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## Subordinate Support Staff as Primary 'Internal Custodians' of Academic Performance, Social and Emotional Development among Students in Primary and Secondary Schools in Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia Counties, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*The current study examined the integral role of subordinate support staff in primary and secondary schools in Kenya on the overall academic performance and social and emotional well-being of students. A total of 80 student respondents currently attending tertiary institutions in Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia Counties in Kenya were interviewed using an on-spot questionnaire. The findings indicate a near 'fanatical,' 'nostalgic,' and 'emotional' attachment of the student respondents to almost all the various subordinate support staff they interacted with in their formative educational years. Respondents enrolled in boarding schools at an early age reported strong 'emotional' and 'social support' from especially matrons, cooks, and drivers who acted primarily as caregivers. The relationship between students and subordinate staff developed to the extent of students assigning 'nicknames' to some of them. In one of the primary and secondary schools, the school bus was assigned the names 'monkey cage' and 'Lucy.' The student respondents ranked the following subordinate staff as follows:*

- Bursar (3%),
- Secretary/messenger (2%),
- Laundry attendant (8%),
- Telephone operator (1%),
- Swimming pool attendant (4%),
- Bus driver (14%),
- Health staff (10%),
- Matron (25%),
- Cooks/caterers (21%),
- Cleaner/groundsman (3%),
- Security (9%)

*The results show that 97% of student respondents acknowledged the significant role of subordinate support staff in promoting the overall academic performance and social and emotional development of students in primary and secondary schools in Kenya. The study concludes that the presence of subordinate support staff in the various educational institutions attended by the student respondents had a beneficial effect allowing them to have a more active role in interactions with adults.*

**Keywords:** Subordinate support staff, students, academic performance, social and emotional

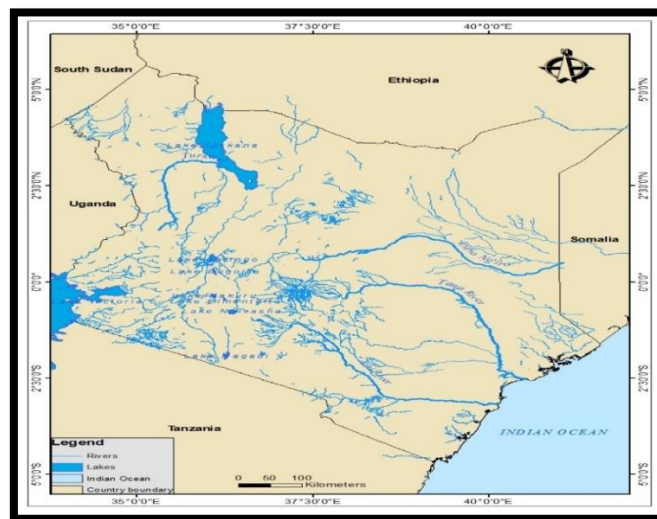
## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Establishment of Primary and Secondary Schools in Kenya (Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial)

Modern formal education was introduced in Kenya during the pre-colonial period by Christian missionaries sent by the Evangelical clergy of the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society (CMS). The objectives of the mission were to introduce and spread Christianity and western civilization to East Africa (Sifuna, 1990; Ranger, 1965). Sultan Sayyid Said, who had moved the capital city of the sultanate of Oman to Zanzibar in 1840 and administered the 10-mile strip along the Kenyan coast, granted a permit to Johann Ludwig Krapf to set up a mission station at Rabai in modern-day Kilifi County in Kenya (Stock, 1950).



*Figure 1: Rabai Mission School  
Source: (Paukwa, 2019)*



*Figure 2: Map of Kenya in East Africa*

The introduced curriculum focused on educating African students on the 3Rs, i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic (Sheffield, 1973). After the completion of the Kenya-Uganda railway, the missionaries migrated into the hinterland, primarily along the railway, constructing schools and church missions. The period from 1900-1924 registered the founding of several schools in Kenya that included:

- Nairobi school (1902),
- Tumutumu Girls High School (1908),
- Kenya High School (1908), etc. (Churu & Mwaura, 2011)

