

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER ACCEPTANCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

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Abstract

The number of students quitting school before passing their matriculation examination is a major cause for concern. A highly qualified workforce is necessary due to the acceleration of technological advancement and the emergence of new, more challenging job prospects. Since underachievement hinders the growth of the labor force, it follows that each student should be encouraged to perform at his best level. With a perfect school environment, there are better chances of a better performance. However, many students in Kenya particularly, Githunguri Sub-County, whose performance has been very low, and the underlying Social Adjustment Indices that influence their Academic Achievement at secondary school have not received appropriate research. Determining the Influence of Social Adjustment Indices on Academic Achievement among students in public secondary schools in Githunguri Sub-County, Kenya, was the main goal of the current study. Among students in public secondary schools in Githunguri Sub-County, the following objectives was set to determine the relationship between peer acceptance and academic achievement. Utilizing Creswell's mixed method technique, concurrent embedded research design was used. The selection of the participating schools and students was done using stratified random, purposive, and saturation sampling procedures. A population of 2787 students, 38 deputy principals, and 38 teachers of guidance and counseling were selected for the study from which 350 form two students, 15 deputy principals, and 15 instructors of guidance and counseling made up the study sample. For data collection, the present study included questionnaires, interview schedules, and document analysis. A pilot study was carried out using 35 form two students from four public secondary schools in the Githunguri Sub-County. Two specialists from Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology verified the validity of the instruments. By using Cronbach's alpha, internal consistency was employed to determine the instrument's reliability, and a reliability coefficient above 0.7 was found. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to examine quantitative data. Inferential statistics involved Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, simple and multiple regression analysis, and ANOVA, and descriptive statistics covered frequency counts, percentages, averages, standard deviation, and variance. Hypotheses were evaluated at a 5% level of significance. Thematic analysis was employed to examine qualitative data. Peer Acceptability and Academic Achievement were shown to be positively correlated ($n=308$, $r = .187$; $p = .001$). According to the present study's findings, Social Adjustment Indices should be incorporated into school guidance and counseling policies and practices since they have a major impact on academic attainment.

IndexTerms: Academic Success, Peer Acceptance

I. INTRODUCTION

Peer acceptance predicts academic accomplishment, whereas rejection lowers it. The association between acceptance and rejection has been noticed to exist from early childhood education to secondary school independent of the evaluation method utilized, for instance, either academic evaluations made by the teacher or scores of standardized exams, according to Hall, Bierman, & Jacobson, meta-analysis (2022). Peer acceptance shows that your classmates like you or that you have friends in the classroom, but peer rejection shows that you are hated in the classroom. More parental and peer acceptance is positively connected with higher levels of education and academic accomplishment. On the other hand, poorer academic success and performance are connected to a rise in parental and peer rejection. Similar to how parental approval and disapproval affect academic achievement in preadolescence, peer acceptance and rejection also have an impact (Hall et al. 2022). Academic achievement benefits from a variety of peer acceptance-related factors.

There are many methods for encouraging academic performance among peers. For instance, better academic support, increased school well-being, a sense of comfort in the classroom, and higher levels of peer acceptability have all been connected to students's academic achievement. Preadolescents who are accepted by their peers may benefit academically and socially from attending school. One's standing within the peer group has a tremendous impact on one's social and academic development. For instance, peer acceptance encourages pupils to develop their academic skills, whereas peer rejection increases the risk of behavioral problems becoming even more externalized (Hall et al. 2022).

Peer acceptance increases the likelihood that students will advance in their cognitive, social, and behavioral development both now and in the future (Bett, 2013). In contrast, students who experience social rejection from their peers suffer with several challenges at once and are much more likely to have suicidal thoughts, use drugs, perform poorly in school, commit crimes, and participate in other negative behaviors as adults. Students who have positive peer relationships typically perform better academically than those who have bad peer relationships, according to Feldman, Ojanen, Gesten, Smith-Schrandt, Brannick, Totura, and Brown (2014). These unfavorable peer interactions might result in low school involvement, subpar academic performance, high absenteeism, and school dropout.

Academic success is impacted by low social acceptance in a variety of ways. Students may find it more difficult to concentrate in class and to comprehend and remember material as a result of increased anxiety (fear of being laughed at or left out) brought on by peer rejection. Kim, Longo, & Riser; Papafratzeskakou; (2011). In comparison to socially acceptable students, students who don't have many school friends often have lower academic self-esteem and depend more on their teachers for academic support (i.e., they ask them for help from them more frequently) (Flook & Repetti, 2015). Students who feel rejected or socially isolated sometimes worry about being bullied or teased, which makes them skip school more frequently, which reduces their opportunities to learn intellectual material in the classroom and eventually lowers their academic ability (Knack, Tsar, Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2012).

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Peer Acceptance and Academic Achievement

Kishkilev, (2018) carried out a study at Louisiana State University, looking into the correlation between children's peers' and academic performance. the study targeted 585 families as study respondents and used both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data from the field. Equally, quantitative and qualitative means of data analysis were used in the analysis of the data collected. The reviewed study concluded that friendship was key in impacting the positive academic performance of learners. The reviewed study by Kishkilev, (2018) was done using children in kindergarten who are pre-adolescents and whiles the current study used secondary school students, who are mainly adolescents hence, a gap that the current study endeavoured to fill.

