

**IMPACT OF SELF ESTEEM ADAPTATION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT  
AMONG STUDENTS: A STUDY OF PUBLIC DAY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
MERU COUNTY, KENYA**

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**Abstract**

Quality education in schools is vital to provide learners with holistic knowledge to improve not only themselves but also the community at large. Academic achievement among secondary school students in Kenya is important because this determines future chances for advancement in life in terms of career options, further studies and sociopolitical appointments in the society. Academic failure may relegate most individuals to casual jobs, peasant farming and low socioeconomic status if they lack business acumen. Due to the rising academic competition for limited professional courses at Universities and Colleges, it is necessary to examine factors influencing academic achievement among secondary school students in Kenya. This study investigated the impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement among students in public day secondary school. Descriptive survey research design was adapted for the study whose sample size was 384 students, school counsellors and deputy principals in the day secondary schools. The research instruments consisted of questionnaires and interview schedules. Data analysis was enabled by use of the Scientific Package for Social Sciences version 20.0. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed for data analysis. The findings indicated that self esteem adaptation negatively impacted on academic achievement with no statistically significant gender differences among day secondary school students. Therefore, it was necessary for the school administrators to institute school policies that boost students' self esteem. Teachers and parents need to make students aware of personal values and talents and also provide resources to nurture such virtues. School counselors need to design programs geared towards enhancing students' self esteem.

**Keywords:** Self esteem, Academic achievement, Adaptation, Student, Gender, Public Day secondary school

## 1. Introduction

Self esteem may be described as the need for respect from others and a desire for self respect. Respect for others entails recognition, acceptance and appreciation (Maslow, 2003). Individuals are driven to seek self esteem and without it they are unable to grow and achieve self actualization. Self esteem serves a protective function and reduces anxiety in life (Mburugu, 2013). Students may feel inferior because of inherent defective mental set up, physiological structure and color of the skin (dark) which may lead to self esteem adaptation deficits. Some students may post dismal academic achievement at school because of self defeating attitudes (Ingule, Rono&Ndambuki 1996). According to Borich and Tombari (1995) attitude is the judgment of one's feelings and academic failure at school tends to generate feelings of worthlessness and helplessness; aspects of self esteem issues. They may think that the world is unfair and unfriendly and thus attribute failure at school and in other situations to this. Students in day secondary schools may not be able to behave appropriately with peers and in boarding secondary schools. Due to this failure to get along, they may develop a poor self concept which in turn may lead to low self esteem.

Parents, teachers and peers play a major role in development of a child's self esteem. For example, if they place high value on appearance, it may affect the child's self esteem positively or negatively. Questioning a child's ability to perform, may cause the child to see a greater discrepancy between what he can do and what he thinks he ought to do. The greater the discrepancy between what he may be able to do and what he thinks he ought to may bring about a negative feeling towards self. Kute (2008) states that students particularly at adolescents valued the level at which their issues are treated; they are concerned about their self esteem. According to Sikolia and Lutomia, (2002), some of the self esteem problems often encountered by student include self identity issues, feelings of loneliness, depression and anxiety. When students face problems, they may express their dissatisfaction in various ways such as withdrawal, drug-abuse, demonstrations, riots, anxiety, and decline in performance or dropout (Vice Chancellors Report 2000). Such issues may generate low self esteem and a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction and failure in life. Therefore, parents and significant others need to develop an environment that fosters high self esteem among adolescents and especially among public day secondary school students.

Woolfolk (1995) asserts that after transition to a new school, especially the transition to high school, self esteem tends to decrease until students adjust to new demands of schedules and workload. Students with higher self esteem are more likely to be successful in school. According to Charles (2002), home environment has a significant influence on a child's academic achievement. High self esteem is likely to be related to more favorable attitudes towards school, more positive behavior in the classroom and greater popularity with other students. Goods and Weinstein, (1986) posit that building of self esteem, interpersonal competence, problem solving and leadership is critical in academic learning. Student satisfaction with school, the sense that classes are interesting and that teachers are caring is likely to raise self esteem and this has a direct impact on academic achievement. According to Woolfolk (1995), personal acceptance may also grow as a child forms a relationship with teachers and classmates and is fostered by a carefully constructed classroom environment. A student with high level of self acceptance is likely to be confident, happy, highly motivated and with the right attitude to succeed academically. Contrary, students with low levels of self acceptance are likely to be fed with negative thinking and criticisms by students and significant others. This may cause an individual to lose confidence and give up easily rather than face challenges hence, negatively impacting on students' academic achievement (Kute,

2009). Therefore, this study sought to investigate the impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement among students in public day secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

