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# STUDENTS' ENTRY BEHAVIOUR AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AS DETERMINANTS OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: CASE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MACHAKOS COUNTY, KENYA[i]

**Elizabeth Njoroge[1],**
**David M. Mulwa[1],**
**Josephat Mboya Kiweu[2ii]**
[1]School of Education,
Department of Education Management and Curriculum Studies,
Machakos University,
Kenya
[2]Department of Accounting, Banking & Finance,
Machakos University,
Kenya

**Abstract:**
Quality education is indicated by learner aptitude, perseverance, readiness for school, prior knowledge, barriers to learning, and demographic variables, among many others. This study sought to investigate the extent to which students' entry behavior influences students' academic achievements and also to determine the association between the learning environment and student's academic achievements in public secondary schools in Machakos County. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and the target population for the study was 369 principals, 4,267 teachers, and 115,132 students. The researcher used purposive and stratified sampling techniques to extract the actual sample size for the study. The sample size was 37 principals, 390 teachers, and 397 students. Questionnaires collected data from the teachers, students, and principals. The test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the research tools. The validity of the instruments was ascertained through discussions with the lecturers from the department of Education of Machakos University and the supervisors. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean, mode, standard deviation, frequency tally, and percentages. Inferential statistical tools, mainly Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Regression Analysis, were also used, and inferences were made from the analysis. Findings showed that; there is no statistically significant relationship between students' entry behavior and students' academic achievement (p = .863) and that there is a

[i] LE COMPORTEMENT D'ENTRÉE DES ÉLÈVES ET L'ENVIRONNEMENT D'APPRENTISSAGE COMME DÉTERMINANTS DE LA RÉUSSITE SCOLAIRE DES ÉLÈVES : CAS DES ÉCOLES SECONDAIRES PUBLIQUES DANS LE COMTÉ DE MACHAKOS, KENYA

[ii] Correspondence: email lizkanyi@yahoo.com, davimulwa@mksu.ac.ke, jkiweu@mksu.ac.ke

statistically significant relationship between learning environment and students' academic achievement (p = .000).

**Keywords**: academic achievement, students' entry behaviour, learning environment

## 1. Introduction

UNESCO (2015) points out that there should be deliberate efforts to safeguard inclusive, equitable quality education aimed at promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Current education dynamics focus on inclusion, gender equality, and equity. Aiming at eliminating gender disparities and creating equitable access to education at all levels. The main objective of the approach is to encourage effective learning outcomes. The global society has been stressing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since 2015 after the Millennium Development Goals. Formerly all efforts were geared at providing education at the primary school level. After 2015, the global society initiated a move to fully realize quality education for all at the secondary school level. In the 21st Century, evaluating children's mastery of the content taught and skills application is vital for the quality of education, and assessing children's mastery of the skills taught; and the relevance of the skills acquired for the 21st Century is critical (UNESCO, 2015).

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results for 2018-2020, Machakos county has had an overall performance below the government's expected mean of 5.00 (C-), a replica of most schools in the County. There is poor academic performance in secondary schools in Machakos County. As per the report from the County Director of Education (CDE) 's office, there has been an outcry due to the dismal performance of students in national examinations in secondary schools. The public secondary schools in Machakos County have performed poorly in KCSE over the years, as shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1:** Students' academic performance in KCSE

| Year | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average Mean Score | 3.971 | 3.8607 | 3.544 |

**Source:** The County Director of Education

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' entry behaviour and learning environment as determinants of students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study.

1) To investigate the extent to which students' entry behaviour influences students' academic achievements in public secondary schools in Machakos County.

2) To determine the association between the learning environment and students' academic achievements in public secondary schools in Machakos County.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Student's Entry Behaviour on Students' Academic Achievements

Entry behavior of students was established by Nakhanu (2009) as a factor affecting syllabus coverage. She further observed that students who entered Form One with low Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination marks were found to be slow learners and thus delayed coverage of the syllabus. This view agrees with that of Hallahan and Kauffman (1982), who observed that a child with learning disabilities needs individual tutoring in one or more areas of disability. Whether or not a resource teacher is available determines to a great extent how much of this instruction would be assumed by the regular class teacher.

In Africa, Barthes, Nair, and Malpede (2000) conducted a study to find the correlation between female learners in primary academic performance registered in sciences, vocational and technical subjects. The findings were that performance in primary schools was a vital determinant of secondary school academic performance for both male and female pupils.