A study by Smyth, Down, and McInerney, (2014) carried out a study in the Netherlands and utilizing a study population of 1,144 used quantitative and qualitative techniques in analyzing the data revealed a significant positive relationship between learner centrality and class achievement. The study revealed a correlation between network processes and academic performance. The reviewed study concluded that all stakeholders should adjust their notion of what is a beneficial or detrimental classroom environment for students. Whereas studies by Smyth et al. (2014) generated information on the variables in Netherlands Europe, the lack suffers from the geographical gap that needs to be filled with similar studies done in Kenya and further infuses pragmatic methodology which is lacking in their studies in the Netherlands.

Literature from the studies done by Smyth, Down, and, McInerney (2014) on the effect of adolescent challenges on academic performance revealed significant relationships between adolescent challenges and academic performance in Germany. The study adopted quantitative methods and drew its study sample from school boys and girls in Germany. Further, the study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to generate information from the data collected. However, the reviewed study by Smyth et al. (2014) was longitudinal which required a huge amount of time and the risk of possible loss of participants could have been experienced during the study. The present study used a descriptive survey research design which involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data limiting the length of the period required to carry out the study.

A study in India by Richards, Campania & Muse-Burke, (2010) was done using quantitative techniques to establish a linear relationship between the study variables, self-perceived cognitive and academic competencies. The study used a population sample of 291 students. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square analysis, and binary logistic regression. The study was founded on theorization utilizing social theories to operationalize the studies. the study observed

that there was a significant positive effect between the peers' perceptions of classmates' skills and the number of students who engaged in the perceptions. Whereas the reviewed study by Richards et al. (2010) was done in India using children who are pre-adolescents the current study was done in Kenya using students in secondary school who are mainly adolescents hence that was the gap the present study intended to fill.

A study in Australia by Guest, Madill, and Rodkin, (2014) on adolescents' perceptions of their relationships and academic performance established a linear relationship between the study variables. The study used an appropriate sample of 1436 respondents to collect data from the field. The study established a significant positive relationship between adolescents' perceptions and academic performance hence concluding that there is a significant positive effect between adolescent relationships had Collinearity with academic achievement. The reviewed study by Gest et al. (2014) was done in Australia which is a developed country using ethnic minority and majority students while the current study was done in Kenya which is a developing country and used students who were in secondary schools regardless of whether they were considered ethnic minority or majority within that location of study and that was the gap the present study intended to fill.

A study by Geven, Jan, and Tubergen, (2017) in Germany which sought to investigate the Collinearity between self-identified ethnic minority and majority students on academic achievement in secondary schools established a significant positive relationship between the variables. The study utilized stochastic actor-oriented models in a sample of 1175 students. The study revealed that students from minority groups sought friend's students who bore higher achievement levels compared to learners drawn from the majority groupings who preferred friends with same level subject performance. The reviewed study by Geven et al. (2017), was longitudinal in nature which required a huge amount of time and the risk of possible loss of participants could have been experienced during the study, the present study used a descriptive survey design a gap left out by the study in Germany.

In the Philippines, Olden, Mosha & Manda, (2012) carried out a study on the relationship between learners' peer pressure and academic performance. The study revealed an association between learner curiosity and lower academic achievement. More the study revealed that cultural parenting had a linear. The reviewed study revealed that there was a significant positive association between social belongingness and performance. The study drew a study sample of 96 respondents to represent the study population in data collection. The study which was quantitative used both descriptive methods and inferential statistics to come up with information from the data collected. The study also established a positive association between cultural-parenting orientation and peer association. The reviewed study by Olden, (2012) used a smaller sample of 96 students unlike the present study which used a sample size of 350 students hence it was possible to generalize the result findings with the present study thus filling the gap in the literature.

Liu, Bullock, and Coplan (2014) studied the association between peer victimization and academic performance among Chinese young learners. The study had a population of 805 and data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Among the results of the reviewed study, peer victimization was negatively related to academic achievement at both time points. Also, peer victimization and academic achievement displayed considerable stability. The reviewed study by Liu et al. (2014) was done on children in China who are mainly in primary schools and are mainly pre-adolescents while the current study was done in Kenya using secondary students who are mainly adolescents of higher age compared to those in primary hence the gap. Further, whereas the reviewed study was quantitative in nature it lacked a qualitative dimension that could have presented participants' feelings and experiences. Therefore, the present study adopted a mixed methods approach to fill in gaps in the literature.

A study by Bursal, (2017) carried out among Turkish students established a linear correlation between peer support and academic performance. The study also established minimal Collinearity between preschool learners' peer support and their academic achievement levels. The study used a sample size of 532 respondents with the data being described descriptively and using inferential statistics. Whereas the study by Bursal, (2017) was quantitatively analyzed, it lacked the support of the qualitative tools of data collection a gap the present study sought to fill.

