families with two biological parents consistently find that those raised in two parents families with biological parents do better on educational achievements and adjustment in school (Carlson and Corcoran 2001) A part of this difference may be due to single mothers lower educational attainment, less social support, fewer economic resources and more stressful environments.

Respondents' Place of Residence

Most of the participant resides with their parents. However there are some who live alone, with relative, guardians and friends. The data obtained through interview with selected students indicate that the school has many students from various parts of the country and even outside the country. Most of the students who reside with relatives and friends are from upcountry and a few from out of the country. Observations about the community in which the school is located can explain why the school is multi-ethnic. The school is located in an area with flower growing farms, quarries and industries with a high population of casual workers who lives with their children, relatives and friends' children in slums and low cost congested estates due to their low and irregular incomes. This data can help to describe students discipline and study environment in relation to the school catchment areas. Survey carried in the school indicated that most of the parents in the school have low level education. They need psycho education on their role in education and discipline of their children. Considerable research evidence suggests that parents' behaviours with their

children – stimulation, consistency, moderation, and responsiveness – influence the children's cognitive and social developments (Clarke- Stewart 1983). If the school can identify parental practices that are relatively successful in enhancing cognitive growth it's possible to develop programs to help more parents' help their children reach their intellectual potential. Empirical research evidence show that parent's attitudes, expectancies, and beliefs about schooling and learning guide their behaviours with their children and have casual influence on the children's development of achievements attitudes and behaviours. This is not a trivial goal for the school given the minimal performance of the students in both internal and national exams.

Duties performed before coming to school

Most of the respondents (80%) were not engaged in major home responsibilities in the morning before coming to school. However as noted earlier in the study most the students' lives within a radius of 4 kilometres and above and therefore leaves home early to be able to get school by 7.00 am. This observation agrees with the respondents report that they didn't perform major duties before coming to school. The results indicate that they were not performing well despite little engagement in home chores because parental support and follow up were inadequate. The respondents revealed that lack of parental follow up and support partly accounts for their lack of motivation in education. The parents' meetings attendance data clearly confirms that most don't attend meetings to discuss academic issues about their children.

Reasons for attraction to the school

The results also indicate that the reasons that made students join the were; public day school charged low fee which is affordable, it had qualified teachers, it offers subjects that are not offered in other schools in the surroundings, high quality of education and teachers commitment, School environment was conducive for learning, adequate leaning facilities, admitted students with relatively low entry Kenya Certificate Primary of Education marks and its accessibility. Most of the reasons that attracted the participants to the school are positive and can be perceived as strengths of the school. The positive attraction can be used positively in enhancing students' perceptions about the school and performance in academics and co-curricular activities. The only paradox is the appreciation of the school in accommodating students with behavioural challenges expelled from other schools and giving them a second chance in education. Though this sound positive it impacts negatively on students discipline since there is evidence that most of the students transferred to the school dominate in discipline cases recorded in the discipline log book. This perspective can serve as an insight on the reason why discipline in the school is a major persistent challenge that is negatively influencing academic performance. When asked to indicate whether they liked the school or not, 87% said yes while 7% held a contrary opinion. However, 6% stated that they were not sure as illustrated in Figure 3. This shows that majority of the students liked the school and their performance had no correlation with their perception about the school.

