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**THE EFFECTS OF ASPECTS OF SCHOOL CULTURE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MACHAKOS COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study was prompted by concerns raised by various stakeholders in Machakos County over declining performance of public secondary schools that used to perform well in the past decades' national examinations. The study sought to examine specific school cultural aspects and their relationship to students' academic performance as evidenced by Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results in selected Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. The study was guided by Vygotsky's Theory of Social Interactionism. The study utilized a sample of 21 selected Public Secondary schools out of 212 public secondary schools in Machakos County. These schools included high and low performing Schools which were purposively selected. Sample size of the study was 200 students of which 100 were boys and girls were 100; 21 principals [men were 11 and 10 were women] and 21 deputy principals [10 men and 11 women], 25 teachers [12 men and women 13], 1 lady County Education Officer from Machakos County. The study adopted a descriptive research design. It employed both probability and non-probability sampling methods. Data analysis was guided by themes from research objectives. Data was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Analysed data was presented using qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods included narratives and descriptions while quantitative methods included tables showing comparisons, fluctuations and distributions in percentile presentations. The study found out that there were various school cultural aspects that affect students' academic performance. They included shared norms by teachers, positive assumptions on academic performance of students and good incidences among teachers which were most predominant positive cultural aspects in selected Public Secondary Schools that enhanced Students' academic performance. Findings also revealed some predominant negative cultural aspects in schools; these were rumours among students and rumours among teachers. The study therefore concluded that positive school cultural aspects had significant influence on students' academic performance. The study recommends that School cultural aspects should be given strong emphasis since they have great influence on school climate that contributes to students' academic performance.*

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**Key Words:** *School Culture, Academic Performance, Public Secondary Schools*

## **1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Over the years, the result of studying on learners' performance has been identified as one of the main ideas in educational survey. Coleman, Campell, Mcparland, Mood, Weinfeld and York (1966) observed that, school factors had little effect on academic achievement as compared to family background factors. This study sparked off a series of studies as well as debate on whether family or school factors were more significant in relation to a student's academic performance.

Academic performance is the measure of a student's achievement across various academic subjects. Teachers and education officials typically measure achievement with classroom performance, graduation rates, and records from standardized examination bodies.

Academic achievement or academic performance is the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has attained their short-term and long-term educational goals. Completion of Educational benchmarks such as Secondary School, Diplomas and bachelor's degrees are also deemed to be academic achievement.

The words Academic performance and Academic achievement can be used interchangeably in this study and the meaning will depend on the context of usage but basically, the two different terms may refer to the same thing at some point or the other. School Culture can be defined as the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates (Fullan, 2007). Again 'School Culture' can be used to encompass all the attitudes, expected behaviours and values that impact how the school operates.

The current study however, concerns itself mainly with school factors, with a focus on specific school cultural aspects that may have an effect on learners' academic performance in selected Public Secondary schools in Machakos County, one of the 47 counties in Kenya. The study sought to examine the specific school cultural aspects and their relationship to students' academic performance as evidenced by Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) results in selected Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

Deal and Peterson (1994) in Odongo (2013), asserts that all that happens in schools is determined directly by culture starting from dressing code and etiquette of the teaching staff, their opinions, their readiness to change, the practice of teaching and the enthusiasm shown on learners and department instruction. Secondary schools are essentially cultural facilities/creations full of exciting multitude of artefacts, practices, rituals of all that affect head-on on the manner in which their occupants circumvent the terms of their living inside the organizations (Jelagat, 2014). Schools being inherent cultural entities as asserted by Hemmings (2000), display their artefacts, rituals and rites through various discourses such as a school's academic achievement orientation, its cultural aspects and/or layers, shared ideology, collaborations, general school environment and leadership, all of which this study sought to examine and describe.

## **2.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE EFFECTS OF ASPECTS OF SCHOOL CULTURE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

This involves a thematic appraisal of studies linked to school culture and its influence of academic performance. There is much focus on school culture, studies particularly layers and school culture on students' performance. High and low performing schools are also looked into as a gauge of school culture.