In 1908, the Christian missionaries jointly formed an educational committee that later transformed into the Missionary Board of Education (MBE). It represented all Protestant missions in the Protectorate of Kenya (Gordon, 1971; Stock, 1950). In the same year, the Educational commission in curriculum Development, headed by Prof. Nelson Fraser, recommended the establishment of a Department of Education and the appointment of a Director of Education (Fraser, 1909). The report further recommended the development of formal education along racial lines, i.e., Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Thereafter, European and Asian children were granted access to quality academic education while African students were trained in vocational and artisan courses (Thompson, 1981; Sifuna, 1975). The colonial Government built additional formal schools to educate children of white settlers moving to the newly established colony (Thompson, 1981; Osogo, 1970; Beck, 1966). According to Nasimiyu-Wasike and Waruta (2000), the missionaries managed schools between 1846 and 1911 with minimal support from the colonial administration. By 2020, Kenya had established over 28,000 primary schools and just over 10,000 secondary schools accommodating 3.5 million students (MoEST, 2020; Republic of Kenya, 2018).

### 1.2. Categorization of Primary and Secondary Schools in Kenya

After independence in 1963, the Government of Kenya restructured the education system by introducing a three-tier education system developed into three school types, i.e., Government, private, and mission (Ominde, 1964; Bongoko, 1992; Sorobe, 1994). The Ominde commission recommended an education structure that would foster national unity and create sufficient human capital for national development. Additionally, the commission proposed strengthening adult literacy programmes and making economic and national development attractive to citizens with basic education (Ominde, 1964; Koech, 1999). The Government of Kenya transferred the management of schools from the Missionary Education Boards (MEB) to Board of Governors (BOGs) appointed for all schools. The Boards of Governors (BOGs) were expected to provide strategic leadership by assisting school heads and staff in providing the highest quality of education (Kamunge, 1988). This policy directive streamlined school administration and provided educational institutions with distinct identities (Ominde, 1964). The Ominde commission further recommended a unified education system and embraced the establishment of self-help schools, i.e., 'harambee' constructed through pooling communal resources together. The commission also recommended that free compulsory primary education be provided to all students in Kenya (Kamunge, 1988; Gachathi, 1976). The segregationist education structure implemented in 1908, as recommended by the Fraser commission, was abolished, and students from all races, i.e., Europeans, Asians, and Africans permitted to attend all schools without discrimination (Mwaka, 2013). This promoted national unity and social cohesion and supported the production of sufficient human capital for national development (Ominde, 1964). The commission stressed that the diverse cultural traditions of the newly created Kenyan nation should be encouraged (Eshiwani, 1993; Anderson, 1970). The schools established after independence are classified further as follows:

- Single-gender
- Multiple-gender i.e. mixed
- Day
- Boarding

Additionally, secondary schools, in particular, have been classified by the Ministry of Science and Education (MoEST) as follows:

- National,
- Extra-county
- County

The already established Boards of Management (BOM) engage various cadres of subordinate support staff to assist in the effective administration of their various schools (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

### 1.3. Effective Management of Schools as Administrative Units

According to studies by Opot (2006) on the role of the principal in promoting effective school headship, participatory school administration is a requirement for improved academic performance. Proper management of educational institutions is crucial for smooth operations in schools, and poorly managed schools usually experience numerous difficulties (Orina, 2005; Wekesa, 1993; Waweru & Orodho, 2014). The Basic Education Act No. 14 of 2013 gave effect to Article 53 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which guarantees access to all students to quality, free and basic education. The act empowers the Boards of Management in decision-making, monitoring infrastructural development and financial issues, overseeing the delivery of educational programmes, and monitoring educational standards (Adan & Orodho, 2014; MOEST, 2003). The Boards of Management (BOMs) are appointed by the cabinet secretary for Education on the recommendation of the County Education Board (CEB). They comprise thirteen members, including:

- Six members representing parents or the local community,
- A nominee of the County Education Board,
- One representative of the teaching staff,
- Three representatives of sponsors,
- One representative of a special interest group, and
- A representative of persons with special needs (Republic of Kenya, 2013)

Studies conducted by Onderi and Makori (2013) show that the success of a school as an administrative unit depends on cooperation among all educational stakeholders, including subordinate support staff. Staffing in pre-primary institutions (ECDE) is directed by the County Governments of Kenya, established by the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 (Orodho *et al.*, 2013).

