Teachers' Labeling of students and its effect on Students' Self– concept: A Case of Mwala District, Machakos County, Kenya

By
Dr. Jonathan Muema Mwania

Email: muemamwania@yahoo.com
Mobile: +254721704337/+254735628777
And
Dr. James Matee Muola
Email: mateemuola@yahoo.com

Abstract

There is a need to help secondary school students to attain higher academic achievements in the national examinations. This is because good performance in these examinations acts as a channel through which students proceed to higher education levels and good jobs. It has been argued that persons with high self concept are more effective and do better at a given level of intelligence than persons with low self-concept. This study seeks to find out whether the way the teacher labels students affects the students' self-concept. The study employs an ex post facto research design. The target population includes all the 360 Form Four students in the six public secondary schools in Mwala District of Machakos County. A proportionate random sample of 186 students has been selected from the six schools. Data has been collected through administration of questionnaires to the respondents. The collected data has then been processed and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0 for windows. The findings show that the kind of teachers' feedback about academic performance and ability of the students influences their self-concept. The findings of this study could help teachers to boost the level of self-concept of the students and this in turn may lead to the improvement in academic performance. It could also help the Ministry of Education to see the necessity of training more teacher counselors to enhance positive self –concept in students. Lastly, it may help teachers to focus on positive feedback about academic performance and ability of students in order to encourage them to work hard. This may in turn enhance improvement in students' performance.

Key Words: Self-concept, Labeling, Academic Performance

Introduction

The provision of efficient counselling assists in the improvement of self- concept for both boys and girls and broadens their educational and occupational aspirations, hence effective utilization of unutilized human resources (Mutie & Ndambuki, 1999). Further, they argue that adolescence is an important time of the development of self-esteem, a positive self-image or self evaluation. Self–concept determines our choice of activities; our intensity of efforts, and our persistence in the face of obstacles and unpleasant experiences, in part by reducing the anxiety that might interfere with performance of the activity (Bandura *et al.*, 1982). This means that persons with high self-concept are more effective and do better at a given level of intelligence than persons with low self-concept. It

1

also implies that positive attitudes towards self indicate positive achievement while negative attitudes indicate failure. Psychologists have developed an interest in the factors that can enhance or impair academic performance. Dweck *et al* (1978) looks at the ideas of learned helplessness. The study looks at how the performance of children is affected by the way teachers give them feedback about their performance. It also looks at patterns of classroom feedback and attempts to identify the difference in these patterns for girls and boys that might explain the helplessness effect. The basic suggestions they tested was that the widespread use of negative commends to boys in all manner of circumstances reduces the impact of negative comments about academic performance. They argue that whereas the less frequent use of negative comments for girls makes the negative evaluations about their work seem to be a comment on their ability rather than their conducts.

The implication of the preceding argument is that the more criticism the teacher delivers in relative to praise, the more feedback about academic failure will be attributed to a characteristics to the teacher ("you are just saying that because you don't like me") rather than of the child. And the more positive the teacher is to girls the more likely feedback about academic success will be attributed to her favorable attitude ("you are just saying that because you like me"). Increasing evidence from Dweck and his colleagues indicate that if the teacher praises the boys or criticizes the girls about their school work, this will have more effect because it does not fall into the usual pattern. The paper reports two studies. The first is an observational study of feedback given by teachers to girls and boys in a classroom. It was predicted that, compared to girls, boys would receive:
  (i)   More negative feedback,
  (ii)   A greater proportion of their feedback for conduct and non –intellectual aspects of the work
  (iii)   More attributions of their failure to their motivation.

Dweck *et al* (1978) also predicted that teachers would use positive feedback more specifically to refer to the academic performance of the boys, but more generally for girls to refer to conduct and non-intellectual aspects of their work. Despite the fact that girls received more and less negative evaluations than boys, the patterns of the comments and attributions made by the teachers were more likely to increase feelings of helplessness to girls than to boys.

Another psychologist, Rosenthal (1994) has shown that teachers' belief about a given student's ability and potential has a small but significant effect on her behaviour towards that student and on the student's eventual achievements. Rosenthal's standard procedure is to tell teachers at the beginning of school years that some of the children in the class are underachievers and just ready to "bloom" intellectually although in fact the children labeled this way are chosen randomly. Those labeled as having more potential typically show more gains during the school years than do those who have not been labeled in this way. So the comparative judgments teachers make about individual children can have pervasive effects.

According to Bee (1997), children absorb these explanations and adjust their behaviour accordingly. He observes that the beliefs about their own abilities that students develop through this process are usually quite accurate. He argues that students who consistently do well in comparison to others come to believe that they are academically competent. Further, and perhaps more important, they come to belief that they are in control of academic outcomes. Interestingly, Bee says that this seems to be less true of girls than of boys, at least in American culture. Bee notes that on average girls get better school grades than boys do, but they have lower perceptions of their own ability. When they

do well, they are more likely to attribute it to hard work rather than to ability: when they do poorly, they see it as their own fault (Stipek & Gralinski, 1991). Therefore, teachers' labelling of students seems to have an effect on the students' self-concept. It is against this background that the study attempted to establish whether there is a relationship between teachers' labelling of students and the students' level of self–concept among secondary school students in Mwala district of Machakos County.