## **2.1 Layers of School Culture**

The substance of culture entails the understanding of simple assumptions, beliefs and values and also including artifacts of a culture common to entire school community. The substance is often defined by average of dimensions (Dellar & Cavanagh, 1998; Anderson & Johnson, Snyder, Johnson, 1996; Pang, 1996) or typologies of culture (Staessens, 1991; Aitkin & Handy, 1986). Culture can be viewed as 'goals oriented' or 'collaborative'. Different vocabularies with same meaning as content of culture include constituent of culture (Maslowski, 1996) the trend of culture (Serpa, Saxton & Kilmann, 1986) or cultural qualities (Scaffold, 1988).

According to Schein (1985) in Maslowski (2001), a school's culture can be classified at three levels, in other words called the cultural system of a learning institution. Maslowski (2001) deduces, with concern to cultural features in learning institutions, Schein (1985) in the area of education management grouping of cultural levels is embraced by many academicians. Schein's divisions have three stages that differ as concerns their conspicuousness in learning institutions and their alertness amongst teachers. In the lower stage in Schein's grouping exhibits of simple expectations, which according to his opinion consist the core of an association's culture. At a higher stage of alertness, transitional stage in Schein's grouping, ethics are present. In stage three there are customs and artifacts connecting to cultural appearances and morals arrangements of association adherents. The least tangible, deepest stage of culture comprises of simple expectations common to teaching staff, which make up the epicenter of school culture.

Assumptions are beliefs that employees take for granted (Schein, 1985). Teachers are often unaware of the assumptions that underpin their everyday understanding of their responsibilities due to their taken-for-granted existence. These beliefs are likely to remain implicit until they are challenged by another member of staff, a learner, or a guardian (Stolp & Smith, 1995). Teaching staff will then show on their actions and become aware of the fundamental expectations that underpin their understanding of what they do. Values and norms make up the second level. Teachers' values apply to what they consider to be "healthy", "correct," or "acceptable." As a consequence, values should be treated as desirable standards; they represent what is deemed valuable to achieve or worthy of aspiring for in a learning institution. Tutors, for example, can value cooperation with other teaching staff or read respect for others as significant. While teachers are not always aware of the principles that govern their actions, the majority can articulate their core values (Corbett, Rossman, & Firestone, 1988). Values like association or admiration are mostly turned into behavioural norms. These behavioural norms, for sure, are 'non-recorded regulations' and which the rest all are supposed to follow. Norms shows what teachers' perceptions of other members of the staff are expressed in the norms. Norms represent what is not acceptable in school and what is seen as unwanted behaviour.

The number three level on Schein's categorization scheme entails practices and artifacts. In addition, as concerns behavioural traits, this stage also encompasses procedures, rituals and customs. When these practices and behaviours are operationalized the underneath expectations, norms and values evolve. For every school unique behavioural pattern is cultivated. The substance of culture means cultural artifacts that are shared by school members and also refers to the meaning of simple assumptions, values and norms.

Cultural aspects that encompass a school's culture also entail school rituals. Rituals are a series of actions that are performed in the same way, especially as part of a practice. These may include and

not limited to rites and ceremonies, assemblies, prize giving days, music festivals, Management Board meetings, and sponsorship of a variety of extracurricular activities, pep and spirit rallies and formal social events such as the prom and the culminating rite of passage, which is the formal graduation ceremony at the end of four years. These rituals seek to provide for commonality of experience, mark significant events in the life of the institutions and strengthen the bonds between members of the school community thereby increasing their points of engagements and sense of purpose. Additionally, tradition plays important roles in the formation of the parameters that serve to define an institution's culture.

Established traditions in secondary schools differ from one school to another and are part of a unique cultural aspect of the school. Traditions are important events that have a special place in time and meaning and happen in years consecutively and provide ample service to community members with a basis to whether difficulties, change and challenges. They entail activities meant to commemorate unique occasions and events that strengthen institutional rites and values.