In Ghana, Sekyere, Sekyere, and Akpalu 2013) conducted a study investigating the influence of learners' entry behavior and overall academic performance. The study reviewed that students with high mean grades register the highest grades in their final examination at the end of the course. The study also sought insight into the gender about age entry behavior of the learners. It was established that there was no relationship between academic performance and gender.

Low entry behavior was identified as a challenge experienced by head teachers in their attempt to provide quality education (Mobegi, 2007). Nakhanu (2009), Mobegi (2007), and Hallahan and Kauffman (1982) agree that entry behavior can affect the quality of education provided for students. These findings further agree with those of Mwebi (2012), who established that high-entry behavior leads to the provision of quality education.

Amburo (2011) conducted a study in Kenya and asserted a significant coefficient correlation of 0.452 between Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education performance at 0.05 level of significance. The study noted differences in the academic performance of learners registered in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education due to the weight of each examination done in the two levels of learning. On the other hand, Mensch and Llyod (1997) conducted a study in Kenya. They found a solid relationship between the selection examinations and the end of the course examinations as 0.538 for the male learners and 0.647 for the female learners. The same resources were used during the teaching and learning process. The study outcome posed concern about using the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education as a predictor of Kenya Certificate of Secondary

Education performance for both male and female learners. This study aims at filling this knowledge gap in Machakos County.

**2.2 Learning Environment on Learners' Academic Achievements**

Guthrie (2006) stresses the importance of having appropriate personnel plans and adequate physical facilities to support the educational effort. An environment that is not conducive to learning can lead to poor performance. The lack of basic facilities like laboratories compromises the teaching of science subjects. Topics meant to be covered practically might be covered theoretically (Mayama, 2012). Providing adequate learning facilities at all levels, including equipment and learning resources, enhance the quality and relevance of imparted skills of learners (Grubb, 2009).

Earthman (2002) conducted a study in the USA and found that good resources support educational endeavors. Such secondary schools have enough facilities, which include classrooms that create a humble and conducive environment for learning, computer laboratories, enough textbooks, equipped library. Resources like projectors, software, and videos are other teaching and learning materials needed to ensure effective learning. Research findings have indicated that good lighting, clean air, and clean, safe, and conducive surroundings ensure a conducive learning environment, leading to the learner's academic performance. (Cash, 1993; Earthman & Lemasters, 1996; Lemasters, 1997; Lackney, 1999; and Schneider, 2002). Inadequate classrooms that do not match the learners' population lead to poor academic performance, and adequate resources such as computers help enhance the student's academic performance. (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Eamon, 2005). On the contrary, the need for more teaching and physical learning resources demotivates the learning activities of the learners.

Aspects forming the school learning environment involve the physical environment, psychological environment, and academic environment, and they all influence the entire students' academic performance, especially in learning a second language (Lizzio et al., 2002). Some educational specialists draw a distinct environment of learning, positive and negative. The social and physical learning environment constitutes a conducive environment. Enough sunlight, orderly sitting arrangement, podium, white or blackboards in classrooms, and digital resources contribute to a conducive learning environment.

Umar (2017) has emphasized the importance of caring for the learning environment and providing learning resources. Kilei (2012) found that adequate learning resources and materials in the teaching and learning surrounding are vital aspects that affect teaching and learning. In order to achieve success through quality education, the effectiveness of teachers and learners in a classroom, together with the availability of resources, are important factors determining the effective learning environment.

Eric (2005) investigated the environment that is enabling academic prosperity and shows that the school environment has a wide range of learners' learning and developmental growth, ranging from social, ethical, and emotional development. When learners realize that the environment around them is enabling and caring, they are not

likely to get involved in the practices of drug and substance abuse, indiscipline, and hostility to the set rules by the administration.

Spillane (2007) conducted a study and asserted that the government as the primary stakeholder duties is now transforming from that of a significant player to that of facilitator in the provision of education; this new tusk of the government gives a more enabling environment for the learners by providing the needed materials and resources to make the learners perform well in their studies.

Waldman (2016) observed that before students can succeed academically, they must feel safe, both physically and mentally, and to have a safe learning environment, students must feel welcomed, supported, and respected. Personalizing learning helps students develop skills including thinking critically, using knowledge and information to solve complex problems, working collaboratively, communicating effectively, learning how to learn, and developing academic mindsets that would greatly increase students' engagement (Raccoon gang, 2018).

Productive learning environments are crucial to students' academic, emotional and social success in school. A conducive learning environment doesn't just happen on its own or by chance. They should be created through conscious procedures like interacting with students in a positive manner, exhibiting positive behaviors etc. that would promote learning activities in the learning environment (Becton, 2017).