### 1.4. Streamlining of Subordinate Staff Remuneration in Kenyan Educational Institutions – (Kilemi Mweria Task Force Report of 2014)

The subordinate support staff engaged in various educational institutions are those employees who provide support services. They are not involved in teaching and learning, although they occupy a dominant role in the management of institutions. The Ministry of Education has published guidelines on the terms upon which the Boards of Management can hire and remunerate subordinate support staff (Republic of Kenya, 1999). Before 1992, the Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Education, was tasked with appointing and remunerating subordinate support staff in Government educational institutions by providing grants for personal emoluments (Republic of Kenya, 1999). The Government of Kenya, through Legal Notice No. 262 of 1993, required that all subordinate support staff appointed by the various Boards of Management be remunerated from the school financial resources and schools with the larger student population and streams allowed to employ additional subordinate support staff according to the needs of the school and financial abilities

of the school BOM. In 2014, the Government of Kenya appointed the Kilemi Mwiria Task force mandated to review the terms of remuneration for subordinate support staff. The report, when finalized, recommended the following guidelines:

- Day schools with one stream should only have a maximum of 5 employees, while the largest school with 15 streams can only hire not more than 37 employees on terms set by the Boards of Management,
- The lowest number of non-teaching staff should be six in a one streamed day school of 180 students,
- Subordinate support staff in secondary schools to be paid a salary of up to kshs. 41,000
- Proposed qualifications for each category of subordinate support staff, i.e., school driver
- Essential support staff should be employed on permanent and pensionable terms (Republic of Kenya, 2014)

The presence of qualified teachers and well-motivated subordinate support staff combine to ensure students excel in their academic studies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Administrative Subordinate Support Staff

Schools are complex institutions that require delicate and precise management (Wanzare, 2013). The school head is assisted in the daily administration of the school by the Board of Management and supports administrative staff (Momanyi, 2015). The support staff are not directly involved with student learning. However, they contribute towards the effective running of the school. The support staff interact with the students on a daily basis at a personal level (Nyakundi, 2012). For example, ICT support staff are always stand by to monitor all IT software within the school and respond to any challenges faced by students. Other administrative support staff in educational institutions include the following subordinate support staff:

- Bursars,
- Accountants,
- Secretaries,
- Storekeepers and
- Librarians (Ngeny, 2016)

The schools are dependent on the support staff to achieve a free-flowing school day. Support staff are not trained to teach, but they work alongside teachers to fulfil the various support roles required by students. Additionally, the school head should ensure that each support staff member is aware of their responsibilities spelt out through a clear job description (Southworth, 1999). Some of these tasks may involve activities such as training in first aid and the safe use of equipment and facilities within the schools. According to Odunga (2013), the contribution of support staff in the smooth running of educational institutions is equally important as that of teachers. The subordinate support staff spend adequate time with individual students, understand their backgrounds, and build trust and rapport with them. The school nurse was seen by students in this study as a parent and key source of expertise, confidential support, and emotional security. Health and safety managers, if engaged in schools, ensure the school environment is safe by enacting correct plans to ensure health and safety requirements. This support system is crucial in providing the emotional stability required for academic learning and social development in primary and secondary school students.