## 2.2 High and Low Performing Schools

The clamour for quality education and success, skills and attitude acquisition are a universal phenomenon as evidenced by various charters and aspirations such as Education for All (EFA) among others. It is the dream of every student, parent, teacher, school manager, the government and others to experience improvement in academic performance. Cheng'oli, Osman and Ongeti (2013) Quoting Cavanagh and Dellar (2003), observe that schools in Kenya are graded as 'performing' or 'non-performing' based on school average scores in national examinations. A disturbing recurrent question in the minds and debates of most Kenyans thus, is, why do we have some category of schools termed as 'performing' while others 'non-performing'? What then could be the possible differences or variables associated with 'performing' schools as opposed to 'non-performing ones'? Various studies have been carried out focusing on varied aspects but still, no clear answer is forthcoming. For instance, Shannon and Bylsma (2007) gives nine characteristics of high performing schools as: clear and shared focus, high standards and expectation for all students, effective school leadership, high levels of collaboration and communication, curriculum and instruction aligned with standards, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, focussed professional development and high levels of community engagement. This study sought to compare the practice of the above variables which are found also in elements of culture in performing and non-performing public secondary schools located in Machakos County and describes their contributions to school academic performance within current operations of secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

Kritek (1986) in Maslowski (2001) has talked about a school improvement case study in which four relatively successful and four relatively unsuccessful schools participated. Kritek found higher ratings of school spirit, frequent student monitoring and evaluation and more frequent teacher discussions in the successful schools. The case study further revealed that teachers in all four 'more successful' institutions of learning offered teachers more collaboration, a high degree of teachers interests and excitement, equal targets and agreement amongst teachers with concern to curriculum philosophy and policies as reasons for progress. Maslowski (2001) carried out a study on School Culture and School Performance where he looked into the beliefs and customs of learning institutions and on the connection between culture and academic excellence. Edmonds (1979) has discovered factors that portray schools' culture like unity and association amongst members of staff, a common mission or philosophy and achievement orientation. Similar conclusions have been

drawn from various school effectiveness studies (Lezotte & Levine, 1990; Hillman, Mortimore & Sammons, 1995).

Studies conducted by Lezotte and Levine (1990) discovered nine qualities of remarkably effective institutions of learning. In first line is learning school climate that is productive and beliefs system. The more specific and active schools are identified by proper and unique learning surroundings. Going by the opinion of these two researchers an orderly environment is somehow connected with individual-to-individual cooperation other than with controlling. They also identify discipline emerges from 'being related and being involved in doing rather than outside regulation and application of law.

Presenting outcomes from a country wide survey of greatly developed middle level schools ( Hackmann, Clark, Valentine & Petzko, 2004) in Valentine (2006), brought forth tangible understanding about effective collaborative school cultures greatly developed learning institution as follows; head teachers and other members of teaching staff were both governed by a similar core of beliefs and values that directed practices and programmes encompassing big hopes to all the learners, a holistic child education, the learners will be victorious, and commitment to an organized curriculum, learner centred teaching, and successful utilization of formative and encouraging learners' data.

Head teachers considered themselves as cooperative leaders and similarly fellow teaching fraternity. They promoted collegiality as the chance for cooperative worker amongst members of teaching staff curriculum teaching and evaluation. Members of teaching staff were equally dedicated to cooperation, achieving a holistic school rule as planners, coordinators of professional development and directors in the endeavours to boost classroom teaching in the entire institution.

Learners and aged people instruction was the target of the schools, with all grown up dedicated to a long-term learning for both learners and for their own behalf. Institutions structure like physical layout of learning rooms, adults and learners timetables/schedules were prepared in such a way that to encourage collaboration and interaction building among teachers-students, teachers-teachers and students-students.

Clark et al in Valentine (2006) also observed that Principals and teachers in highly successful schools denoted that establishing "relationships" amongst grownups was a significant principle in evolving their effective school cultures. In these schools, head teachers and members of teaching staff from time to time discussed the need of interactions and the role relationship play in the cumbersome planning as well as query-solving tasks that a department/teachers must confront.

### **3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Trochim (2006) notes that research design is the method that a researcher uses to study, measure and analyse data and research problems. The study deployed a mixed methods research design which involved Quantitative and Qualitative approaches. This method was chosen since it enhanced the validity of findings in line with Almpanis (2016) who noted that no single design existed in isolation and hence the need to combine different designs.

In Quantitative Technique, the Study formulated questionnaires that were guided to the specific target groups with an allowance of closed ended and open- ended questions. These were later collected, analysed, tabulated and interpreted according to the study objectives. The Quantitative



approach entailed the use of a descriptive survey study design which gives the researcher the opportunity to identify the attributes of a certain variable based on observation or correlation between variables.