Methodology.

The target population for this study included all the Form Four public secondary school students in Mwala district. The district has 15 public secondary schools with a total population of 4006 students (3250 boys and 756 girls). The six schools were stratified into three categories that included boys' schools, girls' schools and mixed schools. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used in selecting the required sample for this study. Purposive sampling was used in this study in selecting six schools out of the 15 to include two boys', two girls' and two mixed schools. It helped to pick cases that were typical of the population being studied (Kathuri & Pals, 1993). According to these authors, in purposive sampling, the researcher does not necessarily have a quota fill; from within various strata as in quota sampling neither does he or she just pick the nearest items as in convenience sampling. Rather the researcher's judgment is used to select the respondents, and then picks only those who best meet the purpose of the study. This was done so as to ensure that all the three categories of schools were adequately involved in the study. Table 1 summarizes the Form Four student population in the six selected schools, by gender. Note that because of confidentiality, the actual school names were not used in this study.

Table 1
Breakdown of the Target Population by Gender

| Name of school | Number of Form four Students | | Total |
	Boys	Girls	
A	60	-	60
B	-	60	60
C	47	33	80
D	80	-	80
E	-	40	40
F	22	18	40
Total	209	151	360

Source: Mwala District Education Office, (2006)

Table 1 indicates that the six schools had a student population of 360 in Form Four classes. In order to determine the sample size of students to be drawn from the 360 Form four students in the six selected schools, this study adopted a formula by Kathuri and Pals (1993) for estimating a sample size, n, from a known population size, N.

$$n = \frac{\chi^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2 (N - 1) + \chi^2 P (1 - P)}$$

Where:
n = required sample size
N = the given population size of form four students, 360 in this case
P = Population proportion, assumed to be 0.50

d^2 = the degree of accuracy whose value is 0.05

χ^2 = Table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom, which is 3.841

Substituting these values in the equation, estimated sample size (n) was:

$$n = \frac{3.841 \times 360 \times 0.50\,(1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2\,(360 - 1) + 3.841 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}$$

$$n = 186$$

Proportionate stratified sampling was used in selecting the 186 students from the six purposively selected schools. This method requires the selection of units at random from each stratum in proportion to the actual size of the group in the total population. This ensured that the sample was proportionately and adequately distributed among the six schools according to the population of each school as shown in table 2.

Table 2
Distribution of the Sample Size

| Schools | Sampled Population from Form Four | | Total |
	Boys	Girls	
A	31	0	31
B	0	31	31
C	18	23	41
D	41	0	41
E	0	21	21
F	12	9	21
Total	102	84	186

A proportionate sample of male and female students was then selected from the two mixed schools using proportionate stratified sampling (Table 2). This sampling procedure gives each unit in the population an equal opportunity to be included. The procedure according to Kathuri and Pals (1993) involves assigning a number and then using the number to select the sample size required. This ensured that male and female students from the mixed schools were involved according to their respective population in each school. Lastly, simple random sampling using random number table was used to select the specified number of students of each gender to be included in the sample from each school. The students corresponding to the number picked were included in the sample.

Data was collected through administration of a structured questionnaire with the selected respondents. The questionnaire used a five-point range likert scale to assess students' self-concept. The likert scale was adopted from Atwater (1994) and Coopersmith (1967). The scale sought to measure the students' levels of agreement or disagreement with 32 statements related to their self-concept.

Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analyses (percentages, frequencies, tables and cross-tabulations) were used to summarize and organize data and to describe the characteristics of the sample population. Inferential statistics were used in making deductions and generalizations about the whole population. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) inferential statistics deal with inferences about a population based on results obtained from samples. Inferring sample results to the population is necessary since this research deals with a sample. The more representative a sample is, the more generalizable the results are

expected to be in a population. Mugenda and Mugenda argue that inferential statistics are concerned with determining how likely it is for the results obtained from a sample to be similar to results expected from the entire population.

Results and Discussions.

The study assessed the way teachers labeled students in the study area. This was done on a 5-point range likert scale using 6 statements relating to the way teachers responded (comment) to the academic performance of the students. The sample respondents were requested to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of their responses.

Table 3
Teachers' versus Labeling of students

Statement	*Response (%)*				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
My teacher tells me that I have a great potential.	60.2	32.3	3.8	3.8	0.0
I relate well with my teacher	31.2	45.2	6.5	13.4	3.8
My teacher acknowledges my efforts.	24.2	57.5	3.2	11.8	3.2
My teacher makes me feel I am not good enough.	5.9	23.1	6.5	32.3	32.3
My teacher dismisses my points	3.2	9.1	6.5	47.8	33.3
My teacher tells me that I cannot make it.	0.5	2.2	5.4	27.4	64.5

N = 186

An examination of Table 3 indicates that the teachers appreciated and encouraged students in their academic work. They recognized their abilities and were always available for the students. Such positive feedback from the teachers about the academic ability and performance of the students was likely to encourage them to work hard. Dweck, *et al.,* (1978) support this by observing that positive feedback of the teachers about the performance of their students encourages high academic achievement in class.