### 2.2. Non-Administrative Subordinate Support Staff

School settings such as academic theatres provide an excellent setting for students to learn more about their interests and explore the full range of opportunities available to them (Nyakongo, 2015). The non-administrative support staff assist the students in achieving this objective. The staff in this category include cooks, caterers, matrons, security guards, and groundsmen. The staff go beyond the school curriculum by providing support by monitoring trauma-related tendencies and negative behavioural tendencies among students. Non-administrative support staff, such as swimming pool attendants, provide specialized instructional support that enables students to acquire crucial life skills as they utilize school facilities. These staff secure the environment and make learning conducive for all students. This crucial responsibility of securing the learning environment is delegated to subordinate support staff, including security guards, gatekeepers, timekeepers, and matrons (Anderson & Creswell, 1980). The safety and security of the boarders are also essential to ensure the learners learn without disruptions (Button, 1984). The School matron also provides much-needed care, including following up with parents/guardians in support of administrative assignments. The matron works closely with other support staff, including the school bursar and deputy head teacher, and keeps the school head regularly informed of day-to-day developments (Cavanagh, 2004; Soomeren, 2002). All subordinate support staff and other educational stakeholders cooperate to foster safe and secure school environments (Republic of Kenya, 2008). The health of students in schools remains a high-priority concern for all stakeholders (Soomeren, 2002). The subordinate support staff foster positive, trusting relationships with students and improve the school learning environment as guiding counselors. Subordinate support staff can act as excellent role models since they easily connect with students after interacting with them the whole day and encouraging them to learn and go beyond the traditional path with necessary support and guidance.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Questions

This research work intended to determine the role of subordinate support staff in achieving overall academic performance and social and emotional development among students in primary and secondary schools in Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia counties in Kenya.

#### 3.2. Statement of the Problem

The implicit contribution of subordinate support staff as 'internal custodians' of overall academic performance and social and emotional development among students in primary and secondary education in Kenya has been largely neglected. The research aimed to evaluate the contribution made by the various subordinate support staff engaged by school Boards of Management (BOM).

#### 3.3. Research Design

A total of 80 student respondents in various tertiary institutions in Uasin Gishu and Trans Nzoia Counties were targeted for an interview and their perception of the significance of the various subordinate support staff found in the primary and secondary schools they attended. The survey targeted both male and female student respondents. The study employed a combination of descriptive survey and naturalistic design, employing both qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The on-spot questionnaire was the primary instrument of data collection that also included oral interviews (Kothari, 2004; Orodho & Kombo, 2002). Statistical packages were used to analyse the data into frequencies and percentages. The qualitative data obtained from the respondents were evaluated and presented in sections (Orodho, 2004). The researcher purposefully identified students and approached them with requests to participate in the research study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, and data were collected using one research questionnaire (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The researcher ensured that the questionnaires were filled out confidentially. A descriptive survey was selected based on interest in the state of affairs already existing in the field and ensuring the collection of significant amounts of data.

#### 3.4. Research Instruments

First, the data were initially recorded by the student respondents. Then the researcher validated the raw data to ascertain validity, relevance, and completeness. The information obtained was analysed and presented thematically using frequencies and percentages using MS Word.

##### 3.4.1. Research Questionnaire

The primary tool to obtain data in this study was the research questionnaire that the student respondents were invited to fill out confidentially. The questionnaire contained a number of sub-sections based on the major research questions.

The respondents were assured of full confidentiality of the information given in the questionnaires. Each individual respondent was required to respond to the question items independently, and the completed questionnaires were collected immediately after that. The researcher used questionnaires for this study because it is the most suitable research instrument for descriptive research design (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

##### 3.4.2. Maps of Study Area

The respondents in this study were identified for interviews from tertiary institutions found in Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu Counties in Kenya. The maps of the two administrative counties are shown in figures 3 & 4 below.