In Kenya, education aims at producing citizens with skills, knowledge, expertise and personal qualities that are required to support the growing economy. It is also aimed at promoting individual development and self-fulfillment. An important aspect of individual development is character building. Quality education is expected to enhance acquisition of sound moral values and help students to grow up into self disciplined, self reliant and integrated citizens. Positive self esteem adaptation enables students to concentrate well in school hence facilitating assimilation of education. It was expected that students who are likely to be well adapted in school are also better placed in terms of achieving the Kenyan goals of Education. However, some students undergo self esteem adaptation challenges which may hinder them from achieving these educational goals. Such students are likely to exhibit behavior problems which at times can be very harmful to themselves, to other students and /or to the learning institution as a whole. They are likely to be disturbed with marked failures in life and unsatisfactory relationship with others. The main concern of this study was to examine the impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement among students in public day secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

## **3. Objectives**

The objective of this study was to determine the impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement among students in public day secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

## **4. Methodology**

This study adapted the descriptive survey research design which was deliberately used to obtain important and precise information concerning status of the phenomena and draw valid conclusions from the discovered facts (Lockesh, 1984). A sample of 384 participants was drawn from the target population of 55,224 respondents comprising of students, school counsellors and deputy principals of secondary schools in Meru County. The techniques used in obtaining the sample were purposive sampling and simple random. The research instruments utilized in data collection were questionnaires and interview schedules. Before the questionnaire was administered to students in each school, either the school head teacher or the deputy head teacher introduced the researcher to the respondents in their respective classes. Reliability of the research instruments were estimated by use of split-half technique which generated a correlation coefficient of 0.78. To mitigate unethical practices, informed consent was sought from the respondents before administering the research instruments and thereafter confidentiality was observed. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20.0 was engaged for data analysis using inferential and descriptive statistics. The data analysis results were represented on Tables, Pie Charts and Bar Graphs.

## **5. Results of the Study**

The following were the results of data analysis:

### **5.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

The information on demographic characteristics of the respondents was considered necessary in understanding the nature of the study participants. The gender of student participants was

proportional with 180 students of each gender due to the intention of comparing boys and girls in these schools. The age composition of the students ranged from 16 years and below to 19 years and above with majority (50.6%) being 17 years old followed by 33.9% of the 16 year olds or below. Students who were 18 years old comprised 10.8% while only 4.7% were 19 years and above. General information was also sought on how students rated themselves academically. Respondents who rated themselves as average were 58.3%, above average were 12.1% and 29.6% rated themselves below average.

School counselors were required to indicate their gender and data analysis results showed that 41.7% were males while 58.3% were females. Majority school counselors (41.6%) had served as school counselors for more than 5 years, 25% had served between 3 years and 4 years, while 16.7% had served for less than 1 year and between 1 year and 2 years each. This denotes that most of the school counselors had enough experience to inform this study. Regarding the highest level of education, most school counselors (50%) had a Bachelors Degree, 41.75 had Masters Degree while 8.3% had a Diploma. Most school counselors (75%) were married while the remaining 25% were single.

The Deputy Principals' gender was proportional with the age ranging between 40 and 50 years. Concerning academic qualification, 58% had Bachelors Degree while 48% had a Masters Degree. Most of the Deputy Principals (53%) had served in the current position for more than five years, 32% had served between 2 years and 5 years while 15% had served for less than 2 years.

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## **5.2 Impact of Self esteem Adaptation of students on Academic Achievement**

Self esteem is a student's feeling about him/herself and its implication on academic achievement. This may be experienced as feelings of acceptance by self and others. It can be high or low depending on the individual. A student who has a high self esteem is likely to adapt to school life with ease. This was analyzed by determining the impact of self esteem adaptation factors and on their academic achievement. The extent to which respondents value themselves and whether their self esteem has affected their academic achievement positively or negatively was analyzed. Finally t-test was used to compare the impact of self esteem on academic achievement between boys and girls in secondary schools.

