

**IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL ADAPTATION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT  
AMONG STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN BOARDING  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MERU COUNTY, KENYA**

**Authors**

Grace Gatune Muriithi  
Veronica Karimi Nyaga  
Hillary K. Barchok

**Author Affiliations**

Chuka University,  
Department of Education,  
P. O. Box 109 – 60400,  
Chuka, Kenya

**Email of the corresponding author**

gracegatune69@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

*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. Hence, there is need to examine factors that may influence academic achievement among secondary school students in the country for which adaptation in school is key. Consequently, this study sought to examine the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among secondary school students with special emphasis on comparing boys and girls in boarding secondary schools in Meru County in Kenya. The study employed the descriptive survey research design on a sample size of 384 students, school counsellors and deputy principals in boarding secondary schools in Meru County. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect the required data. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as means, standard deviations and t-test statistic were used to analyze the data with the aid of the Scientific Package for Social Sciences version 20.0. Data analysis results revealed that although interpersonal adaptation impacted positively on academic achievement, there were no significant differences in the impact between boys and girls in boarding secondary schools. Thus, to improve and sustain academic achievement among secondary school students, measures need to be put in place to enhance interpersonal relationships among students as well as between students and school staff, school administrators, relatives and parents.*

**Key words:** Interpersonal Adaptation, Academic achievement.

**1. Introduction**

A school is a place where children develop a variety of competences that help to define self and ability; where friendship with peers is nurtured and the role of the community member is played out (Goods & Weinstein, 1986). Typically, students do not learn or exist alone but rather in close collaboration with their school colleagues and with encouragement from significant others (Weissberg & Myrisk, 2007). Therefore, interpersonal adaptation is essential for social acceptance which requires that a person obeys social norms, beliefs and values set by a group, organization or

society. The way the school is organized, its rules and regulations, the routine work, the curriculum and teaching methodologies may make many students to run from or stay in school (Wango & Mungai, 2007). How well a student adapts to the school social environment will determine the academic achievement.

A student's interpersonal adaptation may have its foundation in the home environment and at school with factors inherent in these two environments determining how well the student relates with other people. Shengchao and Hannum (2007) argue that the home background has influence on a students' intellectual, psychosocial, moral and spiritual development. For example, parents who constantly fight and disagree affect children emotionally and this could lead to dismal academic achievement at school. According to Wango and Mungai (2007), a child may have psychosocial maladaptation as a result of parental pressure and demand for perfection which take the form of criticism, abuse and scolding at the slightest mistake. Children in broken homes may not get affection, love, sympathy and security thus vulnerable to social challenges. There are some emotionally disturbed homes which may be in constant conflict between parents and other members of the family; such provide conditions which may affect security, affection, mental stability and fulfillment of needs of children (Wango & Mungai, 2007). Some parents reject their children because of some personal inadequacies such as physical and mental disabilities; the rejected child develops feelings of insecurity, helplessness and loneliness. This creates frustration and may lead to psychosocial maladaptation

that affects academic achievement. Therefore, inappropriate parent child relationships may give rise to quarrels, disagreements and fighting resulting into truancy, stealing, dishonesty, guilt and a sense of inferiority at school. This may end up affecting a student's academic achievement.

Osterman (2000) asserts that when students perceive their teachers as supportive, disruptive behaviour decreases and students perception of successful interactions with teachers increase. The quality of student teacher relationship is positively associated with student academic motivation and attitudes towards school. Teacher student relationship provides an essential foundation for effective classroom management which is essential to students' academic achievement. Teachers can influence the dynamics of their classroom and build strong teacher student relationship that will support student learning. Wetzel (1997) points out that the teacher student relationship is a critical fact that motivates middle school to engage in the academic and social activities of the classroom. The Government of Kenya, (2005) recommends the need to set services that will equip learners with skills that enable them to meet growth and development; the need for enhanced physical and psychosocial health. To attain the goals of vision 2030, the Kenyan learning institutions need to provide globally competitive quality education and training to her citizens thus contributing to the development of individual wellbeing. There is need to establish independent mechanism for effective and timely handling of students' complaints and issues such as commitment to duty, accountability, transparency, unfairness, bias and sexual harassment (Vice Chancellors Report, 2002). Improving school systems and early intervention programs may help to reduce these risk factors. According to Lockesh (1984) studies indicate that attributes such as physical attractiveness and social skills such as the ability to self disclose and social competence are instrumental in developing social support and promoting interpersonal adaptation. Therefore, there is the need to examine impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among secondary school students.