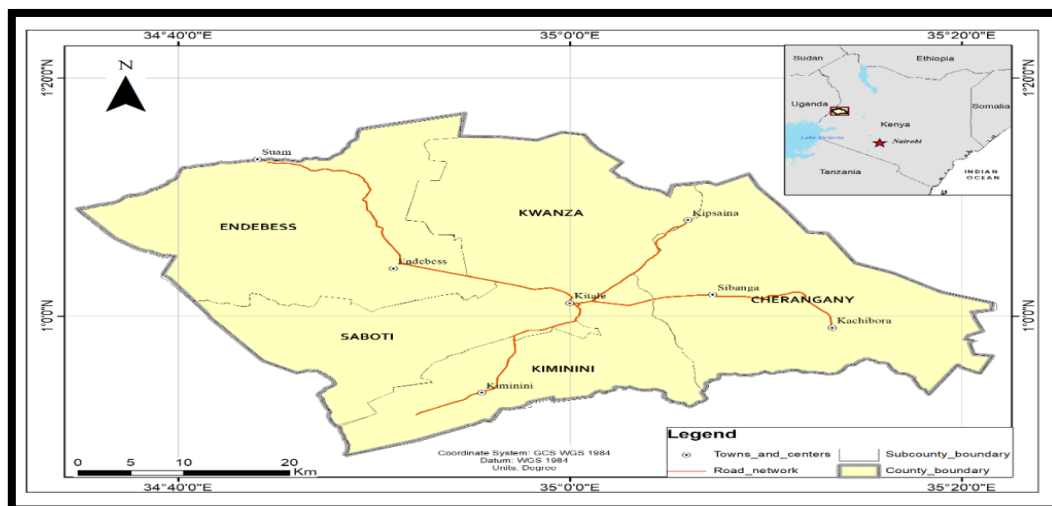


Figure 3: Map of Trans-Nzoia County

Trans-Nzoia is a county located in the western part of Kenya. The County headquarters is located in Kitale town. Currently, there are 470 primary schools and 120 secondary schools in the county. Trans Nzoia has over 20 tertiary institutions.

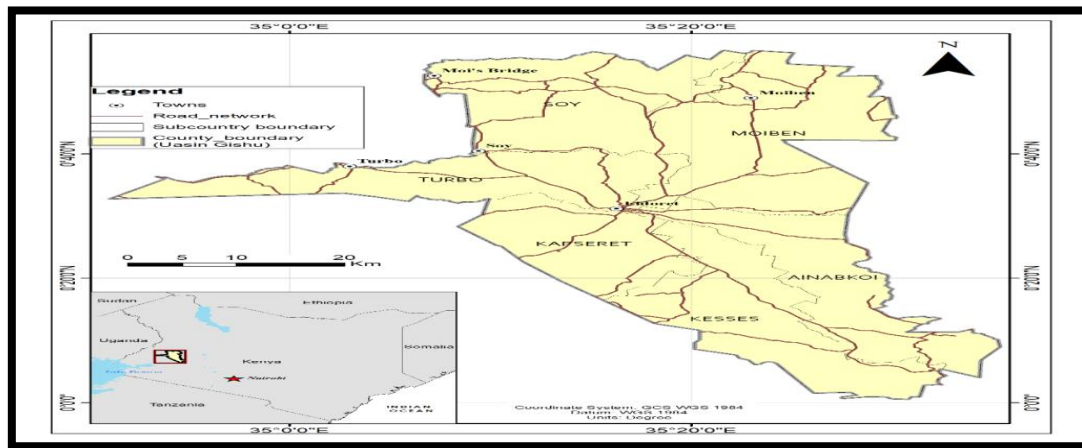


Figure 4: Map of Uasin-Gishu County

Uasin Gishu is located in the former Rift Valley Province. The County headquarters is located in Eldoret town. Uasin Gishu is located on a plateau and has a cool and temperate climate. Currently, there are 713 primary schools and 156 secondary schools in the county. Several tertiary institutions are located in the County.

**4. Results and Discussions**

*4.1. Categorization of Respondents by Gender*

The student respondents interviewed were categorized according to their gender. This sampling approach intended to obtain as much diverse information from the respondents as possible. A total of 80 respondents were interviewed across the two counties, and the results are shown in figure 5 below.