The response to each constituent statement was scored on a scale of 1, indicating the most unfavourable feedback of the teachers about students' performance, to 5, indicating the most favourable feedback. The individual statement scores were added up to form a total score for each respondent, which measured unfavourable-favourableness of teachers' labeling of the respondent. The total score varied between 6, indicating the most unfavourable feedback score, and 30, indicating the most favourable feedback score. The higher the score, the more positive (favourable) was the teachers' feedback about the academic performance of the respondents, and vice versa. The total score was later coded into three ordinal categories in order to differentiate between the levels of unfavourable-favourableness of teachers' labeling of the respondents. This included a score below 18 (6-17) meaning unfavourable, a score of 18 (average/neutral) and a score above 18 (19-30) meaning favourable. Table 4 depicts the level of unfavourable-favourableness of teachers' labeling of the respondents.

Table 4
Level of Teachers' Labeling on students

Level of Teacher Labeling	Frequency	Percent
Unfavourable	6	3.2
Average/neutral	1	.5
Favourable	179	96.2
Total	186	100.0

Table 4 indicates that 96.2 percent of the respondents recorded a favourable teacher labeling. This suggests that their teacher gave them favourable feedback about their academic performance. As noted earlier, such favourable feedback that teachers gave their students about academic performance encourage them to work hard as they feel recognized and appreciated. Rosenthal (1994) supports this by arguing that favourable feedback from the teachers positively affects students' attitude toward their academic work. He argues that teachers' belief about a given student's ability and potential has a small but significant effect on his/her behavior towards the student and the student's eventual achievements. Those labeled has having more potential typically show more gains during school years than do those who have not been labeled in this way. Consequently, the comparative judgments teachers make about individual children can have pervasive effects.

Correlation analysis was also used to test these variables. In this case, teacher labeling was treated as the independent variable while self-concept was the dependent variable. Both teacher labeling and self-concept were measured on a 5-point likert scale. Table 5 shows a correlation coefficient matrix of teacher labeling and self-concept.

Table 5
Pearson Correlation of Teacher Labeling and Self-Concept

Variables	Statistics	Self-concept	Teacher labeling
Self-concept	Pearson Correlation	1	.493(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	186	186
Teacher labeling	Pearson Correlation	.493(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	186	186

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

Table 5 indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship between teacher labeling and self-concept (r = .493, $p < 0.01$). Since $p < 0.01$, it implies that favourable feedback that teachers gave their students about academic performance improved their self-concept, and vice versa. This means that for high academic achievement to be realized in schools, teachers should strive and give favourable feedback to students about their abilities to perform well in school.

Recommendations

There is a need to boost the level of self-concept of the students in order to improve their academic achievement. This could be realized by establishing strong guidance and counseling programme that will led to improvement of self-concept of secondary school students. This is in line with respondent and work done by Atwater (1994) who says that self-concept exerts the powerful influence, affecting the way you perceive, judge and behave.There is also need for teachers to focus on positive feedback about academic performance of students in order to encourage them to work hard. This could be realized by educating teachers through guidance and counseling on the importance of positive feedback on academic performance to students. This is in line with the respondents and the findings of Dweck *et al.,* (1978) who talks about the importance of positive feedback to boys and girls.

REFERENCES

Bandura , A., *et al* (1982). Microanalysis of action and fear arousal as a function of   deferential levels of perceived self –efficacy . *Journal of Personality and Social   Psychology*, *43*, 5 –21.

Bee, H. (1997). *The developing child.* (8th Ed.). New York: Longman

Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The Antecedents of Self – esteem*. San Francisco: Freeman.

Dweck, C. S., *et al* (1978). Sex differences in learnt   helplessness.   The   contingencies   of evaluative feedback in the classroom; and an experimental   analysis. *Developmental psychology, 14*, 268-76.

Kathuri, N. J., & Pals, D.A. (1993). *Introduction to Educational Research*. Egerton   University: Educational Media Centre.

Mugenda, O. & Mugenda, J.D. (1999). *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approach*. Nairobi: Acts Press.

Mutie, E. K. &   Ndambuki , P. (1999). *Guidance and Counselling for Schools and Colleges* . Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Rosenthal, R. (1994) Interpersonal expectancy effects. A 30-year perspective. *Current   Directions in Psychological Science, 3*,176-179.

Stipek, D., & Gralinski, H. (1991). Gender differences in children's achievement-related beliefs and emotional responses to success and failure in Math. *Journal of Educational psychology, 83*, 361-371.