## **2. Objectives**

The objective of this study was to determine the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement with a view of comparing this impact between boys and girls in boarding secondary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

## **3. 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). The target population of the study was 55,224 respondents comprising of students, school counsellors and deputy principals of secondary schools in Meru County. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques was used to obtain a sample of 384 respondents. Questionnaires and an interview schedule were employed for collection of the desired data. The researcher sought advice from University Supervisors and research experts to ascertain the validity of the instruments. Reliability of the research instruments were estimated by use of split-half technique which generated a correlation coefficient of 0.78. The research permit was granted by the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation. To mitigate unethical practices, informed consent was sought from the respondents before administering the research instruments and thereafter confidentiality was observed. The collected data were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20.0. The data analysis results were represented on Tables, Pie Charts and Bar Graphs.

## **4. Results of the Study**

The following were the results of data analysis:

### **4.1 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 comparative nature of the study. 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 63.3%, above average were 27.2% and 9.4% rated themselves below average

School counsellors were required to indicate their gender and data analysis results revealed that 41.7% were male while 58.3 were female. Majority school counsellors (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 counsellors had enough experience to inform this study. Regarding the highest level of education, most school counsellors (50%) had a Bachelors Degree, 41.75 had Masters Degree while 8.3% had a Diploma. Most school counsellors (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.

#### 4.2 Impact of Interpersonal Adaptation on Academic Achievement

To determine the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among students in boarding secondary schools in Meru County, the student were required to indicate their level of agreement with interpersonal adaptation statements. A 5 level likert scale rated 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Undecided, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree was employed. Since the interpersonal adaptation statements were positively stated, a mean score below 2.5 indicated Low Impact, between 2.5 and 3.5 indicated Moderate Impact while a mean score above 3.5 indicated High Impact. The results of data analysis were presented on Table 1.

**Table1: Students' Views on Impact of Interpersonal Adaptation and Academic Achievement**

Interpersonal Adaptation and Academic Achievement Statements	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Students who relate well with their colleagues achieves better academically	360	4.13	1.06
Students who are friendly to their parents performs well academically	360	4.46	0.91
Students who get along well with others have a better academic achievement	360	4.04	0.99
The commitment observed by students in teachers makes them to do well academically	360	3.94	1.22
Those students who have a strong stand against peer influence do well academically	360	3.99	1.19
Students who are friendly with teachers performs well academically	360	3.96	1.17
Students who choose to respect other students' opinion performs well academically	360	3.82	1.23
Students competence to choose friends wisely performs well academically	360	4.20	0.98
Participation of students in group discussions exposes them to better academic achievement	360	4.30	0.92
Involvement in co curriculum activities has a positive impact on students' academic achievement.	360	3.47	1.31
Those students who relate well with their school leaders( <i>prefects</i> ) have a positive achievement in their academic	360	3.47	1.37
Sharing freely of students with others has a positive influence on their academic achievement	360	3.70	1.30
Students relationship with relatives enhances their academic achievement	360	3.68	1.30
Students who have regular consultation with their guidance and counseling master achieves better academically	360	3.64	1.31
Students ability to relate well with the school management boost their academic achievement	360	3.54	1.25

Students ability to relate well with the school support staff boost their academic achievement	360	3.46	1.03
<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>1.16</b>
Valid N (listwise)	360		

