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Relationship Between Clear Performance Standards and Students' Academic Performance in Homa Bay County

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Abstract

Active learner and the teacher contribute to meaningful learning. Active participation requires motivation which is fundamental especially to learners who view learning process as a challenging and time-consuming activity. This can only be achieved by the implementation of motivational strategies to enhance students' performance. This paper was aimed at establishing the relationship between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in public secondary schools. The paper was guided by the following objective: To establish the relationship between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in Homa Bay County. This study adopted Maslow's theories of motivation. The correlation research design was used. The study was carried out in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County, Kenya. The target population of the study was 32 heads of department, 64 teachers and 640 students in 32 public secondary schools in Homa Bay County, this gives a total of 736.The sample size were: 32 heads of departments, 19 teachers and 64students. This gave a sample size of 115.Stratified sampling was used in selecting schools according to the following strata: public boarding secondary schools and mixed-day secondary schools. Simple random sampling was used in selecting heads of departments, teachers and students. The instruments for collecting data were questionnaires for teachers and students. There was also an interview schedule for heads of departments. Qualitative data was analysed thematically and presented in thematic summary and quotes while quantitative data was analysed using Spearman rank correlation, frequencies, percentages, and mean and presented in tables and graphs. The key findings of this study were that there is a positive correlation between student performance standards, and student academic performance in public secondary schools in Homa-Bay County. Based on the findings, the study recommends that educational policies should mandate the establishment of clear and well- communicated performance standards across schools.

Keywords: *Academic Performance, Clear Performance Standards, Active learner*

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1. Introduction

Education involves gaining knowledge, attitudes, and skills, occurring in formal environments like schools and informal settings as well (Papi & Hiver, 2020). This comprehensive process plays a pivotal role in the holistic development of a nation's youth, preparing them for the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood. Extensive research has demonstrated that

education is vital not only for shaping students' social and economic development within formal educational environments but also for improving overall societal well-being (Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014; Wara, Aloka & Odongo, 2018). Consequently, stakeholders, including parents and educators, emphasize the importance of students achieving academic excellence.

Academic performance signifies the grades students 'get through summative evaluations in educational institutions. It includes the results of students' abilities to interact with educational material, both quantitatively and qualitatively, during formative and summative assessments (Schilling & Applegate, 2012). Achieving high academic success in secondary school significantly impacts students' prospects for higher education and future employment opportunities (Dev, 2016). Assessing academic performance through exams fulfils several roles, including pinpointing students' strengths and areas needing improvement, providing feedback on their progress, measuring the attainment of educational objectives, assigning grades, and ranking students based on their capabilities (Wara et al., 2018).

According to Mwangi and Nyagah (2013), a person's performance in national examinations may indicate their future opportunities. This focus on the future of citizens has led countries worldwide to prioritize investments in education. To improve academic achievement, nations also allocate resources to enhance school facilities, as observed by Yichun, Rodney, and Lance (2012). There has been a notable rise in education spending, particularly targeting students. For instance, between 1998 and 2005, national per-student spending in Canada rose from $7,077 to $9,040, and in the United States, it increased from $8,118 to $10,770 (Statistics Canada, 2008; National Centre for Education Statistics, 2007). This increased funding reflects the belief that school infrastructure significantly influences students' academic performance (Dearden, Ferri, & Meghir, 2002; Earthman, 2002).

1.1 Problem Statement

The Ministry of Education strives to ensure quality education for all children, prompting the government to continually introduce measures to improve the quality of secondary school education. Teacher motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing student performance. Despite government initiatives such as improving school facilities and learning resources through CDF funds, and implementing free day secondary education, public secondary schools in Homa Bay County have consistently shown low performance. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of teacher motivation strategies, given that teachers are the most critical factor in supporting student performance. The researcher is therefore motivated to conduct this study to investigate how teacher motivational strategies correlate with students' academic performance in the KCSE in Homa Bay County.

1.2 Objective

To establish the relationship between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in Homa Bay County.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

Ho 1: There is no significant relationship between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County.

2. Literature Review

Performance standards or levels are essential in shaping students' academic performance, providing a framework for assessing and evaluating progress. Clear performance standards serve as benchmarks that allow students to measure their achievements and set goals. When

students are aware of the expectations set by performance standards, it can motivate them to strive for excellence and enhance their academic performance.