### 5.2.1 Impact of self Esteem Adaptation Factors on Academic Achievement by Student

#### Participants

In order to establish the impact of self esteem adaptation factors on academic achievement, the mean and the standard deviation were determined based on 15 items measuring self esteem adaptation. The respondents were grouped in three categories of least impact, little impact and strong impact. Likert scale was used to award points. The respondents were expected to indicate responses on a five level likert scale where 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Undecided, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree. All the items were positively stated and the higher the points the stronger the impact. A score below 2.5 indicated low impact, a score between 2.6 to 3.6 indicated a moderate impact and a score above 3.6 indicated a strong impact. The average mean was 3. This information is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Impact of Self esteem on Academic Achievement

Self Esteem Adaptation Factors	N	B o y G i r l s			
		Mean	SD	Mean	S D
The feeling that am appreciated by parents has boosted my academic achievement	1 8 0	4.47	0.80	4 . 3 9	1 . 0 5
My feeling that other students value me has boosted my academic achievement	1 8 0	3.98	1.02	3 . 9 2	0 . 9 7
My don't care attitude about the comments made by my colleagues when i answer questions in class has enabled me to achieve well academically	1 8 0	3.37	1.51	3 . 6 9	1 . 3 9
My appreciation of my communication skills has nothing to do with my academic achievement	1 8 0	2.89	1.46	2 . 9 3	1 . 4 1
Appreciation of my ethnic background has positively influenced my academic achievement	1 8 0	3.93	1.17	4 . 0 9	1 . 0 9
My feelings of adequacy has influenced achievement positively	1 8 0	3.57	1.18	3 . 7 5	1 . 1 8
Acceptance of my social background has influenced my academic achievement positively	1 8 0	3.93	1.16	4 . 1 4	1 . 0 3
My feelings of independence has boosted my academic achievement	1 8 0	3.86	1.18	3 . 4 4	1 . 4 1
Having confidence to do things on my own has enhanced my academic achievement	1 8 0	4.24	0.99	3 . 9 9	1 . 3 2
Appreciating my appearance has positively influenced academic achievement	1 8 0	3.14	1.01	4 . 1 4	1 . 1 2
My confidence to try new things has positively influenced my academic achievement	1 8 0	4.19	0.96	4 . 2 2	0 . 9 4
My feelings that am a worthwhile person has helped me to achieve academically	1 8 0	4.15	0.99	3 . 9 2	1 . 2 2
Respecting myself has boosted my academic achievement	1 8 0	4.41	0.88	4 . 4 4	0 . 9 5
Appreciating the way i do things has enabled me to achieve well academically	1 8 0	4.34	0.85	4 . 2 6	1 . 0 0
My feelings of acceptance by my colleagues has boosted my academic achievement	1 8 0	3.74	1.19	3 . 6 8	1 . 2 2
Valid N (listwise)/ average mean and SD	1 8 0	3.95	1.09	3 . 9 3	1 . 1 5

The findings in Table 1 indicated that the factor on self esteem that had the strongest impact on academic achievement was feeling appreciated by parents for boys with the mean of 4.47 and a SD of 0.8 and slightly lower for girls with a mean of 4.39 and a SD of 1.05. Other items that had a very strong impact were; respecting oneself for girls (m=4.44, sd=0.95) and

(m=4.41, sd=0.88) for boys, appreciating the way one does things (m=4.34, sd=0.85) for boys and (m=4.26, sd=1.00) for girls, confidence to try new things for girls (m=4.22, sd=0.94) and (m=4.19, sd=0.96) for boys, both boys and girls agreed that appreciating ones appearance has an impact on academic achievement with an equal mean of 4.14. Boys also indicated, having confidence to do new things on one self (m=4.24, sd=0.9) against girls (m=3.99, sd=1.32). Acceptance of social background (m=4.14, sd=1.03) and appreciating the ethnic background (m=4.09, sd=1.09) came out strong from girls as opposed to boys who scored at 3.93 in the two factors. The item with the lowest impact was appreciation of communication skills for both boys and girls with a mean of 2.89 and 2.93 respectively. Having a don't care attitude scored low for boys (m=3.37, sd=1.51) while feelings of independence scored low for girls (m=3.44, sd=1.41) that were lower than the average mean of (3.95) for boys and (3.93) for girls.

### 5.2.2 Extent to which Respondents value themselves

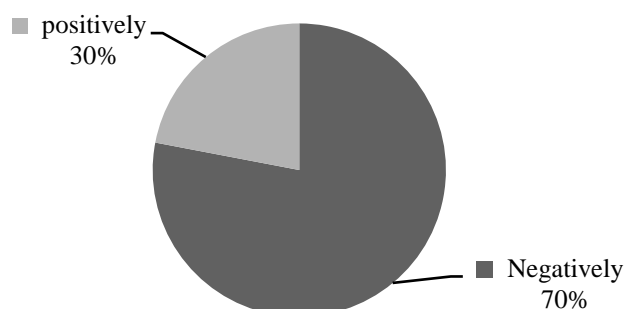
An item on the extent the respondents valued themselves was asked. The following were the responses as in Table 2.

