Influence of Sociocultral Factors on Academic Performance among Candidates in Kisumu City, Kenya

ABSTRACT

Aim: To investigate the influence of sociocultural factors on performance in national examinations among candidates in Kisumu City, Kenya

Sample: The study population was 5603 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) candidates in Kisumu City. Convenient sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 224 students.

Study design: The study employed phenomenological design in the qualitative approach.

Place and Duration of Study: The place of the study was Kasagam Secondary School in Kisumu City, Kenya, between September and October 2017.

Methodology: Focus group discussions were used to collect qualitative data. Focus group discussion guide was piloted with students who did not participate in the study to establish validity and reliability. Data was transcribed in summaries by the group secretary and analyzed thematically.

Conclusion: The findings revealed that sociocultural factors of collectivist cultural practices, involvement in political activism and participation in witchcraft promoted poor academic performance in national examinations among students in Kisumu City.

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Background of Study

Sociocultural factors are shared values, norms and attitudes among a people that form a community [1]. Academic achievement of students is important because it is used to judge the effectiveness of schools besides affecting the future of youths [2]. Moreover, poor school performance leads to serious negative psychological, social, and economic outcomes [3]. In addition, [4] in India found out that poor school performance resulted in low self-esteem in children and significant stress to parents.

Therefore, in an academic set-up, sociocultural factors are those factors that affect the academic performance of students but originate from the unique circumstances surrounding their school or home. Consequently, [5] posited that academic performance is one of the best measures of the transfer of knowledge in modern society.

A study into the effects of sociocultural factors on students' academic performance is important because [4] and [6] found that certain sociocultural factors could promote poor academic performance in a school. However, neither [4] nor [6] elucidated what those particular sociocultural factors were. The present study filled this gap by pointing out the specific sociocultural factors that affect students.

However, [4] posited that identifying the particular sociocultural factors that affect students' academic performance is important for coming up with a treatment plan so that the child can perform up to full potential. In addition, according to [7], identifying sociocultural factors that affect performance at national examinations is important to teachers because the teachers are unhappy when their students do not perform well academically.

Grossmann, [8] examined the role of the sociocultural background of students for choosing STEM fields in universities in Switzerland. Their findings indicated that sociocultural backgrounds affected students' choice of subjects at the university. Moreover, in Pakistan, [9] found out that student performance in intermediate examinations was linked with students' family stress, which is a sociocultural factor. In addition, [2] investigated the relationship of home environment with academic achievement among elementary school students in India. The study revealed that home environment

and academic achievement were significantly and positively correlated. However, the studies by [2, 8, 9] did not point out the aspects of students' home culture that affected the students' academic achievement. The present study filled this gap by pointing out the type of culture that promotes poor performance among students.

[10] and [11] examined the effects of home environment and parental socioeconomic status on students academic performance. [10] examined the influence of sociocultural factors on the academic performance of students in Nigeria in a descriptive survey design. Data collected using questionnaire was analyzed to reveal that the academic performance is affected by students' home background. In addition, [11] investigated factors that influences students academic performance in Rift Valley University, Ethiopia. The study found that there was strong association between the academic performance of students' and the sociocultural background, which was parental education level and family economic status. In addition, in Tanzania, [12] assessed factors that influence the academic performance of students of selected secondary schools. The data analysis revealed that sociocultural factor, which was low parents' income, had significant influence on the academic performances of students. However, the studies did not consider the effects of sociocultural factors such as witchcraft and spiritism, which are widespread in Africa.

In Kenya, poor performance in the national examinations is identified as failure to attain a grade that qualifies the student into the next level of education. Consequently, [6] investigated factors contributing to poor performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in public day primary schools using a descriptive survey design. The study identified the sociocultural factor of lack of support from parents as one of the factors contributing to poor performance. However, the study did not delve into the effects of specific sociocultural factors on students' academic performance. Therefore, the current study set out to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors on performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations candidates in Kisumu City.