Research shows that well-defined performance standards are essential for establishing a supportive learning environment for students (Brookhart, 2008). These standards offer clear guidance, reducing anxiety and uncertainty while helping students concentrate on meeting specific criteria. In contrast, ambiguous or inconsistent standards can confuse and impede students' ability to accurately assess their progress.

Furthermore, clear performance standards assist teachers in planning and delivering instruction effectively, thereby maximizing instructional quality and improving student learning outcomes (Kim, 2022). Ensuring assessments are aligned with these standards enhances the credibility and consistency of evaluations, offering equitable and impartial assessments of students' academic achievements (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001).

Clear performance standards enable effective feedback and self-assessment, which promote the growth of metacognitive skills and self-regulated learning (Brown, 2020; Jones & Lee, 2017). Additionally, they support equity and fairness in the classroom by ensuring all students have equal opportunities to comprehend and meet expectations, thereby minimizing achievement gaps and potential biases (Lee, 2021).

Moreover, performance standards serve as a framework for educators to offer constructive feedback to students (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback that adheres to these standards enables students to identify their strengths and areas needing improvement, fostering a growth mind-set and encouraging them to perceive challenges as opportunities for growth (Johnson, 2018). Clear standards also help students set goals and comprehend how their actions contribute to their academic advancement (Smith & Jones, 2019).

Furthermore, clear standards foster accountability and goal-setting among students, empowering them to take ownership of their learning (Martinez & Garcia, 2019). This empowerment cultivates a growth mindset and encourages students to prioritize effort and continual improvement (Patel & Nguyen, 2018).

Intrinsic motivation among students is critical, and effectively integrating challenges into educational environments acts as a catalyst for enhancing this motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Amabile, 1996). Challenges not only energize individuals but also build resilience and essential skills necessary for lifelong success (Locke & Latham, 2002; Duckworth, 2007). Therefore, embracing challenges contributes to improved academic outcomes and the development of crucial skills.

Tayag (2020) conducted a study examining the relationship between students' achievement and their scores on performance tasks in mathematics, specifically focusing on fourth-grade pupils. Using a descriptive correlational research design, the study explored this relationship through achievement tests and performance tasks as assessment tools. The study noted potential errors in performance tasks that could lead to discrepancies between students' scores and their actual achievement levels. The findings revealed a significant correlation between mathematics achievement scores and performance task scores.

In line with the key role performance standards play in students' academic performance and fostering a positive learning environment, it becomes imperative for educational institutions to prioritize the establishment and communication of clear and consistent standards. However, many institutions still face challenges in effectively implementing such standards across various facets of education. Working on these challenges requires concerted efforts to fine-tune the existing standards, provide comprehensive training to educators on their implementation,

and ensure alignment with evolving educational goals and best practices. By dealing with these gaps, secondary schools can better support student success and enhance overall educational outcomes.

3. Methodology

A correlation research design was appropriate for this study. This research targeted a total of thirty-two (32) public secondary schools in Homa Bay County, as specified by the Ministry of Education in 2020. The schools were classified based on school type and gender as follows: Mixed-day were 28, 1 Boys boarding and 3 girls boarding schools. The study aimed a total of 736 respondents. This comprised twenty Form Four students selected from each of the thirty-two schools, resulting in a total of 640 students. Additionally, two teachers from each of the thirty-two schools was included, contributing to a total of 64 teachers. Furthermore, one head of department (HOD) from each school participated, totaling to 32 HODs.

The researcher utilized questionnaires for students and teachers, along with an interview guide for department heads. According to Borg and Gall (2007) and Creswell (2014), questionnaires are an effective tool for gathering substantial data from a large group of participants. This approach is not only cost-efficient but also standardized, making data collection more straightforward. Additionally, Smith (2018) points out that interviews can capture detailed insights, emotions, and personal stories, offering a deeper comprehension of the research topic that other methods might not provide.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Instruments' Return Rate

The sample size of the study was 115 respondents comprising 32 Heads of Departments (HODs), 19 teachers, and 64 students from public secondary schools in Homa Bay County. Questionnaires were distributed to all the anticipated respondents of the study. Among the heads of department 29(91%) were successfully interviewed and the interview schedules were returned for analysis, among the teachers 17(89%) successfully filled the questionnaires and returned them for analysis. Regarding the students, 59(92%) successfully filled out the questionnaires and returned them for analysis. The response rate is indicated in Table 4.2. According to Babbie (2012) any response of 50% and above is adequate for analysis. It is due to this, that the researcher started the analysis of the data collected.