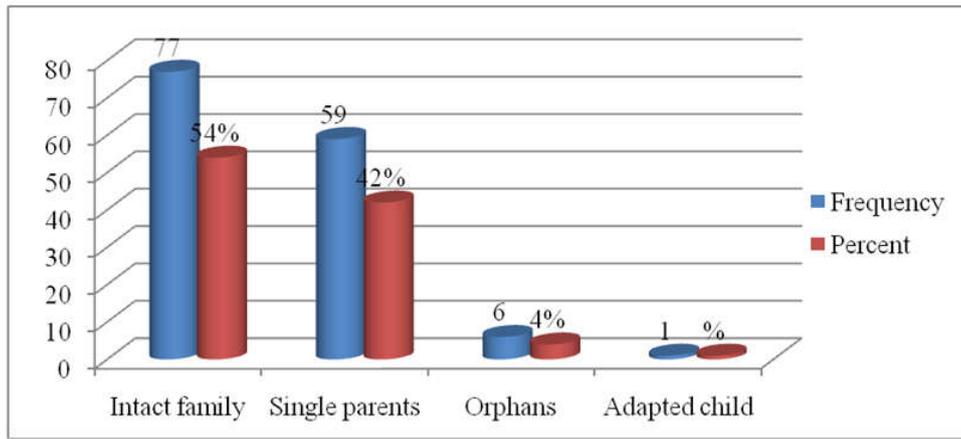


Figure 1. Family status

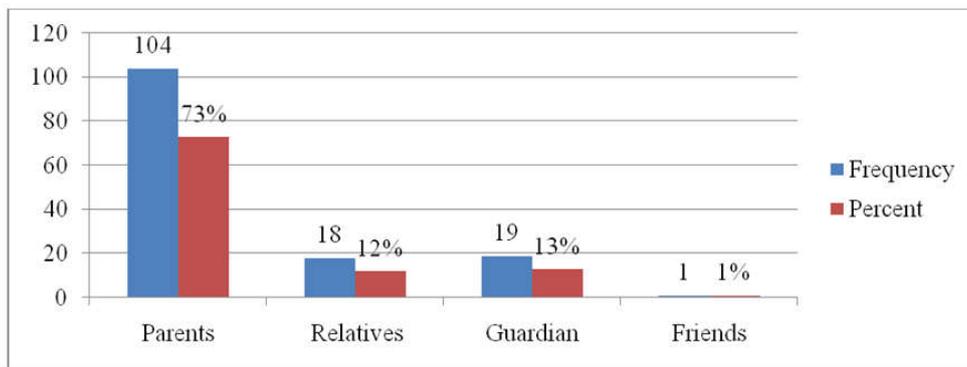


Figure 2. Respondents Residence Status

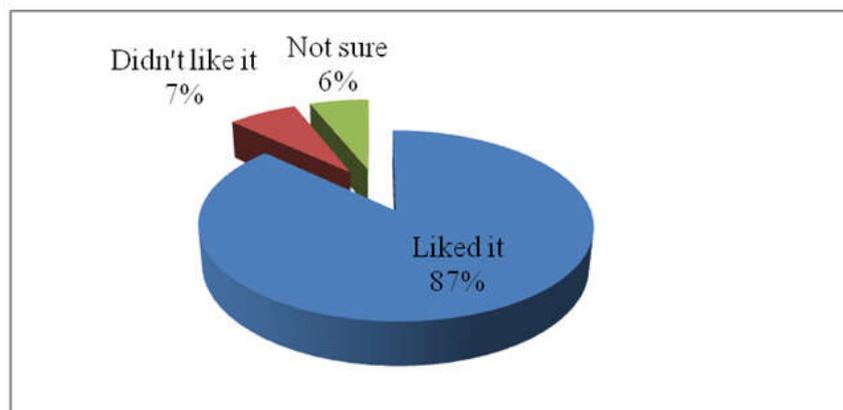


Figure 3. Respondents' perception about the school

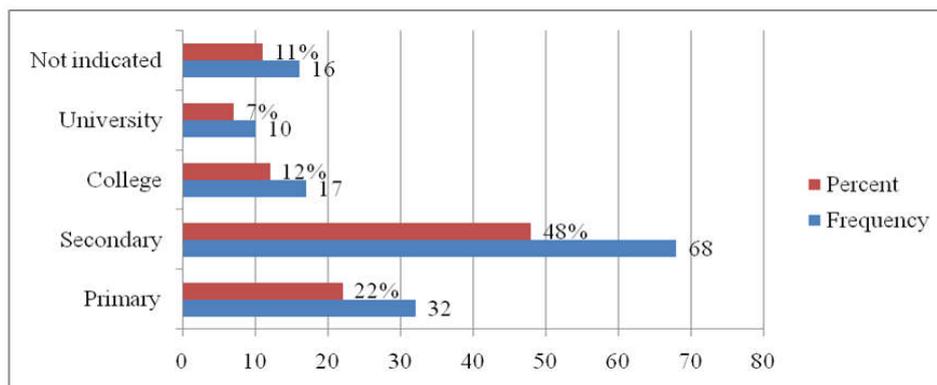


Figure 4. Parents Level of Education

Parents Level of Education

The results in Figure 4 indicate that most (48%) of the students' parents had secondary education although a significant number (22%) had primary education. Very few parents (7%) had university education. Observations made during PA (Parent association) and BOM (board of management) elections conducted in the school majority of the parents could not qualify because they could not meet the minimum requirement of having K.C.S.E qualification and above. The parents' low level of education can help in describing their perceptions about education of their children. Interview report from the school administration indicates lack of parents support in the school academic policies and programs. Some students reported that their parents don't bother about their academic performance and discipline and therefore they live with minimum parental control

Parents / Guardian occupation

Some participants failed to disclose the economic status of their parents. 28% of the respondents did not indicate their parents / guardian occupations may be because they don't like their parents' occupations. Many parents engage in small business and informal casual employments. This might be a pointer on why many don't pay school fees on time. This observation was confirmed during the parents' annual meeting. Majority of the parents with form four level of education contested for positions in parents association engage in small scale businesses and few in formal employment. The failure of the parents to pay school fees on time is supported by the huge unpaid school fees balances at the end of the year. The non-payment of school fees impacts negatively on students' performance when they are sent home to collect the fees. The analysis of school attendance registers supported these findings. Report by teachers, administration, parents and students indicate absenteeism due to school fees as a factor affecting the students' academic performance. Research has shown that there is a relationship between the school attendance and students performance in exams. Social economic status of the parents may affect their provision of learning materials to the students and provision of basic requirements thus influencing their performance in exams. Data collected through interview with students further confirmed lack of adequate learning resources like text books and revision materials.