## 3. Research Methodology

The target population was 4,267 teachers and 11,1134 students in the 369 public secondary schools in Machakos County. The public secondary schools were divided into three strata, namely, 307 mixed schools, which represented 83.2% of the public secondary schools, 27 girls (7.3%), and 35 boys' schools (9.5%). The researcher used purposive and stratified sampling techniques to extract the actual sample size for the study. The sample size was 19 principals, 390 teachers, and 397 students.

Questionnaires were used to collect data. These were administered to students, teachers, and principals. Structured, closed, and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect primary data. The questionnaires were framed based on the provision of the research topic objectives. A pilot study was carried out in one sub–county in Makueni county as it has characteristics similar to Machakos. Form three and Form Four class teachers' students were selected to complete questionnaires of the randomly selected schools and the school principals. A research permit was obtained from NACOSTI to do research. The researcher self-administered the questionnaires. According to Neuman (2006), the advantage of the self-administration of questionnaires is that a single researcher can easily undertake the survey.

Data analysis used descriptive statistics such as mean, mode, median, and frequency tally. Inferential statistics were also used to determine the relationship between variables. The researcher was assisted in observing trends in the data whose

interpretations were used to make the conclusions. The SPSS software version 28 was used in the analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Students' Entry Behaviour and Academic Performance

The first objective sought to determine the extent to which students' entry behavior influences students' academic achievements in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The principals were asked to indicate entry marks for learners in their respective schools while the students were asked to indicate the marks that they scored in KCPE. Findings are presented in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2:** Entry Marks

| | Students | | Principals | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Entry Marks** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| 200 – 250 | 18 | 2.8 | 4 | 21.0 |
| 251 – 300 | 262 | 67.1 | 13 | 68.5 |
| 301 – 400 | 112 | 28.8 | 2 | 10.5 |
| 401 – 500 | 5 | 1.3 | | |
| **Total** | **397** | **100** | **19** | **100** |

Findings show that the majority of the principals indicated that the entry marks for their form one student were between 251-300. This was echoed by the majority of the students, who also indicated that they joined the secondary schools with 251-300 marks. This implies the priority to admission in public secondary schools in the County is a minimum of 250 marks though some schools admit students with lower marks. Admission of students with low marks could be a challenge to the school administrators and students since they may take time to understand concepts and may also significantly affect the general mean score for the class. This concurs with Sekyere, Sekyere, and Akpalu's (2013) findings that students enrolled with high mean grades end up registering the highest grades in their final examination at the end of the course.

**Table 1.3:** Students' Response on Overall Mean Grade in Exams

| **Mean Grade Points** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | **Cumulative Percentage** |
|---|---|---|---|
| A- (11) | 14 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| B+ (10) | 24 | 6.0 | 9.5 |
| B (9) | 18 | 4.5 | 14 |
| B- (8) | 23 | 5.8 | 19.8 |
| C+ (7) | 30 | 7.6 | 27.4 |
| C (6) | 72 | 18.1 | 45.5 |
| C- (5) | 112 | 28.2 | 73.7 |
| D+ (4) | 59 | 14.9 | 88.6 |
| D (3) | 45 | 11.4 | 100 |
| **Total** | **397** | **100** | |

Table 1.3 findings show that 72.6% of the students scored a mean grade below C+ (7) in the past termly exam. This is because the majority of the students perform below the university minimum required-entry mean grade, which is a replica of most of the schools in the County. Prior findings have shown that the student's performance is determined by teacher experience, learning environment, student-teacher ratio, and to a low extent, low entry marks to secondary school. The principals were also asked whether subsidized secondary education affect entry grade for students in secondary schools. Findings are presented in Table 1.4.

**Table 1.4:** Effect of Subsidized Secondary Education on Entry Marks

| Effect of subsidized secondary education | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Poor enrollment marks | 18 | 94.7 |
| Low need for secondary education | 1 | 5.3 |
| **Total** | **19** | **100** |

Findings show that almost all the principals agreed that subsidized secondary education affects secondary school students' entry grades. Implying that the government's effort to ensure a 100% transition to secondary schools affects entry marks to secondary education. Implying that some schools may be forced to admit students that do not meet their admission threshold, especially if they are selected to join the school through the ministry of education secondary schools' selection systems. Admission of poor-performing students may affect education quality if efforts are not made to provide extra tuition for the students admitted to secondary schools with low marks. Findings concur with Mobegi (2007), who found out that low entry behavior was identified as a challenge experienced by school principals in their attempt to provide quality education. The principals were further asked to indicate the effect of Free Secondary Education (FSE) on secondary education. Findings are presented in Table 1.5.