Fong, Chen, Zhang and Liang, (2015) carried out a study in Macau to establish the collinearity between school belonging and academic performance among adolescents. The study used a sample size of 406 school-going adolescents. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed both descriptively and using inferential statistics. From the findings of the study, it was established that there is a negative linear association between the two variables. Whereas the study by Fong et al. (2015) was quantitative in nature it lacked qualitative approaches to enrich the quantitative data analyzed. This is the gap that the current study sought to fill.

Kingery, Erdley and Marshall, (2011) carried out a study at the University of Maine which revealed a linear relationship between peer acceptance and the level of student adjustment. The study drew 365 respondents for data collection and the subsequent data was analyzed through quantitative techniques. The reviewed study results of repeated measures MANOVAs indicated no differential changes in adjustment across time by gender. The reviewed study concluded that peer acceptance was vital in determining the level of student adjustment to a school setup. The reviewed study by Kingery et al. (2011) was quantitative in nature and lacked a qualitative dimension which could have presented participants' feelings and experiences. Therefore, the present study adopted a mixed methods approach to fill in gaps in the literature.

A study by Fan, (2012) sought to establish relations between peer groups and academic performance in the subject of Social Studies of Students in the Cross River State of Nigeria. The study established that there is a significant association between peer groups and school performance in Nigeria. A total sample of 1110 learners was used for data collection and a stratified random sampling procedure was used to establish the study sample. Data collection for the study was done using the questionnaire on socio-psychological factors and social studies achievement (QSSA). The result of the data which was analyzed using inferential statistics showed that peer group influence was a significant predictor of senior secondary school students' achievement in social studies. The reviewed study concluded that social studies teachers, parents, school counsellors and administrators should help to encourage positive peer relationships among students. The reviewed study by Fan, (2012) focused on students' performance in Social Studies which is one subject but the present study considered the performance of students in more than 10 subjects hence that was the gap the present study intended to fill.

Schwarz et al. (2012) in South Africa carried out a study to determine the relations associations between the quality of the parent-child relationship and peer acceptance and early adolescents' life satisfaction differed depending on the importance of family values in the respective culture. Further, the study established that there is a significant negative effect between family values and satisfaction. The reviewed study concluded that parental warmth and support in adolescence as well as peer acceptance for adolescents were significant in forming well round adolescents. The reviewed study by Schwarz et al. (2012) was quantitative in nature and lacked a qualitative dimension which could have presented participants' feelings and experiences. Therefore, the present study adopted a mixed methods approach to fill in gaps in the literature.

Filed, Bello, Uwaoma, Anwanane & Nwangburka, (2019) carried out a study to establish relationships between peer group influence and the academic performance of undergraduate students at Babcock University, Ogun State in Nigeria. The reviewed study adopted a mixed method design with 300 students used as a study sample. Quantitative methods of analysis were used in the eventual data analyzes. The study observed a significant positive correlation between peer groups and the academic performance of students. The study recommended that the youth should be counselled from time to time to cope with academic performance. The reviewed study by Filade et al. (2019) was done using undergraduate University students who were predominantly adults while the current study used students in secondary schools who are likely to be younger in age, a gap targeted by the present study.

In Egypt, a study was done by Ahmed and Al-Mahmoud, (2015) which endeavoured to find the relationship between parents' attachment to their children and academic performance in nursing. A total subject of 492 nursing students was enrolled in the study. A comparative study design was used and a self-report questionnaire. The reviewed study concluded that the parent's attachment was significant to academic performance. The reviewed study by Ahmed and Al-Mahmoud, (2015) focused on university students who were pursuing a nursing course to become professionals while the current study focused on secondary school students who were still struggling with the path to career choice, a gap aimed to be filled. Furthermore, the reviewed study used university students who are predominantly adults, unlike the present study which used students in secondary school who are younger hence the gap to fill in the existing literature.

De Bruyn, Cillessen and Wissink, (2010) in their study in Morocco examined the role of peer acceptance and perceived popularity in bullying and victimization in early adolescent peer groups. The reviewed study revealed a significant positive association between the study variables. The study used a population of 1,207 to collect data and it was analysed using quantitative methods. The reviewed study found that bullying was positively associated with popularity. Whereas the reviewed study by De Bruyn et al. (2010) used quantitative approaches in generating information, it lacked the blending of the qualitative data to complement it hence the gap that the present study was to fill.

Michielsen et al. (2012) carried out a study in Rwanda whose aim was to seek to establish the relationships between peer-led HIV prevention interventions in secondary schools. The study which adopted longitudinal approaches established that there were significant positive associations between the study variables, peer-led HIV prevention interventions and school achievement in secondary schools. The study used a study population of 1950 respondents to collect information on the subject matter. The study used quantitative techniques in analyzing the data. The reviewed study concluded that there is a significant positive association between peer education and school performance. However, a reviewed study by Michielsen et al. (2012) used a small sample size of 14 schools hence limited in generalization of study findings, unlike the present study which used a sample size of 350 students and so generalization of results was possible hence filling the gap in the existing literature.