Table 5. Parents / Guardian occupation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	47	33%
Business	21	15%
Casual labour	23	16%
Farmers	12	8%
Not indicated	40	28%
Total	n = 143	100%

Payment of School Fees

The results further indicate that 76% of the respondents had their schools fees being catered for by the parents, 13% got school fees from relatives, 10% got it from sponsors and 1%

got fees from friends as shown in Table 6. It also emerged that many parents engage in small business and informal casual employments and this might be a pointer on why many students had not cleared their fees on time. The non-payment of school fees impacts negatively on students' performance because when they are sent home to collect the fees they spend time which they are sometimes unable to recover. The results also indicate that teachers, administration, parents and even students confirmed that absenteeism was affecting the learners' academic performance. Research has shown that there is a relationship between the school attendance and students performance in exams. Social economic status of the parents may affect their provision of learning materials to the students and provision of basic requirements thus influencing their performance in exams.

Table 6. Payment of school fees

Person responsible for fees payments	Frequency	Percentage
Parents	109	76%
Relatives	18	13%
Sponsor	15	10%
Friends	1	1%
Self	0	0
Total	143	100%

Students' discipline

The results in Table 7 indicate that majority (55%) of the respondents felt that the school rules and regulations were clear however, a significant percentage (22%) felt that they were confusing. There can be no order in schools nor can the objectives of the education system be achieved, unless clear rules and regulations are established to enforce discipline. This is why effective school discipline policies are important otherwise schools may become dysfunctional and negatively influence students' academic performance.

Table 7. Participants perspectives about school rules and regulations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Clear	78	55%
Confusing	32	22%
Strict	16	11%
Friendly	16	11%
Not friendly	2	1%
Total	143	100%

When asked to indicate whether they had been punished because of having flouted school rules, majority (83%) confirmed that they had received some form of punishment while only 17% had not as presented in Table 8. This shows that the level of discipline in the school was low and hence affecting the academic performance of the learners.