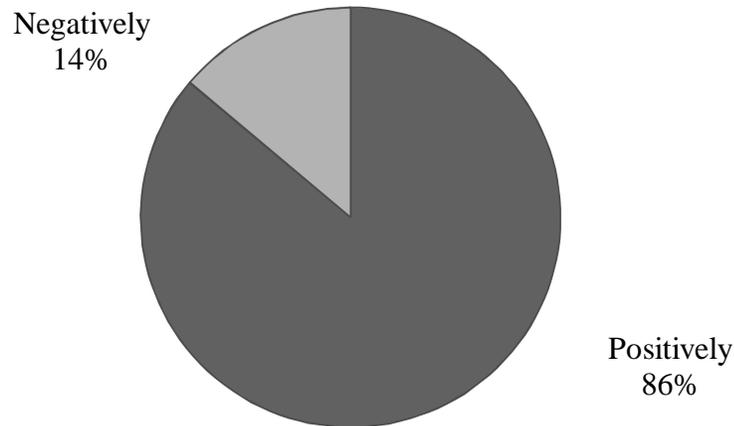
Information in Table 1 reveals a high impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among secondary school students depicted by an overall mean of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 1.16. The interpersonal adaptation factors that had moderate impact on academic achievement among the secondary school students were involvement in co curricula activities and good relationship with school leaders (prefects) with a mean score of 3.47 each and standard deviations of 1.31 and 1.37 respectively.

A question item in the questionnaire required student participants to rate their interpersonal relationship with other people. Information in Figure 1 represents the data analysis results.



**Figure 1:** Rating Boys and Girls Interpersonal Relationships with Other People

As indicated in Figure 1, majority of the students rated themselves as having fair, good or very good interpersonal relationships with other people. This means that majority of the students were doing well in interpersonal adaptation. Further the students were asked to indicate whether their interpersonal adaptation had a positive or negative impact on academic achievement. Data analysis results were represented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** General Effect of Interpersonal Adaptation on Academic Achievement

Information in Figure 2 suggests that majority of the students felt that interpersonal adaptation positively contributed to academic achievement.

The school counsellors were required to indicate their level of agreement with interpersonal adaptation statements. A 5 level likert scale rated 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Undecided, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree was employed. Since the interpersonal adaptation statements were positively stated, a mean score below 2.5 indicated Low Impact, a mean score between 2.5 and 3.5 indicated Moderate Impact while a mean score above 3.5 indicated High Impact. The results of data analysis were represented on Table 3.

**Table 2: School Counsellors' Views on Impact of Interpersonal Adaptation and Academic Achievement**

Interpersonal Adaptation and Academic Achievement Statements	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Students who relate well with their colleagues achieves better academically	12	4.50	.52
Students who are friendly with to their parents performs well academically	12	4.17	.83
Students who get along well with others have a better academic achievement	12	4.00	1.04
The commitment observed by students in teachers makes them to do well academically	12	4.33	.89
Those students who have strong stand against peer influence do well academically	12	4.67	.89
Students who are friendly with teachers performs well academically	12	4.50	.90
Students who chose to respect other students opinion performs well academically	12	3.58	1.31
Students competence to choose friends wisely performs well academically	12	4.33	.89
Participation of students in group discussion exposes them to better academic achievement	12	4.67	.49

Involvement in co curricula activities has positive impact on students' academic achievement	12	3.83	.94
Students who relate with their school leaders/prefect have a positive academic achievement	12	4.17	.58
Students freely of student with others has a positive influence on their academic achievement	12	4.17	.94
Students relationship with relatives enhances their academic achievement	12	3.75	1.42
Students who have regular consultation with their G/C master better academically	12	4.17	.58
Students ability to relate well with the school management boost their academic achievement	12	4.42	.52
<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4.217</b>	<b>.764</b>
Valid N (listwise)	12		

Information in Table 2 indicated a high impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among secondary school students depicted by an overall mean of 4.217 and a standard deviation of .764. The interpersonal adaptation factors that had the highest impact on academic achievement among the secondary school students were Participation of students in group discussion and a strong stand against peer influence with a mean score of 4.67 each and standard deviations of .49 and .89 respectively.

An interview was used to gather more in depth qualitative data on the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among boarding secondary school students from the schools' Deputy Principals. The respondents had varied views indicating both positive and negative impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement. The deputy principals were of the opinion that students who related well with teachers accepted corrections, had less indiscipline issues and were more able to concentrate on studies thereby creating a conducive learning environment. The students who got along with other students were also perceived as being active in group discussions and co-curricular activities thus leading to excellent academic achievement.