A study by Wabukundi (2016) conducted in Tanzania sought to establish the relationship between peer acceptance groups and the academic performance of learners in high school. The population sample was taken from four (4) secondary schools in Kinondoni Division, Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania. The study established a linear relationship between the two study variables, peer acceptance groups and academic performance. The study recommended that school counsellors and society, in general, should take a center stage in counselling the youth groups to assist them to cope and perform better in school. Whereas the reviewed study by Wabukundi, (2016) was done using quantitative approaches, it lacked the advantage of benefitting from the qualitative mix which would argue the study findings. This is the gap that the current suggested study sought to establish.

Rukundo, (2012) carried out a study in Uganda that sought to establish the relationship between teenage influence and school performance. The study findings which used a sample of 40 respondents during data collection processes revealed that there is a significant negative effect between youth influence and learners’ academic performance. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design and adopted the qualitative method in analyzing the information. The reviewed study found that peer pressure had a similar influence both positively and negatively affecting school performance and that the teenagers used different methods to manage peer pressure. However, Rukundo, (2012) used a small sample size of 40 students while the present study used a student sample of 350 students which was good in drawing generalized conclusions and that was the gap the current study was to fill in the literature.

Kipkemboi, (2014) conducted a study in Kenya on the Impact of School Environment and Peer Influences on Students’ Academics. The study which used a study population from 21 secondary schools established that there is a significant positive association between school environment factors and peer and learning outcomes. The reviewed study used a correlation research design where school environment and peer influence constituted the independent variables whereas students’ academic performance was the dependent variable. Quantitative tools were used in data collection. The reviewed study concluded that school environment and peer influences were some of the psychosocial factors that affected academic achievement. Whereas the study generated information using quantitative tools, there was a gap in using the mixed method approach in data collection. Since the reviewed study was quantitative in nature, the present study sought to establish new literature based on mixed design approaches.

Njeri, (2015) carried out a study to establish determinants of the high prevalence of homosexuality in public boarding secondary schools. A case study of Githunguri District, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study which used a sample of 2035 and a sample of 120 was selected used questionnaires to collect data from the respondents. Quantitative analysis techniques were used to generate information from the data collected which indicated that there was a significant association with homosexuality in their schools. The reviewed study concluded that despite homosexuality being condemned at the social level, it is increasingly being experienced in schools especially boarding schools in Kenya. Whereas the reviewed study by Njeri, (2015) used a sample of 120 students to obtain information, the current study used a bigger sample of 350 to obtain information that could be conceptualized with the reviewed study.

III. METHODOLOGY

Target population

The current study focused on all 2787 form two students from the 2018 academic year in the 36 public secondary schools, 38 deputy principals, and 38 Guidance and Counseling Instructors in the Githunguri Sub-county. The form two students were the primary focus of the research because the researcher believed that they had recently transferred to secondary schools and that their final exams, which were composed of their term 1, term 2, and term 3 averages while they were in form one, would have provided helpful information about how they had been adjusting to the new environment given that these examinations were completed when they had barely turned a year old since they had transferred from primary schools. Deputy Principals were selected because they deal with disciplinary concerns and can give more insight into how the students are responding to the new environment. Since the researcher believed that certain students who had a difficult time adjusting to the secondary environment could seek out or be recommended for guidance and counseling services during their studies, teachers of guidance and counseling were also targeted.

The target population is divided down into extra county, county, and sub-county schools in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Target Population

School Category	Number of public schools	Population of form two students	Population of Deputy Principals	Population of guidance and counseling teachers
Extra County	02	910	04	04
County	09	936	09	09
Sub-County	25	937	25	25
Total	36	2787	38	38

Source: Githunguri Sub- County Education Office, 2019

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

3.5.1 Sample Size

A sample size is a subset drawn from a population in order to generate statistical approximations of the characteristics of the complete population (Tiwari and Chilwal, 2014). It is an accurate reflection of the entire sample (Campbell, Murray, Darbyshire, Emery, Farmer, Griffiths & Kinmonth, 2018). The formula was used by the researcher to determine the sample size. According to Creswell,(2013) Slovin’s formula is a random sampling technique for estimating sample size as computed below;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where

n=number of samples

N=total population-2787

e=error margin/margin of error (0.05)

Sample size for the students was therefore being computed as follows:

$$n = \frac{2787}{1 + 2787(0.05)^2}$$

= 350 Students.

The present study employed a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. The results are as tabulated in table 3.2

Table 3.2: Sample Size

Respondents	Target population (N)	Sample Size (n)
Form two students	2787	350
Interviews		
Deputy Principals	38	15
Guidance and counseling Teachers	38	15
Total	2863	380
School Category		
Sub- County	25	8
County	9	3
Extra-County	2	2
Total	36	13

Source: Researcher 2019

Interviews with 15 deputy principals and 15 teachers of guidance and counseling from the 13 sampled schools were undertaken to gather qualitative data. The recommended sample size for qualitative interviews, according to Mason (2010), is 10–30 participants.

Peer Acceptance Scale

The School Engagement Scale - Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive Engagement was used to develop the items to measure peer acceptance (2005). The measure was appropriate because school connection, or a feeling of belonging to the school community, is a determinant in the health, education, and social well-being of students and adolescents. Students who have a feeling of belonging at school are more likely to engage in academic and extra-curriculum activities, form positive relationships with teachers and other students, and value the outcomes of their education.