1.2 Problem Statement

The present study examined the influence of sociocultural factors of collectivist culture, politics and witchcraft on students' academic performance because of the cultural richness of the ethnic communities around Kisumu, political upheavals in Kenya in 2017 and the underlying practices of witchcraft and spiritism among the people in Kisumu City. The ethnic communities with a collectivist view of community populate the City of Kisumu. The collectivist culture is characterized by students who are candidates visiting relatives on errands and social fetes even during exams. In addition, there are disco dances, called *disco matanga*, which are held in the night a person is buried and many young people might attend including candidates. These activities go on throughout the year and their effect on KCSE candidates' academic performance had not been examined before the present study.

In addition, in the year 2017, Kisumu was arguably the epicenter of political demonstrations against the conduct of the Kenya Presidential General Elections. The annulled Presidential General Elections was in August 2017 when students who were candidates in the national examinations were in the home stretch to the exams. The fresh Presidential General Election was held in October 2017 when the national examinations had begun. Both the annulled and fresh Presidential Elections were characterized by heightened political emotions and violent demonstrations which often ended with people, including candidates, being killed. However, no study has been conducted on the effect that the political disturbances might have had on the KCSE candidates.

Witchcraft activities are also practiced by some people in the City of Kisumu. Indeed, it is common to see such services advertised to attract people who are in various crises. To many candidates, a national examination that is going to determine the outcomes of their lives for a long time is a major crisis. Therefore, some students might seek the services of witchdoctors and spiritists to help them face the national examinations. However, the influence on the performance in national examinations of witchcraft and spiritism practices has not been ascertained.

From the foregoing, it might be surmised that sociocultural factors affect students' academic performance. Therefore, there was need to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors of collectivist culture, political activism and witchcraft on the academic performance of students sitting examinations in Kisumu City, Kenya. The relevance of the present study, thereafter, was established.

1.3 Relevance of Study

The findings of the study might be used to mitigate the effects of the factors that might contribute to poor performance and thereby improve the academic performance of students in Kisumu City, especially in national examinations.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors on students' academic performance in national examinations among students in Kisumu City, Kenya. The objective of the study was to identify the sociocultural factors that affect students' performance in national examinations.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW
3.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study was guided by [13] Triadic Reciprocal Determinism theory. This theory postulates that a model of reciprocal causation among behavior, personal factors, and environmental influences. Moreover, [13] argued that students' expectations, cognitions, beliefs, feelings, self-perceptions, goals and intentions affects how they behave. In the context of the present study, sociocultural norms are seen in the light of this theory as personal factors expressed as students' values, norms and attitudes. Therefore, the behavior of academic performance might be affected by such personal factors as beliefs, attitudes and thoughts derived from the student's sociocultural environment.

Consequently, [13] presented that social influences develop and modify student's expectations, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies through modeling, instruction and social persuasion. From this postulate, the Triadic Reciprocal Determinism theory suggests that the sociocultural factors might influence students' performance in national examinations.

Moreover, [13] argued that behavior, such as academic performance, alters environmental conditions, such as sociocultural factors; and behavior, is in turn, altered by the sociocultural factors it creates. As a result, because of the bidirectionality of influence between behavior and environmental circumstances, people are both products and producers of their environment. This leaves to conjecture whether students' academic performance affects their sociocultural environment or sociocultural factors affect students' academic performance. Wherefrom, there was need for a review of literature on sociocultural factors and students' academic performance.

3.2 Literature Review

The literature review was conducted according to the objective of the study, which was, to identify the sociocultural factors that affect students' academic performance in Kisumu City Kenya. Studies have identified sociocultural factors as affecting students' academic performance [14, 15]. Furthermore, [16] examined different factors influencing the academic performance of students in a tertiary institution in Singapore. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed quantitatively and the results showed that sociocultural factors such as nationality of student affected the academic performance of students. However, the [16] study was a quantitative one which imposed the researchers' constructs on the respondents and did not allow themes to emerge from the responses given. Therefore, the present study used the qualitative approach that allowed themes to emerge naturally from the responses given by the respondents.