**Table 2: Extent to which students value themselves**

	Boys		Girls	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very great extent	43	23.6	40	22
Great extent	50	27.5	30	16.5
No opinion	30	16.5	27	14.8
Small extent	37	20.4	53	29.2
No extent	20	11	30	16.5
Total	180	100	180	100

The results in Table 2 indicate that 27.5% of boys against 16.5% of girls valued themselves to a great extent and thus have a high self esteem. Only 22% of girls indicated that they valued themselves to a very great extent against boys (23.6%). Most of girls valued themselves to a small extent an indicator of low self esteem. A number of students

A question item in the questionnaire required student participants to indicate whether self esteem had a positive or negative impact on academic achievement. Information in Figure 1 presents findings for boys.

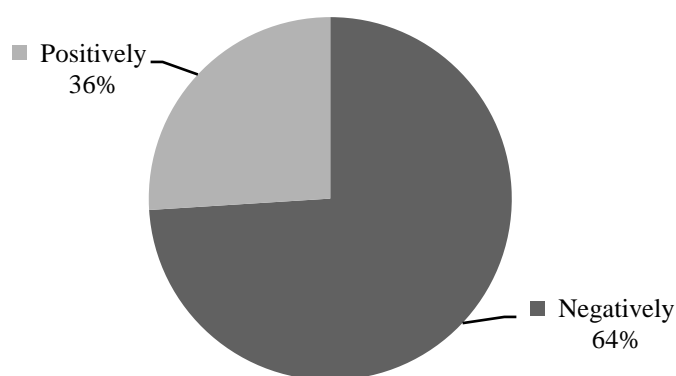


**Figure 1: Impact of Boys Self esteem on Academic Achievement by Students**



The response on whether self esteem had a positive or negative impact on academic achievement, 30% boys responded positively while 70% of the response was negative as shown in Figure 1.

The findings for girls on whether self esteem had a positive or negative impact on academic achievement is shown in figure 2



**Figure 2.** Impact of Girls Self esteem on Academic Achievement

The findings on whether self esteem impacted positively or negatively on academic achievement, 36% girls responded positively while 64% of the responded negatively as indicated in Figure 2. Therefore, both boys and girls agreed that low self esteem had a negative impact on their academic achievement.

#### 5.2.4 Impact of Self esteem Adaptation on Academic Achievement by school counselors

Further information was gathered from school counselors' respondents on self esteem of students and academic achievement. The results were analyzed by determining the mean and SD on 15 items related to self esteem. The responses were grouped in three categories of low impact, moderate and strong impact. This was based on five likert scale to award points; 5=SA, 4=A, 3=UD, 2=D and 1=SD. Highest score indicated strong impact while lowest score indicated low impact. A score below 2.5 was considered low, between 2.5 to 3.5 was considered moderate and a score 3.5 and above is strong. The Table 3 shows the response on the mean and SD of self esteem adaptation factors.

**Table 3: Impact of Self esteem Adaptation Factors on Academic Achievement from school counselors**

Self - esteem Adaptation Factors	N	Mean	S	D
Students who feel appreciated by parents achieves better academically	12	4.67	.4	.9
Students who have feelings that others value them have a positive academic achievement	12	4.42	.9	0
Students who have a don't care attitude about the comments made by their colleagues when they answer questions in class have better academic results	12	3.58	1.4	4
Appreciation of students communication abilities has nothing to do with their academic achievement	12	2.58	1.3	8
Students who appreciate their ethnic background have a positive academic achievement	12	3.83	1.0	3
Students feelings of adequacy has influenced their academic achievement positively	12	4.00	1.0	4
Students who accept their social background performs better academically	12	4.42	.5	1
Students who have confidence to do things on their own performs well academically	12	4.42	.6	7

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Students ability to make decisions or solve problems on their own achieve better academically	1	2	4.50	.52
Students who appreciate their physical appearance performs well in their academic achievement	1	2	3.83	1.40
Students who are confident to try new things do well academically	1	2	4.08	1.31
Students who feel they are worthwhile persons do well academically	1	2	4.08	1.16
Students who respect themselves performs better academically	1	2	4.50	.52
Students who appreciate the way they do things are academically success full	1	2	4.33	.98
Students who feel accepted by their colleagues perform well academically	1	2	4.42	1.16
V a l i d N ( l i s t w i s e )	1	2		

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The findings in Table 3 indicated that the factor that had strong impact on academic achievement was students who feel appreciated by their parents. This had a mean of 4.67 and SD of 0.49. Others that had strong impact were; students who respect themselves and students who have ability to make decisions and solve problems that had both a mean of 4.50. Four other factors had a mean of 4.42 and varied SD. The factors with the lowest impact were; appreciation of communication abilities (mean= 2.58, SD=1.38) and students who have don't care attitude about comments made by colleagues (mean=3.58, SD=1.44). Only four factors had a mean less than 4.00. This implied that the factors on self esteem had a very strong impact on academic achievement.