Peer Acceptance Scale items were specifically rephrased to align to Kenyan educational context in order to ensure that the students' participants understand the survey item and respond appropriately. They were also rephrased to suit secondary school environment since it was previously used in university. There were 15 questions on peer accepting orientation, and the responses ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree). The scale ranged from 10 to 50, with 10 representing a low peer acceptance orientation and 50 representing a strong peer acceptance orientation

IV. RESULTS

Peer Acceptance among Public Secondary School Students

To investigate the level of peer acceptance among high school students, sampled students filled a 15 itemed Likert scale questionnaire recommended for examining peer acceptance in school environment. Students were asked to rate the indicators of peer acceptance using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Students responses were presented in means and standard deviation, as summarized in Table 4.3

Table 4.3: Peer Acceptance (n=308)
Key – 1 –Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

Indicators of peer acceptance	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
People at my school genuinely care about one another.	6.5	39.6	20.5	0.0	33.4	3.14	1.41
I truly feel as though my classroom and school are where I belong.	5.8	39.3	21.8	5.5	27.6	3.10	1.33
My teachers genuinely care about me and are worried if I'm not in class.	6.5	45.1	21.4	4.5	22.4	2.91	1.28
My teachers aid me in comprehending the material I must learn.	4.2	51.9	19.8	5.5	18.5	2.82	1.21
I have a family-like feeling towards my school.	5.2	52.9	12.7	4.5	24.7	2.91	1.33
My classes are like contented families.	5.2	57.8	11.4	4.2	21.4	2.79	1.28
I believe I play a significant role in my classroom.	5.5	50.0	14.0	2.9	27.6	2.97	1.36
I consider myself to be an integral part of my school.	11.0	58.4	13.0	4.5	13.0	2.50	1.16
My teachers urge me to participate in extra-curriculum at school and in the community.	2.9	61.0	13.6	4.2	18.2	2.74	1.20
I'm encouraged by my teacher to pursue my hobbies and talents.	3.2	56.5	13.3	4.2	22.7	2.87	1.28
Our school has a large number of clubs and activities that I can participate in	29.5	49.4	8.4	4.2	8.4	2.13	1.14
My school motivates me to look at several career options for when I graduate.	28.6	41.9	11.4	4.5	13.6	2.33	1.31
I believe I have many options for what and how I learn.	24.4	47.1	14.3	2.9	11.4	2.30	1.20
Everyone at my school seems to be motivating me to finish high school, enroll in a program for further study, or get a profession.	19.8	50.3	13.6	4.2	12.0	2.38	1.20
In my school and classrooms, I experience support and respect.	15.9	21.8	5.2	36.4	20.8	3.24	1.41
Average mean peer acceptance among the sampled students						3.06	0.53

Source: Survey data (2019)

The findings of Table 4.3 in the present study revealed that many of the high school students in Githunguri Sub-County enjoy moderate level of peer acceptance. Moderate level of peer acceptance was reflected by an average mean rating of 3.06 in the scale of 1 to 5, with a standard deviation of 0.53, implying that many students exhibit just above average level of social adjustment. For instance, 33.4% of the students asserted that their school is a place where people care about one another, reflecting a mean peer acceptance of 3.14 (SD=1.41). Similarly, a mean of 3.10 many (33.1%) of the students believe that they are accommodated in the mind of majority of their peers and they feel that they really belong in their school and classroom. The results of Table 4.3 agreed with those of a study by Kimbrough et al. (2017) conducted in California, which found that sense of belonging substantially predicted reported usage of adaptive help-seeking behaviors, even after taking students' motivation into consideration. Utility value negatively predicted expeditious help-seeking techniques, but self-efficacy for self-regulated learning positively predicted adaptive help-seeking strategies. The findings in Table 4.3 were supported by Kishkilev's (2018) research at Louisiana State University, which found a correlation between academic performance and increased peer acceptability, more friends, and decreased peer rejection in each grade. According to Kishkilev's (2018) research, girls—but not boys—performed better academically in the years when they had more friends and were less bullied by their peers. Romens et al (2015)'s study in England found significant variation among students, which strongly suggests that other aspects of a school's makeup—rather than the level of inclusivity—have an impact on students' average academic performance.

The results of Table 4.3 in the current study were in line with those of Olden et al. (2012), who conducted research in the Philippines to ascertain how students' levels of school performance were influenced by their sense of belonging. They discovered that students' sense of social belonging had an impact on their academic excellence. Associated with peers who have good peer acceptance suggests that students will be more satisfied with school, whereas associating with friends who have negative peer acceptance suggests that students will be less interested in attending.