The researcher used descriptive survey design in her research to obtain the research data on the magnitude of Implications of School Culture on Academic Performance in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya. The qualitative technique deployed the use of Interviews that were descriptive in order to get an in-depth insight through elaborate answers from the respondents based on their actual (real-time) experiences. Accordingly, no attempt was made to change behaviour or conditions, the situations were reported as they appeared.

According to Lokesh (1984), this design helps to acquire consistent and accurate knowledge about the existing state of nature, and to derive as many general deductions as possible from the evidence found. This design cannot be experimented for they deal with the interactions amongst variables that cannot be manipulated. The researcher simply chooses the appropriate variable for the study of their interactions since the events or circumstances have already happened or exist (Best and Khan, 1993). The selection of this study design for the research was based on the truth that in this type of research, the researcher doesn't manipulate study variables. These techniques denote to the way in which information are amassed and analysed, and the kind of generalizations and illustrations resultant from the information. According to Myers (2009), the study method is a strategy of enquiry, which moves from the underlying assumptions to research design, and data collection.

Researchers in the social sciences developed qualitative analysis techniques to analyse social and cultural phenomena. Since qualitative research is naturalistic, it aims to analyse the daily lives of various groups of people and cultures in their natural environment. According to Dooley (1984), the methodology of qualitative research includes the techniques of semi structured interviewing and participant observation in natural field settings. The study used Interview schedules for school principals and their deputies plus the County education officer. This method was chosen because it takes an interpretive, realistic approach to its subject matter, trying to make sense of or understand phenomena in terms of the meanings that people attribute to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Quantitative research methods were also employed so as to enhance the study's objectivity, reliability and validity, representativeness and generalization of the study findings. Quantitative research methods seek to quantify relationships between variables. For this study, variables such as aspects of school culture and students' academic performance, emphasis on ideology and students' academic performance, academic orientation and students' academic performance, as well as central role of school principal were quantified on a scale of 1-10, so as to determine the extent they affected each other.

### **3.1 TARGET POPULATION**

The study was carried out in 21 public secondary schools out of 212 public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya with a student population of 84 800. This was a study to establish whether school culture had any strong relationship and remarkable influence on students' academic performance, as seen in performing and non performing schools. The study was also undertaken in only high and low performing schools which were purposively selected. The target population of the study comprised of 2000 students, 212 principals, 212 deputy principals, 800 teachers and one County Education Officer from Machakos County, Kenya.

### 3.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

These are methods employed to obtain data as well as the sample size to be studied. Sampling technique is a method or procedure for specifying how the researcher obtains a sample taken from a population (Campbell et al, 1995). The researcher applied both probability and non-probability sampling methods and techniques to collect quantitative and quantitative data. Stratified random sampling technique was used to get a study sample of 21 schools from a total of 212 public secondary schools where schools were stratified according to type, for example, girls, boys or mixed school. The aim of using stratified sampling was to achieve a desired 10 percent representation from various sub groups from the population (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2013).

The study choice of Machakos County was arrived at purposively due to the growing concern of parents and education stakeholders on an increasing trend of poor performance of most secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Selection of public secondary schools and not primary schools was therefore purposive. Drawn from sampling frame of 212 public secondary schools located in Machakos County, Kenya, stratified sampling technique was used to categorize the schools in three strata of High performing schools (7), average (7) and low performing schools (7) as evidenced by KCSE Exam results in the years 2017 and 2018 were purposively selected for the study. The stratified sampling frame of schools is presented in table 1

**Table 1 Stratified Sampling of Schools**

<b>Stratified random sampling of schools</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
High performance	1	3	3	7
Average performance	1	3	3	7
Low performance	1	3	3	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>

### 3.3 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample frame for the study was 212 public secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. Stratified sampling was then employed to categorize these schools into 3 strata of: High, average and low performing schools based on 2017 and 2018 KCSE results. These results were obtained from Machakos County education office located in Machakos town. Purposive sampling was then employed to pick only high and low performing schools for the study, based on a school mean score of Grade C+ and above and grade D+ and below were treated as high and low performing respectively. Grade C- and C plain was treated as average. Determination of high, average or low was based on a school having half or more than half of its candidates falling within those levels. A sample of 200 students was drawn from the 21 schools selected; 21 principals and 21 deputy principals; 21 teachers and 1 County Education Officer from Machakos County office. The sample size is presented in table 2