### 5.2.5 Response from Deputy Principals

More qualitative data was gathered through an interview session and the discussion is presented in Excerpt 3.

#### Excerpt 3

**Researcher:** To what extent do you think students acceptance of themselves and the significant others has an impact on academic achievement?

**Respondent 1:** Very great extent. If a student accepts self, then the self esteem of such student is high. The student will develop confidence to face challenges and this will improve his performance. They are able to face challenges confidently.

**Respondent 6:** great extent. Students who accept themselves and feel accepted by others are highly motivated to excel in life.

**Respondent 10:** great extent. Such students don't give up easily. They try many times until they succeed.

**Respondent 12:** very great extent. Such students are ever in competition to remain the best and always feel they have a chance to make the best in life.

**Researcher:** What is your suggestion on improving academic achievement of students?

**Respondent 3:** Close supervision of the learners to ensure they do the right thing.

**Respondent 4:** Motivation of both teachers and learners.

**Respondent 5:** Finding ways of learners who are needy to assist them to go through their course.

**Respondent 8:** Maximizing use school counselors to address emerging issues among students.



### 5.2.6 Comparison of Boys and Girls Impact of Self Esteem Adaptation on Academic Achievement

In order to compare the variability of impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement among boys and girls in public day secondary schools t-test was used. The mean for self esteem for the two variables and the standard deviation were tabulated. The independent variable was the type of school. All factors on self esteem and the mean were considered the dependent variables. The results were as shown on Table 5.

	School	N	Mean	t-value	D	f	p-value
Self esteem	Boys	180	3.95	0.316	357	0.752	
	Girls	180	3.93				

From Table 5, the mean for impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement for boys was 3.95 and for girls 3.93. The standard deviation from the mean for boys is 1.09 and girls 1.15. The number of participants in each case was 180. The t-value was 2.34 and p-value 0.752. The computed p-value 0.752 was greater than theoretical  $p < 0.05$ . This is indicative of no statistically significant difference in impact of self esteem adaptation on academic achievement among boys and girls in public day secondary schools.

### 6. Discussion of the Results

The results indicated that self esteem adaptation impacted on academic achievement to a great extent. According to Borich and Tombari (1995) perception of self worth is enhanced by experiences in areas in which a student places value about self. In addition, Kute (2008) notes that students particularly at adolescents valued the level at which their issues are treated, they are concerned about their self image/ self esteem and this affect their academic achievement. Besides, Ingule, Rono and Ndambuki (1996) suggest that attributes such as physical attractiveness and social skills such as ability to self disclose and social competence are instrumental in developing social support and promoting psychosocial adaptation. According to Borich and Tombari (1995) successful adaptation of students depends on how well they are able to handle frustrations in life. As an individual goes through life, he builds up a repertoire of psychosocial defense mechanisms which he uses unconsciously to adapt to ego-involving frustrations.

The findings indicated that students required self acceptance and acceptance by others to achieve better academically. Ruggiero (2008), purports that high self esteem correlates positively with self-reported happiness and thus academic achievement. Therefore, school counselors may substantially impact on students' academic achievement and personal development by enabling them to make necessary self esteem adaptations towards improving performance (Chaduvendi, 2007). According to Borich and Tombari (1995) attitude is the judgment of one's feelings and academic failure at school tends to generate feelings of worthlessness and helplessness; aspects of self esteem issues. This means that success at school may lead to high self esteem which in turn perpetuates further increases in academic achievement. The agreed that students who were appreciated by parents tended to post excellent academic grades. Shengchao and Hannan (2007respondents) argue that home background influence a students' intellectual, psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations. Thus parents who constantly have issues at home affect the children emotionally and this could lead to problems with self esteem adaptation as well as academic achievement

The respondents agreed that students who were appreciated by parents tended to post excellent academic grades. The responses also indicated that most of students perform poorly because they feel neglected by the significant others. Shengchao and Hannan (2007) argue that home background influence a students' intellectual, psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations. Thus parents who constantly have issues at home affect the children emotionally and this could lead to problems with self esteem adaptation as well as academic achievement.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i) It is necessary for the school administrators to institute school policies that boost students' self esteem.
- ii) Teachers and parents may need to make students aware of personal values and talents and also provide resources and opportunities to nature such virtues.
- iii) School counselors need to design programs geared towards enhancing students' self esteem.

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