Additionally, qualitative data obtained from excerpt in support of the findings indicated that many students who feel they have a sense of belonging are motivated to remain and engage in school activities as for instance one deputy teacher observed that;

'Our school has arrangement for form one. When they join school in that every new student is given a 'guardian' who takes care of him and is seen as just a parent or really guardian and help the new student in adjusting to the new environment by taking the new student all-round the school compound until the student gets full orientation before the student is left on his own.' [DPT 6]

Another excerpt also noted;

Many students like our school because they feel there's a lot of oneness and unity where new students are warmly welcomed and so they find it easy to copy with our school program because of this orientation.' [DPT 5]

From the excerpts of [DPT 6] and [DPT5] the present study noted that there were schools which have very good programs where conducive learning environment is created for new learners and as a result they feel warm, appreciated and liked by people in the new environment and this help new students to cope up and adjust to the new environment with ease which impacts positively to their academic achievement. The present study implied that such students they feel accepted as the bigger part of school family and so they are likely to benefit from the fruits that go along with a sense of belonging in a school as one family. In this kind of interaction, students have a place to routinely interact socially with their peers and can support one another in all peer activities.

The results of Table 4.3 in this study were in line with those of a study conducted in Macau by Fong et al. (2015), who found that feelings had an impact on the relationship between academic success and school belonging. According to a study by Fong et al., students who felt more a part of their school community had more good emotions (both activating and deactivating) and fewer negative deactivating emotions, which helped them succeed academically (2015). The results of the current study were in line with those of a study conducted in the Netherlands by Smyth et al. (2014), which discovered that subtle network processes were important for academic success and that classroom network characteristics were related to level variation in academic achievement. Peer rejection can lead to increased anxiety, such as worry about being teased or left out, which disrupts classroom focus and prevents students from learning and remembering new material.

Similarly, 26.9% of the students also held a moderate (mean = 2.91) belief that their teachers really care about them and concerned when they are absent and 16.2% of the students alluded that they always feel (mean=2.38) like everyone at their school encourages them to stay in school, graduate and go on to college or training. On the flip flop, 70.1% that some students believe they are not liked by everyone at their school and are never encouraged by anyone to stay in school. The present study findings concurred with study by Schwarz, (2012) in South Africa who reported that there was a positive relation between parental admiration and adolescents' life satisfaction independent of culturally membership and that the higher the importance of family values in a culture, the weaker was the positive effect of peer acceptance on adolescents' life satisfaction.

However, as interpreted from a mean rating of 3.24 (SD = 1.41), quite a respectable proportion (57.2%) of the students who were surveyed feel supported and respected in their school and classrooms, an indication of a feeling of high peer acceptance. Further, 30.5% of the student cited that they always feel like they are important part of their classroom, reflecting a mean peer acceptance rating of 2.97 (SD = 1.36). However, to a relatively lesser degree (mean=2.50) 17.5% of the students also feel like they are important part of their school. In fact, a good proportion of the students equated their

classroom and school as a family reflecting a feeling of social acceptance. For instance, 25.6 percent of the students reported that their classes make them feel like happy families (mean=2.91), and 29.2 percent of them assessed their school as making them feel like a big family with a rating of 2.79 and a standard deviation of 1.28. The results of the current study were in agreement with a study conducted by Kingery et al. (2011) at the University of Maine, which found that peer variables present before the shift predicted post-transition academic achievement, self-esteem, school involvement, and loneliness.

Additionally, qualitative data obtained from one of the excerpt in support of the present study findings indicated that students do appreciate the role of good friendship amongst themselves as this makes them to feel secure and in the event they are confronted by challenging situations then they will have someone to lean onto. Students therefore embrace sharing of ideas and challenges as one of the excerpt expressed;

'...at one point I counseled a student who felt like he was not having any good friend that he would trust and so even when confronted by challenging situations he would not share it with any one and he would rather keep it to himself. The thoughts of committing suicide were inevitable. His academic performance was on the decline. I however counseled him on the need to have positive interactions with the rest of the students and finally he was able to feel accepted' [G&CTr 4]

Another excerpt also noted;

I have counseled students who on many occasions have experienced rejections by their peers and as a result they felt like dropping out of school because they felt humiliated and such experiences were really weighing them down so much so much, some students even disclosed the fact that they had contemplated committing suicide' [G&CTr 3]

From the excerpts of [G&CTr 4] and [G&CTr 3], the present study noted that no man is an island and that human beings are social creatures who need to be loved, accommodated and appreciated by others and contrary to this will result into catastrophic situations which in a school setup may make a student to drop out of school or risks registering dismal performance. On the worst is even the feelings of committing suicide as a result of rejection and schools have in the past experienced cases of students committing suicide though the reasons could be varied from one individual to another one. Findings in Table 4.3 in the current study agreed with study by Romens et al. (2015) in America who reported that peer rejection had negative effects on an individual. Students caught up in such scenarios struggle with heightened anxiety including Suicidal thoughts. The unstable state of the mind interferes with the learner's concentration while undertaking studies.

On the support by teachers, the results of the survey indicate that although 56.1% of the students held a contrary opinion, 24.0% of them felt that their teachers always help them understand what they need to learn, signifying a social acceptance of 2.82 (SD=1.21). Others (22.4%) observed that their teachers always encourage (mean=2.74) them to join clubs and activities in school and community and 26.9% of the students believed that they are encouraged enough (mean=2.87) by their teachers to develop their interests and talents. However, it emerged that many of the schools do not offer variety of opportunities for the students to effectively develop their social interactions.