**Table 2 Sampling Frame of Informants**

Respondents	Sample size			Percentage
	Male	Female	Total	
County Education Officer	0	1	1	100
School principals	10	11	21	10
Deputy principals	11	10	21	10
Teachers	12	13	25	10
Students	100	100	200	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>268</b>	

### 3.4 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

A Research Instrument is a tool designed to collect or obtain data on a topic of interest from research subjects. This study used questionnaires, interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions. The logic of using many tools for data collection was to strengthen evidence since weakness of one tool was corrected by strength of another tool. Triangulation of findings was done to enable credibility of the findings of the study. Apart from closed-ended questionnaires, Likert Scale rating was also used because it is considered appropriate in measuring perceptions of the respondents.

### 4.0 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the effects of aspects of school culture on academic performance in selected public secondary schools I Machakos County Kenya.

The student's informants were asked to describe salient aspects of a school culture, in selected public secondary schools in Machakos County and how they affected academic performance of students. First, informants had to identify categories of salient cultural aspects found in their schools. The findings are presented in table 1.



**Table 1 Categories of School Cultural Aspects in Coded Groups of Selected Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County**

School cultural aspects and attached meaning	Scores On Scale 1-10					F	%
	A	B	C	D	E	F	%
Symbols	7	7	9	8	5	36	10.1
Rituals	5	3	8	4	2	22	6.2
Ceremonies	8	3	7	4	3	25	7.0
Customs	9	6	8	6	6	35	9.8
Level of students' values	8	6	8	4	5	31	8.7
Level of teacher values	8	5	7	5	6	31	8.7
Number of shared norms by teachers	9	5	8	6	4	32	8.9
Number of shared norms by students	6	7	8	5	5	31	8.7
<b>Nature of reality and truth:</b>							
(i)Counts of facts							
(ii)Counts of rumours	5	4	7	4	5	25	7.0
	3	10	4	8	8	33	9.3
<b>Nature of human relationships:</b>							
(i)Good incidences in school	7	5	8	5	6	31	8.7
(ii)Bad incidences in school	2	8	1	6	7	24	6.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings in table 1 above suggests some of the common aspects of school culture that are used to communicate in meanings among students and teachers. The common school culture means of communication were symbols 10.1% (36), customs 9.8% (35), and ceremonies 8.7% (31). The findings suggest that symbols, rites, rituals, ceremonies, myths and audible behaviour patterns and customs were manifested in day-to-day way of doing things in schools. The symbols were used as basic assumptions that shared by teachers about the nature of reality, relationships, life, dreams about career aspirations and how to use opportunities in school to achieve one's dreams in life.

The findings in table 1 also show that cultural features were rated on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being lowest level value and 10, highest level value, respectively.

Column [A], shows schools with 3 highest cultural features where school customs and number of shared norms by teachers, rated highest at 9 respectively while school ceremonies, level of teacher and student values tied with 8 scores each at positions 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

In [A] schools therefore, the three most predominant school cultural features were School customs, number of shared norms by teachers and school ceremonies. The cultural features included values and norms, where values referred to what teachers and students believed was 'good', 'right' or 'desirable' which then was translated into norms for their daily behaviour.

A form three female student when asked to talk about her perception on the school's salient cultural aspects had this to say:

*“My school has her own unique school cultural practices that include school symbols, rituals and ceremonies, that we practice annually which give both learners and teachers, motivation. For example, our school badge, motto and vision, all show ‘hard work rewards’. Our daily activities are guided by this and a class that performs excellently are usually taken to Mombasa together with their teachers; to set new targets, while enjoying themselves and having a conducive environment. Annually, a prize giving ceremony see well performed top students go to college with a new laptop, smart phone and a dairy cow. These annual rituals and ceremonies motivate other students to work hard and also gain materially”, (Kamurembo, a form 3 student, 2019).*

This observation confirms the vital role of school culture in nurturing conducive school climate and environment for academic performance and good discipline for stable career and productive employment in future. It shows that good character and conduct are offshoot of good school climate. The finding seems to underscore the need for good school climate that nurtures young boys and girls to be good role models of the youth in contemporary society.