Table 8. Number of students who had been punished

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	118	83%
No	25	17%
Total	143	100%

Most of the respondents (51%) felt the punishments administered due to their indiscipline in the school are justified. This supports the study findings on students' awareness about their indiscipline behaviours. The critical observation in the study is that students engage in indiscipline yet the school rules are clear to the majority. This challenges the level of students' internalization of the school rules and regulations and the effectiveness of the disciplinary processes. Another concern based on this finding is how effective are the punishments administered to the students in promoting enhancing discipline. This can serve as a benchmark to justify the need for re-evaluation of the punishments administered and the entire student's disciplinary processes in the school. Building and sustaining a positive school climate is a complex challenge that requires evidence informed solutions.

This justifies the significance of this study. According to Burton (2001) methods of research used by social scientists must be designed to document adequately the richness and diversity of meanings people attribute to phenomena. Therefore it's important that the students' perspective about the punishments administered in the school be documented. This can be significant in understanding students' reactions toward the administrators of the disliked punishments. In this study the participants revealed their negative attitudes toward the teachers, who they described as too strict because of applying corporal punishments in enhancing discipline. Interview with the teachers through focus group approach revealed that teachers- students' relationship is weak. Some teachers like confrontation with the students and always want them canned. The forms of punishments administered by teachers can help in understanding why students fear to consult for academic guidance and assistance. The study established that types punished administered to the students' impact negatively on the teacher - students' relationship and by extension academic performance.

School Routine

According to the results in Table 9, the school routine is relatively good since it creates time for lessons and co-curriculum activities. Most of the respondents (56%) felt that the school routine was good. However, 11% of the respondents described the routine as stressful since its does not create time for the students to participate in relaxing activities like group discussions, consulting teachers, conducting personal studies and completing assignments. This can partly explain why the students don't complete assignments. This justifies the need to consider revising the routine to accommodate the suggestions of the participants that can help them improve their academic performance like creating time for personal studies and group discussions.

Table 9. Participant perspective about school routine

In your opinion rate the school routine?		
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	39	27%
Good	41	29%
Fair	47	33%
Stressful	16	11%
Total	n = 143	100%

Participants 'perception on factors affecting students' academic performance

The results presented in Table 10 are a summary of the factors that affects students' performance in secondary schools. These factors have been discussed individually in the preceding sections. During a group focus interview with teachers the hypothesized factors that affect students' academic performance were confirmed to include; extreme truancy, drug abuse, inadequate teaching and learning resources especially