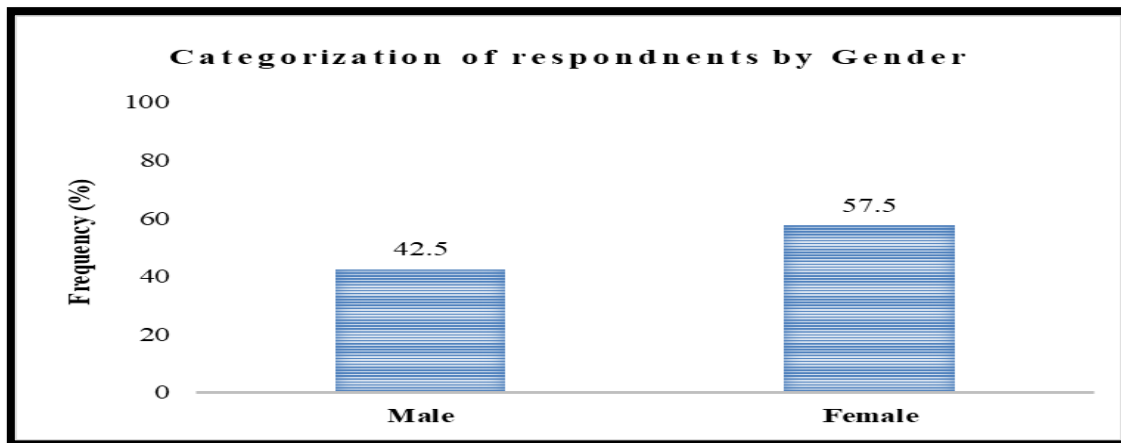


Figure 5: Gender Composition of Respondents

The findings reveal that more female respondents (57.5%) participated in the study compared to their male counterparts (42.5%). Out of the total 80 respondents, 34 males and 46 females took part in the survey. The respondents were students in tertiary institutions located within Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia Counties. In addition, 49 (61%) student respondents attended primary and secondary school educational institutions in the two counties. A further 31 (39%) student respondents attended primary and secondary schools located outside the two counties considered in this study. The results, as shown in figure 5, show that a greater proportion of female respondents were willing to participate in the survey.

*4.2. Type of Primary School Attended by Respondents*

The student respondents were also categorized according to the geographical location of primary schools attended. The distribution is shown in figure 6 below.

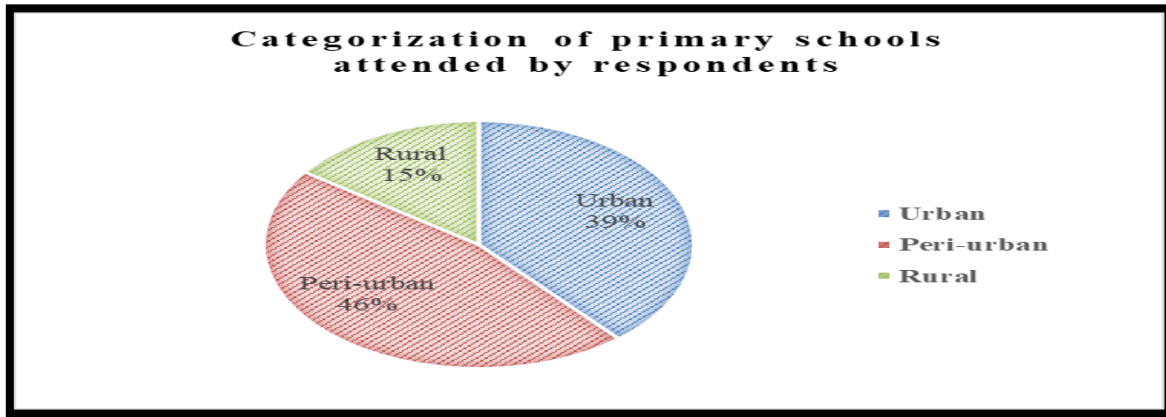


Figure 6: Categorization of Respondents by Primary School Attended

The location of the primary schools attended by the respondents influenced the nature of their responses to the questionnaire. The study classified the respondents according to the location of the primary schools that they attended, i.e.

- Urban= 31 students (39%),
- Peri-urban= 37 students (46%),
- Rural= 12 students (15%)

From the findings, a greater proportion of the respondents attended primary schools located in peri-urban areas, and the least number of respondents attended schools in rural areas.

4.3. Type of Secondary School Attended by Respondents

The respondents were further interviewed to establish the type of secondary schools they attended after completing their primary school studies, as indicated in figure 6. The placement of secondary schools into various category types is done by the Ministry of Education in Kenya. The classification of the respondents according to the secondary school attended is shown in figure 7 below.