As indicated in table 1, for schools B, 3 most predominant school cultural features were, Nature of reality and truth with Counts of facts being the highest, followed by nature of human relations particularly bad incidences in school and symbols.

Several Qualitative statements from students concurred with the preceding findings. A form four female student had this to say:

*“Students in our school have many symbols and signs only understood by them. Rumours and bad incidences among students are very high, leading to increased conflicts, sometimes over nothing important or related to academics”, (Kasoka a form four female student in school B, 2019).*

The findings suggest that in some schools, school culture and climate is not well nurtured. This shows some schools may not be having a school climate that nurtures talents for productive efforts in academic performance and good school discipline. It shows students in such school may get poor results in academic performance, poor self-discipline and poor character that may reduce their productivity in future careers in society.

In [C] Schools, symbols were the highest with 9 scores, followed by rituals, level of student values, customs, and number of shared norms among students and teachers as well as nature of human relationships with good incidences in school, all with 8 scores respectively. This indicates that in [C] schools 3 most predominant school cultural features were symbols, rituals and level of student values.

A male form three student from school C, while talking of salient school cultural aspects, had this to say:

*“My school has many good symbols, placed in strategic places like notice boards, that really inspire us, students. There are relatively many positive values such as respect, hard work, among others, that are religiously observed by all members of the school community”, (Kababa, a male form three student, 2019).*

These observations suggest that effective communication using correct mix of symbols that are understood by teachers and student may lead to conducive school culture that communicates the aspirations of the school. These aspirations contain values that inspire a culture of hard work, diligence and a passion for excellence as the values in the school's motto, vision and mission enable student to have good dreams that they strive to achieve. This is ideal school climate that inspires good academic performance and good discipline in a school setting. This is a versatile matrix that nurtures academic prowess and good character development that makes social purpose of education feasible.

In [D] schools, school symbols and nature of reality and truth, particularly rumours, were the highest with 8 scores each, followed by customs, number of shared norms by teachers and nature of human relationships, particularly bad incidences, tied with 6 scores each. This indicates that 3 predominant school cultural features for school D were school symbols, rumours and bad incidences in school.

While in school D, a form two student, had this to say:

*"In this school, there are a lot of bad incidences among students, inside and outside class. Teachers seem to have given up and those male teachers, who are easily distracted, get trapped to students' rumours as well as female students' romance triangle and become powerless. Our school culture is more inclined to sports than academics", (Kasupuu, a form two student, 2019).*

This observation suggests that in some schools there is lack of a conducive school culture and climate that may nurture talents and ability of students to focus on academic performance. This leads to loss of hope and dims expectations of students which may create negative energy that may ruin academic and discipline of the school. This does not augur well for a school.

Lastly, in school E, nature of reality and truth particularly counts of facts was highest with 8 scores, followed by nature of human relations particularly bad incidences in school having 7 scores. School customs, number of shared norms among teachers and nature of human relationships particularly good incidences in school, all tied with 6 scores each. This indicates that 3 predominant school cultural features in school E were:

First, nature of reality and truth particularly counts of facts, followed by nature of human relations particularly bad incidences in school and school customs.

It was notable in documentary analysis for the selected schools on KCSE mean score for 2017 showed a stable pattern with school A leading with a 7.3 KCSE mean score, followed by school C with 7.2, school B with 5.6 and school D 6.1 and school E with 4.3. Further, in 2018, school C led with a 7.5 mean score followed by school A with 7.2 and school D with 5.8 mean score, school B with 5.2 and last was school E with 4.2.

Qualitative statements from students also concurred with the preceding quantitative finding. A form four student in school E asserted:

*"I wonder why my school, unlike our neighbouring schools, has very few school ceremonies, rituals as well as positive customs. Most daily customary practices are generally, negative oriented, with little value to academics.*

*Rumours and bad incidences, theft and sneaking out, is the order of the day among most students!” (Mutongoi, a form four student, 2019).*

Overall findings for twenty-one schools revealed 3 predominant school cultural aspects that had high scores as: school symbols, school customs and nature of human relationships, particularly rumours. These cultural aspects influenced students’ academic performance either positively or negatively as demonstrated from the preceding findings.