**Table 1.5:** Effect of FSE on Secondary Education

| Effect of FSE on KCPE entry marks | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| High enrollment | 5 | 26.3 |
| Overcrowding in classes | 8 | 42.1 |
| Constrained teaching and learning resources | 6 | 31.6 |
| **Total** | **19** | **100** |

Findings show that subsidized secondary education leads to high enrollment in secondary schools, class overcrowding, and constrained teaching and learning resources. The rate at which student numbers increase in secondary schools does not rhyme with school resources and facilities. Principals were further asked to indicate the number of streams in their schools. The findings are presented in Figure 1.

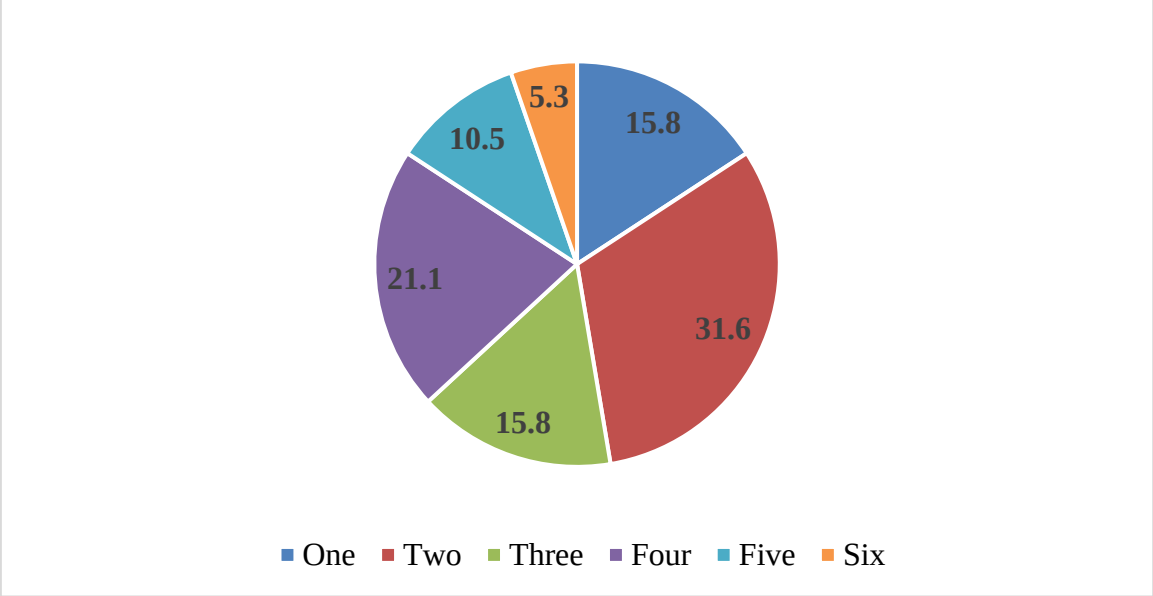


**Figure 1:** Number of Form One Streams

Findings show that while some schools have one stream, others have more than four, which indicates high enrollment rates in some public secondary schools as an effect of FSE. This finding supports the findings in Table 1.5 that free secondary education has resulted in high enrollment in public secondary schools.

In order to establish if there exist significant differences between entry marks and students' performance, an ANOVA test was conducted. Findings are presented in Table 1.6.

**Table 1.6:** ANOVA Results for Students' Entry Level and Students' Performance

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students between groups | .038 | 3 | .038 | .030 | .863 |
| Entry level within groups | 303.872 | 241 | 1.267 | | |
| **Total** | **307.909** | **242** | | | |

Table 1.6 shows that ANOVA ($F$ (3,241) = 0.030, $p$ = .863). The p>0.05 implies that there is no statistically significant relationship between students' entry-level and students' performance. Implies that students' performance is not affected by their entry marks to secondary school. Because some students who enter secondary schools with low marks may also perform poorly in secondary school while others perform very well; similarly, some students enter secondary schools with high marks but perform poorly in secondary schools.