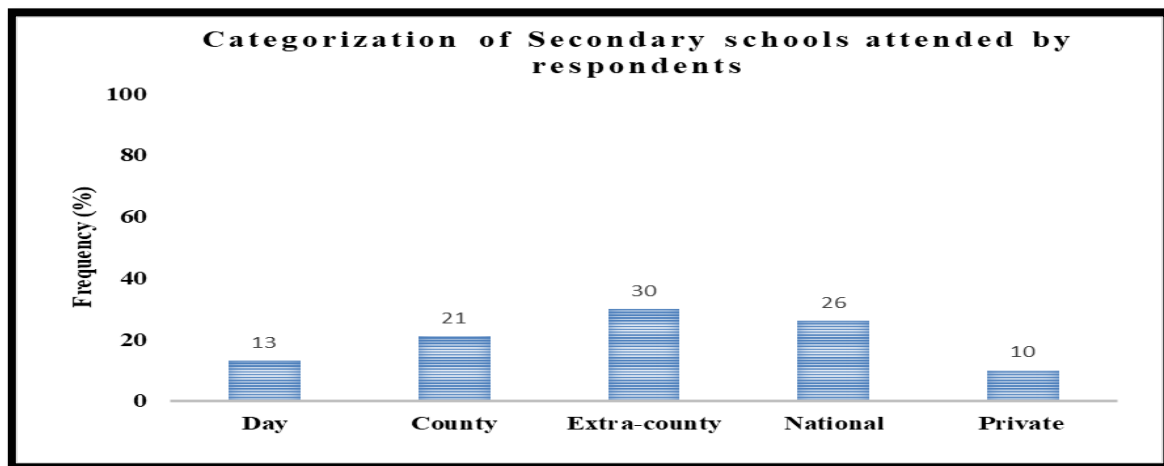


Figure 7: Classification of Secondary Schools Attended by Respondents

From the research questionnaires, the type of secondary school attended by the various respondents influenced the nature of their responses. The majority of respondents in this study (30%, 24 students) attended secondary schools classified as 'Extra-county.' The students from these Extra-county schools showed greater enthusiasm in participating in the survey. The least number of respondents (10%, 8 students) reported having attended private secondary schools. The remaining respondents attended secondary schools classified as follows:

- Day= 10 students (13%),
- County= 17 students (21%),
- National= 21 students (26%)

The responses obtained from the respondents indicate satisfactory overall academic performance, social and emotional development from the various secondary schools attended, and their subsequent enrollment into tertiary institutions that included universities, polytechnics, and vocational colleges.

4.4. Student Perception of the Role of Subordinate Staff in Their Overall Performance

Figure 8 below summarises the perception as reported by the student respondents in the role of subordinate support staff in their overall academic performance and social and emotional development.

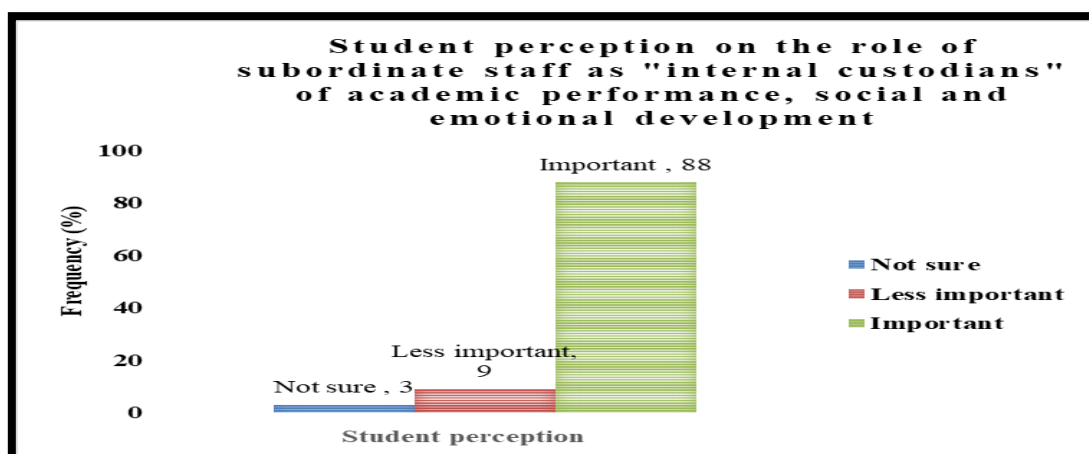


Figure 8: Overall Student Perception of the Role of Subordinate Support Staff on Their Overall Academic Performance, Social and Emotional Development