Deputy Principals blamed the negative impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among secondary school students on negative peer influence. Students who were easily influenced into social ills such as drug abuse, gangs, sexual perversion, strikes and destruction of school property tended to be in good interpersonal relationships within those groups. The interpersonal adaptation also caused some students to waste time and resources in non academic activities such as gossiping and telling stories leading to low academic achievement, cheating in examinations and dropping out of school.

#### **4.3 Comparison of Impact of Interpersonal Adaptation of Boys and Girls on Academic Achievement**

To compare variability between boys and girls with regard to the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement in boarding secondary schools, t-test statistic was computed. The findings were represented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Comparison of Impact of Interpersonal Adaptation of Boys and Girls on Academic Achievement t-test Results**

	School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Interpersonal relationship	Boys	180	3.88	0.59	0.07 *	0.71
	Girls	180	3.87	0.60		

\*Denotes significant at  $\alpha=0.05$

According to information in Table 3, the mean for boys (3.88) and girls (3.87) on impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement was almost equal with standard deviations of the 0.59 and 0.60 respectively. The computed p-value (0.71) was greater than the theoretical  $p < 0.05$ . The obtained t-value ( $t = 0.07$ ,  $p > 0.71$ ) was indicative of no significant difference in the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement between boys and girls in boarding secondary schools in Meru County.

### 5. Discussion of the Results

The findings of this study indicated a high impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement among secondary school students. Students who related well with teachers were perceived as being positive in accepting corrections and therefore achieving high academic grades. In agreement with this finding, Osterman (2000) observes that when students perceive their teachers as supportive, disruptive behavior decreases and students' perception of successful interactions with teachers increases. As a result, this teacher student relationship provides an essential foundation for school management which is important for high students' academic achievement (Wetzel, 1997). Donna (2009) ascertains that free interaction among members provides support and comfort in resolving difficulties and alternatives behaviour is learned. When students interact well with the significant others they are bound to create conducive environments that will result to high levels of academic achievement.

Data analysis results revealed a high impact of student parent interpersonal adaptation and academic performance. Those students who related well with their parents tended to achieve well academically. According to Charles (2002), home environment has a significant influence on a child's academic achievement. This is because there is a positive correlation between a Child's attitude towards academic and the parents' attitude towards the same. Therefore students who had good interpersonal adaptation were expected to achieve better academically. Similarly, students who participated in class and group discussions were associated with high academic achievement. This finding is in line with Willing (2001) which maintains that participation in classroom activities where students work together and help each other results to high academic achievement.

The deputy principals were of the opinion that interpersonal adaptation may lead to time wastage and negative peer influence generating vices such as drug abuse, gossiping and sexual perversion among others culminating in dismal academic achievement. Charles (2002) observed that most psychosocial adjustment challenges occur as students attempt unsuccessfully to meet a universal psychosocial need of belongingness. Students want to feel secure, welcome and valued; and to a large extent their behaviour influences how well those needs are met in the classroom. Those students with psychosocial adjustment challenges at times talk without permission, call each other sarcastic names and laugh when they shouldn't. According to Donna (2009) students who continually break the school rules like talking in class without permission or getting into fights need

to be seated away from others who might get influenced by them. This may be a remedy to negative peer influence occasioned by interpersonal adaptation as indicated by deputy principals.

There being no gender differences in the impact of interpersonal adaptation on academic achievement, measures taken to enhance interpersonal adaptations that positively contribute to academic achievement may need to be similar for both boys and girls in secondary schools.

## 6. Recommendations

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

- i) School counsellors need to design intervention strategies that would enable students to live in harmony with colleague students, teachers, school staff, the school administrators, parents, relatives and the society members.
- ii) School administrators may consider strengthening activities such as sports, communal work, religious societies, clubs, entertainment and pseudo families that encourage peaceful coexistence among students in boarding secondary schools.
- iii) The life skills syllabus may need to be revised in order to integrate more contemporary issues relating to interpersonal adaptation.
- iv) There is need for the Ministry of Education to develop awareness programs to educate and sensitize the public about the importance of enhancing interpersonal adaptation among secondary school students as a strategy of improving academic achievement.

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