In the present study, an interpretation from a bigger proportion (78.9%) of students confirmed this and a low rating of 2.13 (SD = 1.14) on the number of clubs and activities in the schools in Githunguri Sub-County that the students can participate in. Further, the present study established that only a few (13.6%) of the sampled students strongly agreed that their schools effectively encourage them to explore all sorts of career opportunities after they finish school. In addition, although a few (14.3%) of the students alluded that they always (mean=2.30) have a lot of choices in what and how they learn, majority (71.5%) of them insisted they have limited choices in what and how they learn. The findings in Table 4.3 in the present study concurred with study by Schwarz et al. (2012) in South Africa who reported universal importance of parental warmth and support in adolescence and underlined the effect of culturally shared family values on the role of peer acceptance for adolescent.

Statistical Relationship between Peer Acceptances and Academic Achievement among Public Secondary School Students

The null hypothesis was examined to see if there was any statistically significant association between academic achievement and peer acceptance among secondary school pupils. The following was the hypothesis;

H_01 : Among pupils at secondary schools in Githunguri Sub-County, Kenya, there is no statistically significant correlation between peer acceptance and academic achievement.

The bivariate Pearson Correlation was used to test the hypothesis, with peer acceptance scores serving as the independent variable and academic achievement serving as the dependent variable. The bivariate Pearson Correlation generates a sample correlation coefficient, r , which measures the strength and direction of linear relationships between pairs of continuous variables. Using the frequency of replies, the independent variable was calculated and transformed into a continuous scale, where high scale ratings indicated high perceived levels of peer acceptance and vice versa. The students' academic performance served as the dependent variable, and it was determined as the average mean of the scores from the three exams. The null hypothesis would be rejected if the p -value was less than 0.05, and it would be concluded that a significant difference does exist. This level of significance (p -value) was fixed at 0.05. The current investigation would draw the conclusion that a significant difference is not there if the p -value was higher than 0.05. Table 4.4 displayed the results of a correlation analysis between secondary school students' academic success and peer acceptance.

Table 4.4: Correlation between Peer Acceptance and Academic Achievement among Students in Secondary Schools

		Peer Acceptance	Student Academic Achievements
Peer Acceptance	Pearson Correlation	1	.187**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	308	308
Student Academic Achievements	Pearson Correlation	.187**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	308	308

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 4.4, a link between academic success and peer acceptance was shown to exist among secondary school students (n = 308, r =.187; p =.001). The results of the current study disproved the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant correlation between academic achievement and peer acceptance among secondary school students in Githunguri Sub-County, Kenya. These results led the current study to draw the conclusion that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables. The results of the current study were in agreement with a study conducted in Egypt by Ahmed et al. (2015), which came to the conclusion that while peer attachment had a significant impact on Saudi students' academic performance, parent attachment had a significant impact on Egyptian students' academic performance. The results of the current study also agreed with those of a study conducted in Kenya in 2014 by Kipkemboi, who came to the conclusion that peer influences and the school environment were two psychosocial factors that affected academic achievement.

Additionally, qualitative findings obtained from interview schedules further confirmed the findings in that one of the Guidance and Counseling teachers interviewed advocated for oneness and unity as pillars that promotes wellbeing which in turns translates to better grades as students are able to share knowledge without discrimination. The respondent told the present study;

‘Our school values oneness and unity as this are pillars that build strong bonds amongst students and give student freedom to express himself even as he learns to interact and network with others hence strengthening the cohesion bonds amongst students. The schools therefore have small families which comprises of a patron which is mainly a teacher and students are put in this groups cutting across learners from form one to four. This promotes unity and encourages students to share knowledge without fears.’ [G&CTr 7]

Another excerpt also noted;

‘... it is no longer what it used to be a 3 decades ago where form ones or new students would find it very rough because they would be harass by senior and older students in the name of ushering them to the new environment. Any one practicing such should know that it is an offence which is highly punishable and can in some cases lead to expulsion of students practicing or wishing to practice such.’ [DPT 8]

From the excerpt of [DPT8], the present study noted that school values togetherness and anything that goes against that was highly punishable. Togetherness rule in particular protects form one students who has just transited from primary to secondary school and so they will find them adjusting to new environment with ease. The rule to embrace togetherness would translate to better academic results.

From the remarks, the present study found that that new students need to feel that they have a sense of belonging as this will help them in adjusting to the new environment which in turn helps them to improve in their academic achievement. The excerpt from this Deputy Principal also agreed with the findings of Smyth et al. (2014) study in Germany who found that peer acceptance slightly predicted lower levels of academic achievement in students on the non-academically oriented track and further reported that there were general positive associations between academic achievement, perceived peer acceptance and self –esteem.