Qualitative statements from various students support the preceding observations. A form three student, talking about salient school cultural aspects in her school, had this to say:

*“My school has her own unique school cultural practices that include school symbols, rituals and ceremonies, that we practice annually which give both learners and teachers, motivation. Our school badge, motto and vision, all show `hard work rewards and our daily activities are guided by this”, (Kamurembo, form 3 student, 2019).*

These observations suggest that schools that have effective school climate have values, symbols and ideals that inspire them to have students and teachers energized to focus on specific goals that improve their self-discipline and academic performance. This is important to motivate and synergize their efforts with focus and foresight.

In contrast to the preceding qualitative findings, a form four student asserted:

*“I wonder why my school, unlike our neighbouring schools, has very few school ceremonies, rituals as well as positive customs. Most daily customary practices are generally, negative oriented, with little value to academics. Rumours and bad incidences, theft and sneaking out, is the order of the day among most students!” (Mutongoi, a form four student, 2019).*

In converse, this finding suggests that where there are no actual and common symbols, ideals and values that psyche students and teachers to focus on clear vision, mission and motto that is specified in school culture, focus on academic excellence and good discipline may not be possible.

The preceding findings show that school cultural aspects greatly influence students’ academic performance, as confirmed by documentary analysis of KCSE results for 2017 and 2018. Results indicate a consistent higher mean score for [C]schools as compared to the other schools studied.

The study findings concur with Schein (1985) classification of a school’s culture, classified at three levels, also referred to as the cultural system of a school. In Schein's classification, the underlying level consists of simple assumptions, which he believes are the essence of a company's culture. Values are discovered at a higher level of understanding, the intermediate level of Schein's classification, are artefacts and behaviours relating to cultural manifestations and organizational members' behaviour patterns are found at the third level.

Assumptions refer to taken-for granted beliefs which staff members perceive to be true and underlie their daily interpretation of their duties. The second level consists of values and norms. As a consequence, values should be treated as necessary standards; they represent what is deemed

valuable to achieve or worth striving for in a school, while norms reflect what is deemed unacceptable conduct.

### EFFECTS OF A SCHOOL'S CULTURAL SYSTEMS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The study further sought to explore positive and negative aspects of school culture that influenced students' academic achievements, in the five groups of coded public secondary schools and correlated to each school's KCSE mean scores for 2017 and 2018, as shown in table 2

**Table 2 Effects of Schools' Cultural Systems on Academic Performance-Positive and Negative Aspects (scale 1-5)**

<b>POSITIVE ASPECTS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Number of Ceremonies in a year	8	3	6	4	3	24	9.9
Teachers positive Assumptions on academic performance	7	6	8	5	6	32	13.2
Students positive Assumptions on academic performance	8	4	7	8	5	32	13.2
Positive customs	9	5	8	4	5	31	12.8
<b>Nature of human relationships:</b>							
Good incidences among teachers	8	6	7	5	6	32	13.2
Good incidences among students	7	3	8	4	6	28	11.5
Number of positive shared norms by students	9	4	7	6	5	31	12.8
Number of positive shared norms by teachers	10	5	8	4	6	33	13.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>NEGATIVE ASPECTS</b>							
Bad incidences among students	3	8	4	7	5	27	19.6
Bad incidences among teachers	1	5	2	6	7	21	8.6
Counts of rumours among students	3	8	4	8	9	32	23.2
Counts of rumours among teachers	4	10	2	7	8	31	22.5
Negative shared norms	2	8	2	6	9	27	19.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE</b>							
KCSE RESULTS MEAN SCORE 2017	7.3	5.6	7.2	6.1	4.3	24.5	100
KCSE RESULTS MEAN SCORE 2018	7.2	5.2	7.5	5.8	4.2	21.9	100

The third level in Schein's classification scheme consists of artefacts and practice related to behavioural aspects, such as customs, rituals and procedures where in each school develops its own set of behavioural patterns.

The researcher further, examined the school's cultural systems and student's academic performance, based on 2 categories; positive meaning that they add value to students' academic performance, while negative reduce value to students' academic performance, as presented in table 2. The sum and mean of each were calculated as well as variance and standard deviation sought. On positive aspect in the 21 schools, number of positive shared norms by teachers was highest with 13.6% (33),

followed by teachers' positive assumptions on academic performance and good incidences among teachers, tied at 13.2% (32) respectively.