However, [17] investigated factors that contribute to the decline in students' academic performance in junior secondary schools in Botswana since 2010 in a quantitative study, which collected data using questionnaires and document analysis. The findings of the study showed that parental involvement is critical for the attainment of high quality education. The [17] study captured an aspect of sociocultural environment, which was parental involvement in education, but did not consider other factors such as the home cultural tendencies. The present study therefore filled this gap by seeking to identify sociocultural factors that affect students' performance in national examinations.

The aspect of sociocultural factors which is socioeconomic status was investigated by [15, 18, 19] in Nigeria and Ghana respectively. The [15] study examined the home environmental factors affecting students' academic performance while [19] investigated the causes of low academic performance of

primary school pupils. In addition, [18] investigated factors affecting academic performance of undergraduate students in Uganda. [15] found out that the socio-economic status of the students' family affects the students' academic performance while [19] results showed that the pupils in high-achieving schools regularly had breakfast and received more help with their studies at home than the pupils low-achieving schools did. The [18] findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between parents' social economic status and former school background on one hand and academic performance on the other hand. All the three studies indicated that home socioeconomic status affects students' academic performance. However, the studies investigated parental socioeconomic status, which is a factor of socioculture, but did not consider other sociocultural factors. Therefore, the present study filled this gap in literature by identifying the sociocultural factors that affect students' performance in national examinations.

In Kenya, [20] and [21] investigated the influence of learning environment on pupil academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni and Murang'a Counties respectively. The studies found out that non-conducive home environments characterized by work-oriented culture, traditional cultural practices and unorthodox spiritual practices contributed to poor performance. Therefore, [22] examined the influence of home environment on academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya. The study used inferential statistical analysis to identify the sociocultural factors affecting students' academic performance as parent's economic status, parental involvement and parenting styles. However, the [22] study used the quantitative approach and collected data using questionnaires that forced the respondents into preset themes, which might not necessarily be the respondents' themes. The present study filled this gap in literature by using the qualitative approach which allowed the respondents to freely express themselves and from that, themes emerged on the sociocultural factors affecting students' performance in national examinations. The themes that emerged were collectivist culture, political activism and witchcraft and spiritism.

3.2.1 Collectivist Culture

Culture has varied effects on the educational outcomes of students [23]. In California, USA, Asians fare significantly better than whites do in school outcomes such as grade point average, while blacks and Hispanics fare significantly worse [23]. However, [23] did not investigate whether these cultures were individualistic or collectivist. Therefore, [24] in the USA examined the differences in achievement between individualistic and collectivist groups in an online instructional environment. ANOVA analysis was used to examine the effects of individualism and collectivism on learner achievement. The study findings revealed significant difference between cultural dimension and learner achievement. Nevertheless, the study did not indicate between collectivist and individualistic cultures affected academic achievement positively. The present study filled this gap in literature by identifying the type of culture that promoted low academic achievement. In addition, [25] studied the influence of individualism-collectivism on learning barriers and performance in a study presented in Los Angeles, USA. The study found out that students' personal orientation of individualism or collectivism may influence social cognitions and behaviors that support academic achievement. However, the study investigated academic achievement obliquely through social cognitions and behaviors unlike the present study that made students' academic achievement its main thrust.

Moreover, [26] and [27] both in Fiji Islands investigated the cultural influences on academics. The [26] study used students from communities with different cultures on which anecdotal evidence had pointed out that there were consistent higher academic achievement from one community and consistent low achievement in another community. However, [27] studied the influence of culture on secondary school students' understanding of statistics. On the other hand, [26] found out that a collectivist culture with a strong communal sense and social obligations was working against high academic achievement among the students from that culture. On the other hand, the [27] findings revealed that students' explanations were not based on statistical principles but on their cultural beliefs and everyday experiences. Consequently, the present study sought to find out if collectivist cultures negatively would affect students' academic performance in an African country with different communities and levels of collectivism.

Consequently, in Africa, [28] and [5] examined the influence of cultural beliefs and social factors in Nigeria. The thrust of [28] was on secondary school students' understanding of atmospheric related physics concepts while [5] investigated the effect of social factors on students' academic performance. Both studies collected data using questionnaires in descriptive survey research design.