Overall, the results of the current study indicated that among secondary school pupils there was a small, positive link between academic achievement and peer acceptance. Students in secondary schools perform better academically when their peers accept them more. A scatter plot was used to further highlight this, as seen in Figure 4.3

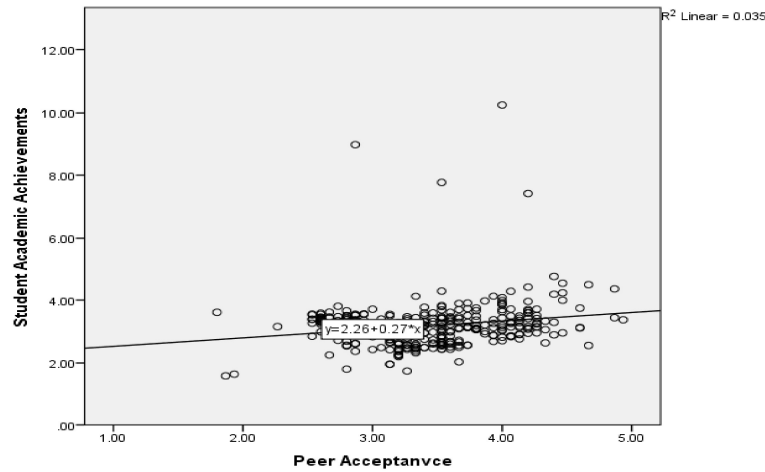


Figure 4.3: Scatter plot graph: Peer Acceptance and Academic Achievement.

The present study noted from Figure 4.3 that the scatter points showed a weak but positive relationship between the two variables. The pattern of the dots does not give clear impression of the slope moving from lower left to upper right, as expected. However, the line of best fit seemingly slopes from lower left to upper right an indication of at least some positive relationships between the two variables.

Further, to estimate the level of influence of peer acceptance on academic achievement among students in secondary schools, a coefficient of determination was computed using of regression analysis and the result was as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Regression Results- Influence of Peer Acceptance and Academic Achievement among Students in Secondary Schools

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.187 ^a	.035	.032	.79871

a. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Acceptance

b. Dependent Variable: Student Academic Achievements

Table 4.5 in the present study showed that the level of peer acceptance accounted for 3.5%, as signified by coefficient of $R^2 = .035$, of the variation in Student Academic Achievements among public secondary school students. That was a small influence on a dependent variable by a predictor. However, it reveals the importance of improving students peer acceptance in order to improve academic achievement.

Further, to determine whether peer acceptance was a significant predictor of Academic Achievements among public secondary school students, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed in line with the recommendation by Tabachnick and Fidell (2012). Use of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was necessary because it consists of calculations that provide information about levels of variability within a regression model and form a basis for tests of significance. It applies the basic regression line concept, $DATA = FIT + RESIDUAL$, which may also be written as $SST = SSM + SSE$, where SS is notation for sum of squares and T, M, and E are notation for total, model, and error, respectively. The square of the sample correlation is equal to the ratio of the model sum of squares to the total sum of squares: $R^2 = SSM/SST$, which formalizes the interpretation of R^2 as explaining the proportion of variability in the data explained by the regression model. The "F" column provides a statistic for testing the hypothesis that $\beta_1 = 0$ against the null hypothesis that $\beta_1 \neq 0$. The test statistic is the ratio MSM/MSE , the mean square model term divided by the mean square error term. When the MSM term is large relative to the MSE term, then the ratio is large and there is evidence against the null hypothesis. For simple linear regression, used in this case, the statistic MSM/MSE has an F distribution with degrees of freedom (DFM, DFE) = (1, 306).

Table 4.6: ANOVA –Influence of Peer Acceptance and Student Academic Achievements among Public Secondary School Students

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7.094	1	7.094	11.121	.001 ^b
1 Residual	195.210	306	.638		
Total	202.305	307			

a. Dependent Variable: Student Academic Achievements

b. Predictors: (Constant), Peer Acceptance

In the ANOVA table, the F statistic is equal to $7.094/.638 = 11.121$. The distribution is F (1, 306) and the probability of observing a value greater than or equal to 11.121 is less than 0.001, suggesting that there is strong evidence that β_1 is not equal to zero. Hence, ANOVA results output reveals that peer acceptance significantly predicts academic achievement among students in secondary schools, $F(1, 306) = 11.121, p = .001$. The R^2 term is equal to 0.035, indicating that 3.5% of the variability in the Student Academic Achievements in public secondary schools is explained by the peer acceptance. The present study therefore concluded that peer acceptance significantly predicts academic achievement among students in secondary schools. The present study implied that knowledge of students' peer acceptance can be used to significantly predict academic achievement among students in secondary schools.

V. THE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Relationship between Peer Acceptance and Academic Achievement among Students in Secondary Schools.

The objective of the present study was to determine the relationship between peer acceptance and academic achievement among students in secondary schools in Githunguri Sub-County, Kenya. The present study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to determine the extent to which peer acceptances was related to academic achievement. Quantitative data was used to test the hypothesis while the qualitative data from interviews of Deputy Principal and guidance and counseling teachers was to enable researcher get the true feelings and views of the participants as regards peer acceptance. Quantitative analysis of the present study established a fairly weak but positive correlation between peer acceptance and academic achievement among students in secondary schools, with a high level of peer acceptance associated with high academic achievement. Qualitative findings of the present study also confirmed the same results as respondents showed that students who were accepted by their Peers fared well in both academics and extra-curriculum activities. Additionally, the present study established that peer acceptance influenced academic achievement positively by 3.5%.

The present study concluded that peer acceptance affects academic performance positively.

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