4.2 Students Response to Performance Standards

The researcher sought to assess the level of agreement on the performance standards, the findings were as indicated in Figure 1.

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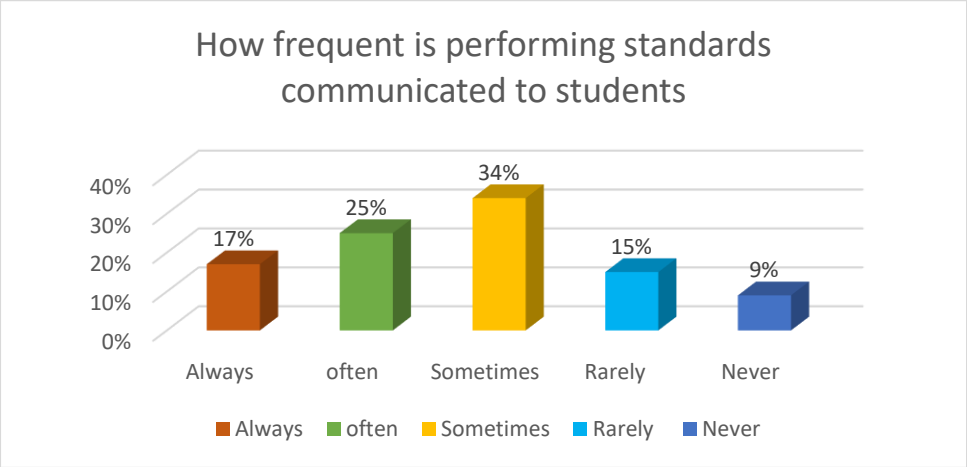

Figure 1: How Frequent is Performing Standards Communicated to Students

From the findings majority of the respondents 17% revealed that performance standards are always communicated to them, 25% revealed that performance standards are often communicated to them, 34% revealed that performance standards are sometimes communicated to them 15% revealed that performance standards are rarely communicated to them while 9% revealed that performance standard is never communicated to them. This implies that the teachers sometimes communicate performance standards to the students.

Table 1: Students Response of Performance Standards

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
Do you think that having well-defined performance standards positively impacts your academic performance?	15	20	12	8	4	3.732	0.943
The performance standards for my subjects are communicated to me.	18	22	10	6	3	3.915	0.874
Do you attend class regularly?	20	25	7	5	2	4.119	0.812
Do you actively participate in classroom activities and discussions?	13	18	15	8	5	3.525	1.005
Do you submit your assignments on time?	17	21	12	6	3	3.814	0.891

The findings revealed that 15% of the respondents strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 12% were neutral, 8% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed that having well-defined performance standards positively impacts their academic performance. The statement recorded a mean of 3.732 and a standard deviation of 0.943. This implies that most students perceive well-defined performance standards as having a positive influence on their academic performance. These findings are in agreement with those of Ramuel (2020), who found that clearly outlined performance benchmarks significantly enhance students' focus and academic outcomes.

Regarding whether the performance standards for subjects are communicated, 18% of the respondents strongly agreed, 22% agreed, 10% were neutral, 6% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.915 with a standard deviation of 0.874. This suggests that a majority of students perceive subject performance standards as effectively

communicated. This aligns with the findings of Karanja and Mwangi (2018), who observed that clear communication of expectations promotes a structured approach to learning among high school students.

On class attendance, the data indicated that 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 7% were neutral, 5% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed that they attend class regularly. The statement had the highest mean of 4.119 and a standard deviation of 0.812. This demonstrates that most students prioritize regular class attendance, a trend consistent with findings by Chen (2019), who reported that regular class attendance positively correlates with improved academic performance and participation.

For active participation in classroom activities and discussions, 13% strongly agreed, 18% agreed, 15% were neutral, 8% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. The statement recorded a mean of 3.525 and a standard deviation of 1.005. This shows a moderate level of engagement in class activities among students. The findings agree with those of Ochieng (2017), who found that classroom participation is influenced by teaching methodologies and students' confidence levels.

On the timely submission of assignments, 17% of the respondents strongly agreed, 21% agreed, 12% were neutral, 6% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The mean for this statement was 3.814, with a standard deviation of 0.891. This indicates that a majority of students recognize the importance of adhering to assignment deadlines. These findings are in agreement with those of Nyambane (2019), who found that timely assignment submission enhances academic discipline and performance among high school learners.