As indicated in Table 2 above, shared norms by teachers, positive assumptions on academic performance of students and good incidences among teachers, were the 3 most predominant positive cultural aspects in the 21 selected schools. On negative aspects, counts of rumours among students was the highest with 23.2% (32), followed by counts of rumours among teachers at 22.5% (31) and bad incidences among students and negative shared norms tied with 19.6% (27) each.

Findings revealed that the 3 most predominant negative aspects in the 21 schools were; rumours among students, rumours among teachers and bad incidences among students.

In addition to the preceding observations, a form four female student, when asked to talk about the extent to which the unhealthy/healthy school cultural aspects found in their school, affected her academic performance, had this to say:

*"I don't want to sound so negative, but our way of doing things in this school doesn't make sense. Emphasis is placed on some routines that don't make sense ... When you look around, students are expected to run, whenever outside class, just in the name of being time conscious, only to get into class and start chatting, talk about strict teachers and prefects and do romance. Everyone seems to pursue their own interest, which unfortunately doesn't enhance learning, no wonder our schools have consistent poor performance in KCSE", (Kasoka, a form four female student, 2019).*

However, a form two female student said this:

*"We have a lot of unhealthy and negative school cultural aspects that have become our school culture. With all this, unless something is done, students' academic performance will continue dwindling", (Kelitu, a form two female student, 2019).*

The preceding observations suggest that there is proliferation of unhealthy school cultures that tend to be counterproductive to good intentions of the schools. These retrogressive school cultures tend to take away students' synergies that could be used to improve academic performances and lead to poor learning outcomes.

The preceding observations demonstrate that predominant school cultural aspects found in a school influence students' academic performance, with schools with predominant unhealthy aspects, performing poorly as compared to schools with predominant healthy aspects.

Secondly, school cultural artefacts and aspects such as school vision, mission, motto, ceremonies, rituals, among others, can be used to influence students' academic performance, as demonstrated by the preceding findings, particularly as demonstrated by schools in A and C.

The findings concur with what Deal and Peterson (1999), who observed that traditions in school are ceremonies marking special occasions, activities that affirm institutional traditions, and rites are examples of important events that have a special history and purpose that occur year after year to provide community members with a base to weather obstacles, difficulties, and transitions. Furthermore, it captures Schein's (1985) cultural level classification, which consists of three layers



that vary in terms of their visibility within schools and awareness among teaching staff. They are made up of fundamental assumptions, which he believes are the essence of an organization's cultures, an intermediate level where values are contained, and a third level that includes artefacts and behaviours relating to organizational members' cultural manifestations and behaviour patterns. Besides, a key informant, Principal, observed that school culture embodies everything that happens in the school on day-to-day basis. She noted:

*“School culture is very important since it includes the behavioural regularities, values and beliefs that are shared by all members of a school community. It entails small but vital aspects such as the kind of language used, attitudes towards specific subjects and teachers’ guidance on careers, motivations and even outings. School cultural aspects are key in character building for students and even teachers as well as methodology used in teaching, cooperation and commitment in the school”, (Kanono, Principal, 2019).*

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

Social interaction tenet guided this study in its pursuit of describing schools' cultural aspects such as symbols, artefacts and value systems which play an important role in students' academic performance.

The study therefore concluded that school cultural aspects, had significant influence on students' academic achievements based on the preceding observations. Positive school culture has inherent motivational effects to the students which enable them to have high self-esteem and high expectations which may enable them to work hard to measure to the expectations of the school. Indeed, continued achievement orientation motivated by school culture, shared ideology and supportive school leadership, results in good achievement in academic endeavours.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of these findings the study recommends schools to carry out a School Culture Typology which is a self-reflective tool and has school related activities designed to identify a school-wide perspective of the “type” of culture that exists in a school. The school typology tool will help all school community members define, implement and monitor acceptable and collective ethos that positively influence students' academic performance.

The study found interesting revelations on school routines, customs and values that may positively or negatively influence students' academic performance. It therefore recommends a detailed study to establish the level at which school customs and ethos influence students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

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