No.	Factor	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't know							
1	Use of drugs	64	45%	36	25%	14	10%	11	8%	18	13%	2	1%
2	Failure to do assignment	61	43%	50	35%	12	8%	18	13%	2	1%		
3	Lack of enough text books	48	34%	52	36%	17	12%	23	16%	3	2%		
4	Lack of detailed note	40	28%	34	24%	26	18%	37	26%	6	4%		
5	Lack of interest in education	51	36%	36	25%	24	17%	22	15%	10	7%		
6	Lack of support from parents	32	22%	22	15%	47	33%	28	20%	14	10%		
7	Negative attitude towards school	66	46%	39	27%	14	10%	15	11%	9	6%		
8	Spending too much time on social media	75	52%	38	27%	14	10%	12	8%	4	3%		
9	Absenteeism due to school fees	76	53%	37	26%	14	10%	13	9%	3	2%		
10	Challenge in writing and speaking English	35	24%	37	26%	44	31%	27	19%	0	0%	2	1%
11	Use of wrong study methods	42	29%	34	24%	24	17%	37	26%	6	4%		
12	Failure to cover the syllabus	41	29%	38	36%	20	14%	37	26%	7	5%		
13	Discouragement due to family challenges	51	30%	43	30%	23	16%	21	15%	5	3%		
14	Lack of self-confidence as students	63	44%	57	40%	12	8%	10	7%	1	1%		
15	Poor concentration in class due to hunger	42	29%	27	19%	35	25%	29	20%	10	7%		
16	Failure to consult teachers	51	36%	60	42%	15	10%	13	9%	4	4%		
17	Discouragement due to continued failure in exams	65	45%	43	30%	15	11%	16	11%	4	3%		
18	Doing too much work at home instead of studies	34	24%	31	22%	37	26%	35	24%	6	4%		
19	Lack of good role model to emulate	29	20%	39	27%	38	27%	27	19%	10	7%		
20	Negative attitude towards some teachers	53	37%	55	38%	15	11%	18	13%	2	1%		
21	Many lessons not being taught	11	8%	20	14%	46	32%	61	43%	5	3%		
22	Students inability to make quality notes	42	29%	49	34%	22	16%	23	16%	7	5%		
23	Lack of teamwork among the students	64	45%	48	33%	9	6%	11	8%	11	8%		
24	Over involvement in co-curricular activity	28	20%	30	21%	42	29%	31	22%	12	8%		
25	Fear of the teachers	72	50%	44	31%	11	8%	13	9%	3	2%		
26	Lack of exposure to KNEC past exams and skills	57	40%	44	31%	20	14%	14	10%	8	5%		
27	Failure of students to set academic goals/targets	52	36%	36	25%	24	17%	26	18%	5	4%		
28	Inability of students to interpret exam terminologies	60	42%	41	29%	15	11%	15	10%	12	8%		
29	Lack of revision materials[books/exam past papers]	49	34%	34	24%	29	20%	27	19%	4	3%		
30	Inability to form and use study groups	55	38%	43	30%	18	13%	18	13%	9	6%		
31	Inadequate academic guidance and counselling programs	65	45%	38	27%	20	14%	17	12%	3	2%		
32	Concentrating too much on boy-girl relationship/coupling	59	41%	36	25%	25	18%	17	12%	6	4%		
33	Failure of teachers to involve students when teaching	44	31%	27	19%	38	26%	27	19%	7	5%		
34	Lack of exposure to many practical in sciences	67	47%	23	16%	20	14%	20	14%	13	9%		

text books, lack of role models to emulate, negative attitude toward school and education, lack of support from parents, state of complacency, poor time management, low entry behaviour, coupling, negative peer pressure, absenteeism, admission of students with discipline challenges, influence of the social media, students low self-esteem and lack vibrant and stable guidance and counselling programs.

Conclusion

The study established that there are many students' factors that affect school academic performance. Such factors include negative attitudes toward the school, teachers and subjects, chronic absenteeism, use of drugs, low self-esteem, and use of poor study methods, coupling and indiscipline. The study established that the school lack guidance and counselling programs for the students and life skills are not taught. The teachers are working hard and committed to their work but the teacher – students' relationship is very weak. Many students fear the teachers due to the types of punishments administered. The school has a culture on impunity by tolerating students with discipline issues. The school rules and regulations lack clear disciplinary procedures. The evaluation policy does not benefit the form three and four since majority don't like the internal continuous assessments tests instead prefer the external exams. The school text book ratio is very poor and students find it difficult to complete assignments and make quality notes. The school routine is too tight and does not create time for students to do assignments, do personal studies and consult the teachers. The prefects are not effective in arresting indiscipline among the students and maintaining class control. In brief the study revealed many factors that affects students' performance in academics that if addressed can lead to school improved performance in both internal and national exams.

Recommendations

- The school should consider revising the school routine to create time for students' personal studies, training in co – curricular activities and consulting teachers.
- The school should consider revitalizing guidance and counselling programs for the students which is lacking. The programs should engage professionals and focus on the challenges identified in this study that affects students discipline and academic performance.
- The school should consider revising the school rules and regulations by putting in place clear disciplinary procedures to address the forms of indiscipline among the students.
- The school to consider putting up more classes, library, laboratories, guidance and counselling office and toilets for the students
- The school to consider coming up with better school fees collection strategies with the aim of retaining students in school and minimizing absenteeism.

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