### 4.2 Learning Environment and Academic Performance

They established the association between the learning environment and student's academic achievements in public secondary schools. Principals, teachers, and students were asked to tick on statements to indicate their level of agreement concerning learning resource allocation in their school. Findings show that the majority of the principals

disagreed that the learners have good textbooks (m=2.11), agreed that there is learner congestion in the classrooms (m=3.58), and disagreed that there is a well-equipped library in the school (m=2.53). They also disagreed that the laboratories are enough in the school (m=1.95), disagreed that all textbooks needed by learners are found in the library (m=2.32), disagreed that facilities like laboratories and classrooms are adequately equipped (m=2.34), and strongly agreed that the classrooms are clean and well aerated (m=4.53). Further, they disagreed that the school has adequate teaching materials (m=2.57), and the majority also disagreed that there are enough computers in the computer laboratory (m=2.26).

For the teachers, findings show that the majority of the teachers disagreed that their school has good textbooks (m=1.92), agreed that the learners are congested in classrooms (m=3.74), agreed that there is a library in the school (m=3.49), and disagreed that there are adequate laboratories in their schools (m=2.34). They also disagreed that learners get the textbooks they need in the school library (m=2.33), disagreed that the school has availed enough classrooms (m=2.44), and agreed that there are clean and well-aerated classrooms (m=3.41). They further disagreed that there are adequate teaching and learning facilities for the teachers (m=2.41), and most teachers disagreed that there are enough computers in the computer laboratories (m=2.22). The teachers concur with the principals regarding the learning environment. Findings support Earthman (2002), who found that good resources support educational endeavors. Secondary schools with enough facilities create a humble and conducive environment for teaching and learning. In addition, Lizzio et al. (2002) found that a favorable school learning environment influences students' academic performance.

Findings show that the majority of the students agreed that they are congested in the classrooms (m=3.63), agreed that there is a library in their school (m=3.97), disagreed that there are adequate laboratories in their school (m=2.34), and disagreed that they find all the textbook in the library (m=2.38). They also disagreed that the school has laboratories with enough apparatus (m=2.06), disagreed that teachers have the required and sufficient teaching aids (m=2.52), and the majority of the students disagreed that the computer lab is well equipped (m=2.53). Results show that the students echo the teachers' and principals' perceptions that inadequate teaching and learning facilities and physical facilities characterize the school environment. Such an environment hinders effective teaching and learning and eventually affects students' academic performance. Findings concur with Crosnoe et al. (2004) that inadequate classrooms that do not match the learners' population lead to poor academic performance, and adequate resources help enhance the student's academic performance.

**Table 1.7:** ANOVA Results for Learning Environment and Students Performance

| | **Sum of Squares** | **df** | **Mean Square** | **F** | **Sig.** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learning environment between groups | 59.002 | 4 | 14.750 | 14.0 | .0000 |
| Learning environment within groups | 246.538 | 234 | 1.054 | .00 | |
| **Total** | **305.540** | **238** | | | |

Table 1.7 shows that ANOVA ($F$ (4,234) = 14.000, $p$ = .000). The p<0.05 implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between the learning environment and students' performance. Implying that students' performance is affected by the school environment. A good learning environment will result in high academic achievement, while a poor environment will result in poor academic achievement. Findings concur with Kilei (2012), who found that adequate learning resources and materials in the teaching and learning surrounding are vital to effective teaching and learning.

From the findings, it is recommended that the governments provide all the necessary teaching and learning resources and ensures that the secondary schools' infrastructure and other learning and teaching facilities are provided. Since the study findings reveal that the learning environment significantly affects students' performance, the government should continue putting more effort into improving the learning environment. With the help of stakeholders, the school administration should build extra classrooms and laboratories with equipment and improve classroom conditions and teaching facilities to facilitate easy teaching-learning processes. TSC should allocate more teachers in schools with a high population to reduce teachers' workload and to facilitate the individual attention of weak learners, which could help the students to improve their grades. More teachers would also significantly reduce teachers' workload; improve teacher motivation and job performance.

## 5. Conclusion

Students' entry grades do not significantly influence academic achievement. Some students who enter secondary schools with low marks may also perform poorly in secondary school, while others perform very well. Similarly, some students enter secondary schools with high marks but perform poorly in secondary schools. Students' performance is affected by the school environment. A good learning environment will result in high academic achievement, while a poor environment will result in poor academic achievement. Thus, adequate learning resources in teaching are significant for effective learning leading to improved performance.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## About the Authors

**Elizabeth Njoroge** is a MEd candidate, School of Education, Department of Educational Management and Curriculum Studies, Machakos University, Kenya.

**David M. Mulwa (PhD)** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Management and Curriculum Studies, School of Education, Machakos University, Kenya.

**Josphat Mboya Kiweu (PhD)** is an Associate Professor, Department of Accounting, School of Business and Economics, Machakos University, Kenya.

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