The [28] study found that cultural beliefs of students have negative influence on students' academic performance. On the other hand, [5] found that although excessive involvement in clubs and organizations by students does not have a significant effect on academic performance, membership in student cults and romantic relationships does have a significant negative effect. However, neither [28] nor [5] studies investigated influence of collectivism, as a sociocultural factor in Africa, on students' academic performance. The present study filled this gap in literature by providing an African perspective from Kenya, on the influence of collectivist cultures on students' performance in national examinations.

In Kenya, [29] investigated the sociocultural and economic factors that affect the academic performance of secondary school students in Garrissa County using a descriptive research design. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guide. The findings identified sociocultural factors that affect students' academic performance as parental economic background and collectivism characterized by strong attachment to culture. However, the [29] used a quantitative approach that did not allow the themes within sociocultural factors to emerge from the respondents, unlike in the present study.

3.2.2 Political Activism

A study by [30] in USA explored the learning outcomes among college students involved in political activism. The findings revealed that students' involvement in activism generally led to lower learning outcomes. However, the study was conducted among college students who had different personal characteristics from the secondary school students who are the subjects in the present study. In addition, [31] in Pakistan investigated the relationship between political activities and students' academic performance. The data was analyzed using chi square and the data analysis showed a strong perceived association between political activities and academic performance of students. However, the study collected nominal data, which yields weak statistical strength in analysis. In addition, chi square test of association does not indicate the direction of causation. The present study filled this gap in literature by using qualitative approach that could identify the direction of influence between political activism and students' performance in national examinations.

The findings of [31] were supported by those of [32] in Portugal who considered the relationship between self-regulation strategies and youth political experiences. The [32] study found out that political experiences are related to learning because political participation stimulates higher-order cognitive engagement and, thus, contribute to the development of learning strategies that promote academic success. However, the [32] study collected quantitative data which imposed responses on the participants and did not allow for in-depth probing of responses. The present study filled this gap in literature by using the qualitative approach, which allowed for in-depth probing of responses to get to respondents' meanings and feelings that provides a more accurate picture on the construct under study.

3.2.3 Witchcraft and Spiritism

Witchcraft is the practice of and belief in magical abilities to manipulate circumstances and situations exercised by persons with some secret knowledge [33]. On the other hand, spiritism is the belief in, and consequently attempt to contact, spirits to influence the outcome of an event [34].

A study by [35] in Ghana posits that students might see spirituality-based practices as a source of inspiration to focus on studies and succeed in their studies. In addition, [34] found no significant relationship between student spirituality and their academic performance. However, the [34] study considered the influence of orthodox spiritual practices and not witchcraft and spiritism. The present study, therefore, considered the influence of witchcraft and unorthodox spiritual practices, as aspects of students' socioculture, on students' performance in national examinations.

Consequently, [33] examined the effect of witchcraft on students' academic achievement in Zimbabwe's rural secondary schools using a case study methodology. The study gathered data through participant-observations, questionnaires, focus group interviews, and documents review. The results showed that witchcraft practices negatively affected students' academic performance. However, the study was a quantitative study that did not let themes emerge unlike the present study that used a qualitative approach.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

4.1 Research Design
The present study employed the qualitative approach with the phenomenological design. Phenomenological design, according to [36], is a fact-based design that seeks to describe the phenomenon accurately. It was appropriate for the present study because of the explorative nature of the study [37]. The present study therefore examined the sociocultural factors that influence students' performance in national examinations.

4.2 Study Participants
The study participants were Grade 12 secondary school students in Kisumu City. The population of the study was 5603 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) candidates. The sampling technique used to select the sample was convenient sampling method that was used to select a sample of 224 students who participated in the study. The sample was then divided into four groups of 56 students each from which qualitative data was collected using focus group discussion technique. Focus groups were used to collect data because teenagers find it easier to express themselves in groups [38].

4.3 Demographic Information
Demographics information is important because it affects how important decisions are made [38]. Demographic information includes socioeconomic information, age, gender, employment status and home status [39]. In the current study, there were 112 girls and 112 boys. The sample were aged between 17 and 20 years old. The students came from low-income socioeconomic status with most of them coming from homes in slums.