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4.3 Teachers Response on Performance Standards

The researcher asked teachers to indicate their level of agreement on the following statements of performance standards, the findings were as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers Response on Performance Standards

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
To what extent do you agree that students benefit from clearly communicated performance standards?	53%	29%	12%	6%	0%	3.124	1.245
Have you ever noticed a correlation between adherence to performance standards and academic success among students?	41%	35%	18%	6%	0%	3.231	1.080
How strongly do you believe adherence to performance standards influences student performance?	59%	35%	6%	0%	0%	3.731	0.832
Do you think the communication of performance standards is effectively executed?	47%	41%	12%	0%	0%	3.271	1.000
Do you think that having well-defined performance standards enhances students' performance?	49%	39%	9%	3%	0%	3.475	0.986

According to the findings, 53% of the respondents strongly agreed, 29% agreed, 12% were neutral, 6% disagreed, and none of the respondents strongly disagreed that students benefit from clearly communicated performance standards. This resulted in a mean of 3.124 and a standard deviation of 1.245. These results suggest that most teachers believe that clear communication of performance standards plays a crucial role in student success. Regarding the correlation between adherence to performance standards and academic success, 41% of the respondents strongly agreed, 35% agreed, 18% were neutral, and 6% disagreed, with no one strongly disagreeing. This produced a mean of 3.231 and a standard deviation of 1.080. This indicates that a majority of teachers observe a positive relationship between adherence to performance standards and student success. These findings align with the study by Jones and Lee (2020), who highlighted that students who consistently follow well-established performance standards tend to exhibit better academic outcomes due to clearer goals and expectations.

For the statement about how strongly teachers believe adherence to performance standards influences student performance, 59% strongly agreed, 35% agreed, and 6% were neutral, with no disagreement. The mean for this statement was 3.731, with a standard deviation of 0.832. This high mean value suggests that teachers strongly believe that adherence to performance standards has a significant positive impact on student performance. These results are consistent with findings by Zimmerman, (2019) who noted that strong adherence to performance standards correlates with improved academic performance as students gain a clear understanding of how to meet expectations.

In relation to the communication of performance standards, 47% of respondents strongly agreed, 41% agreed, and 12% were neutral, with no one disagreeing. The mean for this statement was 3.271 with a standard deviation of 1.000. This indicates that teachers generally agree that performance standards are communicated effectively, although a small percentage were neutral. Lastly, when asked if well-defined performance standards enhance student performance, 49% strongly agreed, 39% agreed, 9% were neutral, and 3% disagreed, with no one strongly disagreeing. The mean was 3.475, and the standard deviation was 0.986. These findings suggest a strong belief among teachers that having well-defined performance standards positively affects student performance. This is in agreement with the research by Clark and Wilson (2021), which concluded that clear and well-structured performance standards significantly improve student outcomes, as they provide students with a concrete understanding of academic expectations.

The researcher further sought to assess how teachers integrate performance standards into their teaching methods, form the analysis majority of the teachers revealed that integrating performance standards into teaching methods is crucial for improving student outcomes and ensuring that educational goals are met. Based on the responses from the teachers, three key strategies were identified for integrating performance standards into their teaching methods: regular assessments, classroom discussions on expectations, and other personalized methods such as providing written guidelines or offering one-on-one feedback.

One of the most commonly mentioned strategies for integrating performance standards was the use of regular assessments. Teachers noted that frequent quizzes, tests, assignments, and other forms of evaluation were essential in monitoring student progress toward meeting academic standards. Furthermore, regular assessments are effective in aligning students' understanding with the defined performance standards, as they provide concrete evidence of achievement. When students are continuously tested on specific criteria, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of them, leading to improved performance (Guskey, 2019). Teachers who use this method report better student outcomes because assessments give students a sense of direction and help them focus on the areas that need improvement.

Another strategy identified was classroom discussions on expectations. Teachers emphasized the importance of clearly explaining the performance standards to students and ensuring that they understand what is required of them. This can be achieved through group discussions, individual conferences, or class-wide meetings where performance standards are outlined in detail.

Research on the importance of teacher-student interaction has found that clear and consistent communication of expectations enhances students' self-regulation and goal-setting abilities. It also fosters a collaborative classroom environment where students feel confident in asking questions and seeking clarification, which ultimately helps them perform better academically (Butler & Winne, 2019). Teachers who incorporate these discussions regularly into their teaching practices enable students to align their personal goals with the performance standards set for them.