4.4 Research Instrument
The research instrument was a focus group discussion guide which was piloted for trustworthiness using students who did not participate in the final study. Focus Group is a method of conducting in-depth interviews on participants by a moderator that is accomplished in a group with characteristics that are defined on size, composition and procedures [40]. Therefore, [38] advises the use of focus group discussions for generating ideas for investigation of new fields such as identification of sociocultural factors affecting students' performance in national examinations. Focus group discussions were used in the current study because it has high face validity and the results obtained it yields are effective in supplying information about how people think, feel, or act regarding an issue [40].

4.5 Data Collection Procedures
The participants were informed of the study objectives and purpose before the discussion and adequately debriefed. Thereafter, the Focus Group members were selected on the bases of part volunteering and part researcher selection. Each focus group elected a secretary who was writing down what the participants said in summarized form. The researcher selected some members who had not volunteered to ensure proportionate demographic representation to fill the sampling frame. A sampling frame is a list or other device used to define a researcher's population of interest. The sampling frame defines a set of elements from which a researcher can select a sample of the target population [41].

4.6 Data Analysis
Data was analyzed using thematic analysis using the steps of [42]. Thematic analysis is essentially a method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data [42]. The steps, according to [42], are familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The study findings revealed that sociocultural factors in Kisumu City have an overall negative influence on students' academic performance in national examinations. Some of these sociocultural activities were recreational such as watching football and video games, relational such as visiting relatives, social such as story telling with their friends, interpersonal such as interactions with members of other classes and personal such as how they feel about themselves.

This finding was similar to [14, 15, 18, 22 and 21] who had found that sociocultural factors influence students' performance in national examinations. Therefore, the present study analyzed the data and the emergent themes were collectivist culture, political activism and witchcraft and spiritism as influences on students academic performance among the sociocultural factors.

5.1 Collectivist Culture

The collectivist culture was shown when the respondents indicated that among factors that influence students' academic performance negatively were visiting relatives, bad company, attending burial disco dance (called *disco matanga*), going to wild barroom parties called clubbing and holding teen music parties called bash. Therefore, the respondents indicated that these aspects of the collectivist culture that is prevalent among the ethnic communities where most of the students came from were influencing their performance negatively. The finding in the present study that a collectivist culture was detrimental to students' academic performance was similar to findings by [23] and [26].

5.2 Political Activism

The respondents indicated this by reporting that some of the things that promote poor performance among the students included participation in political demonstrations (called *maandamano*), debating the political issues of the day and spending a lot of time on updating themselves on the details of the political on-goings through news presented in print and electronic media. This finding was similar to the findings by [30] who had found that political activism negatively affected students' academic performance. However, it was contrary to the finding of [31] and [32] who reported that political engagement enabled students to have higher order cognitive processes.

5.3 Witchcraft and Spiritism

This was captured when the respondents reported that candidates often resort to witchcraft when the national examinations are approaching. In addition, the respondents indicated that some candidates also go to spiritists who pray for the candidates using paraphernalia such as black clothes, candles, incantations and concoctions. The respondents reported that resorting to witchdoctors and spiritists promoted poor academic performance among the people who believed and used such practices. The finding that such spiritual activities negatively affected students' performance in national examinations was similar to that of [33] who reported that education services suffered because of witchcraft in a part of Zimbabwe because of witchcraft. It was, however, contrary to the finding of [35] in Ghana who found no significant relationship between spiritual activities and academic performance.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the conclusion that sociocultural factors affect the performance of students in national examinations in Kisumu County, Kenya. Therefore, the study recommends that involvement in collectivist cultural practices, political activism and unorthodox spiritual activities negatively affect the academic performance of students. Consequently, communities with a collectivist traditional background should be sensitized on practices that thwart the academic progress among students

Secondly, the study recommends that since political activism negatively affects students' performance in national examinations; secondary school students, and especially candidates in national examinations, should be advised to refrain from political activism

Thirdly, the study recommends that since expressions of unorthodox spiritual activities such as witchcraft and spiritism negatively affects students' performance in national examinations; students should be advised to refrain from resorting to such practices when they face national examinations.

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