In addition to regular assessments and classroom discussions, some teachers mentioned other personalized methods, such as providing written guidelines or offering one-on-one feedback. Written guidelines can help clarify expectations, particularly for students who may not fully understand verbal instructions or who need additional time to process information. This method is consistent with research on the effectiveness of written feedback, which has been shown to

improve student comprehension and achievement by making standards more accessible (Shute, 2018).

Moreover, one-on-one feedback provides students with tailored advice on how to meet performance standards. This personalized approach is grounded in the principles of individualized instruction, where teachers give specific, actionable feedback that targets students' unique learning needs. These findings are in consistent with those of (Hattie, 2019) who revealed that personalized feedback enhances student motivation and achievement by helping them understand their strengths and areas for improvement. One-on-one sessions allow students to ask specific questions about their performance and clarify any doubts, promoting deeper learning.

4.4 Discussion of Qualitative Data

The researcher sought to understand how HODs ensure that clear performance standards are effectively communicated to students to boost their academic performance. One of the HODs noted,

"*We ensure clear communication by displaying performance standards prominently in classrooms. We also go over them with the students at the start of every term to avoid any confusion and to reinforce the expectations*" (HOD, from County girls' day School). Meanwhile, another HOD explained,

"*For our boarding school students, we often hold orientation sessions at the beginning of the term, where performance standards are discussed in detail. This proactive approach helps students understand exactly what is expected from them*" (HOD from Extra County girls' boarding school).

The study found a significant, positive correlation between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in Homa Bay County ($r = 0.545$, $p = 0.000$). This suggests that schools that set clear and well-communicated academic expectations foster better academic outcomes for students. This finding is consistent with Karanja and Mwangi (2018) emphasis on the importance of setting clear, transparent expectations to guide students' learning. When students are aware of the performance standards they are expected to meet, they are more likely to strive towards meeting these goals, resulting in better academic performance. Similar findings were noted by Onyebuchi and Uchechi (2023), who highlighted that students perform better when expectations are clearly communicated and understood.

5. Conclusion

The researcher sought to test hypothesis one that **H01:** There is no significant relationship between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County. The p-value was $0.002 < 0.05$. Based on the significance threshold, the study rejected the null hypothesis (H01) and concluded that clear performance standards had a significant relationship with students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County.

The study found a significant, positive correlation between clear performance standards and students' academic performance in Homa Bay County ($r = 0.545$, $p = 0.000$). This suggests that schools that set clear and well-communicated academic expectations foster better academic outcomes for students. The study further found that performance standards are communicated inconsistently to students. Most students acknowledged that they are occasionally informed about performance expectations, which suggests a lack of systematic and regular

communication. This inconsistency could hinder students' ability to align their efforts with the required benchmarks. The findings also showed that well-defined performance standards positively influence students' academic performance. Students agreed that clarity regarding expectations enhances their focus and understanding, helping them to prioritize their learning objectives effectively. This highlights the importance of providing structured and precise performance benchmarks to support academic success.

Additionally, students recognized that clear communication of subject-specific performance standards supports a more structured approach to learning. They reported that understanding expectations in individual subjects motivates them to prepare adequately, thus improving their overall academic engagement. Students also prioritized regular class attendance, which was associated with enhanced participation in learning activities and improved academic outcomes. Active involvement in classroom discussions and activities was noted to be moderate, with factors such as teaching methodologies and individual confidence influencing their participation. Moreover, students acknowledged the importance of timely submission of assignments. Adherence to deadlines was noted to improve their academic discipline and organization, which contributes to better academic performance overall.

Teachers emphasized that clear communication of performance standards is crucial for academic success. They noted that students benefit significantly when expectations are explicitly outlined, as this provides them with clear academic goals and guidance. Teachers observed a strong correlation between adherence to performance standards and improved academic performance. They explained that students who consistently follow the outlined benchmarks perform better as they gain a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Furthermore, teachers highlighted the importance of integrating performance standards into teaching methods. They identified strategies such as regular assessments, classroom discussions, and personalized approaches, including written guidelines and one-on-one feedback, as effective ways to ensure students understand and meet performance expectations.

6. Recommendations

It was recommended that educational policies should mandate the establishment of clear and well-communicated performance standards across schools. This would ensure students are aware of the academic expectations and can work toward meeting them. Additionally, policies should promote the integration of goal-setting practices and timely, constructive feedback mechanisms to enhance student motivation and academic performance. Finally, it is recommended that policy makers invest in creating conducive learning environments that are both physically and emotionally supportive for students.

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