In figure 8 above, the student respondents reported their perception of the significance of all categories of subordinate support staff in contributing to their overall academic performance and emotional development. The majority of respondents [(important=88%, 70 students)] reported that the subordinate support staff in their various primary and secondary schools were instrumental in fostering their performance. As shown in figure 9, the school matron was singled out as the most significant subordinate support staff in ensuring that the students enjoyed a conducive learning environment. The catering staff were also reported to have positively influenced the performance of the students by ensuring the timely preparation of meals. Other respondents reported the perception of subordinate support staff as follows:

- Less important= 8 students (9%),
- Not sure= 2 students (3%)

4.5. Student Ranking of the Individual Contribution of Subordinate Staff towards the Achievement of Overall Academic Performance

In figure 9 below, the respondents ranked the individual subordinate support staff in order of their significance in positively influencing their overall academic performance and social and emotional development through their primary and secondary school studies.

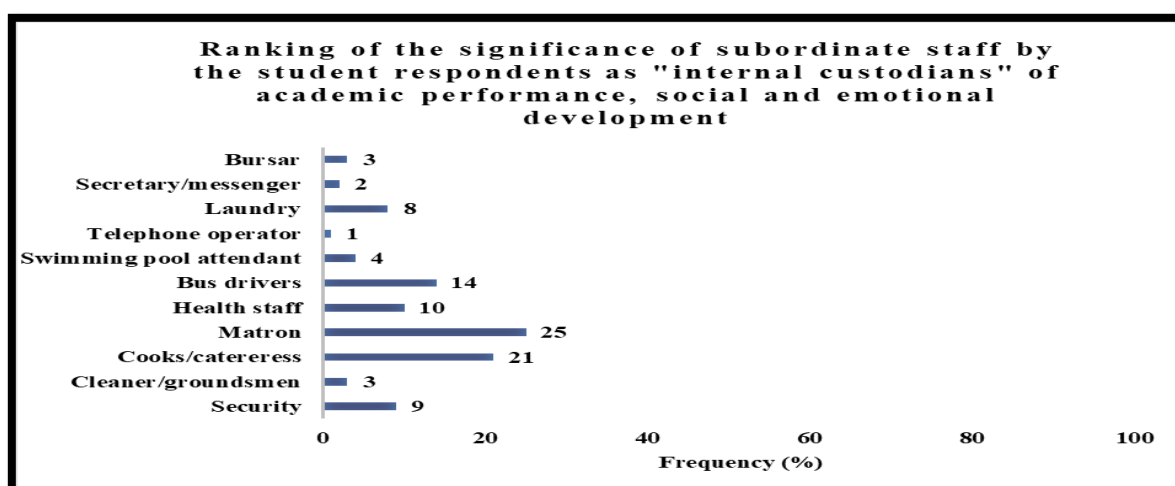


Figure 9: Student Respondent Ranking of Subordinate Support Staff in Positively Impacting Their Academic Performance, Social and Emotional Development

The results summarized in figure 9 show the order of importance of the various individual subordinate support staff as reported by the student respondents. The school matron was ranked by the majority of respondents (25%, 20 students) as having contributed most significantly in securing their overall academic, social, and emotional development during the course of their primary and secondary school studies. The catering staff, i.e., cooks and caterers, were ranked



second with (21%, 17 students). The telephone operator was ranked the least significant subordinate support staff (1%, 1 student). Other subordinate support staff were ranked as follows:

- Bursar= 3 students (3%),
- Secretary/messenger= 2 students (2%),
- Laundry= 7 students (8%),
- Swimming pool attendant= 3 students (4%),
- Bus driver= 11 students (14%),
- Health staff= 8 students (10%),
- Cleaner/grounds men= 3 students (3%),
- Security= 7 students (9%)

## 5. Conclusions

A strong bond exists between subordinate support staff in primary and secondary schools and their students. The relationship often developed to extreme emotional levels, especially between the matrons and cooks on one side and the students. The school bus drivers were identified to have positively impacted the students by motivating them to achieve excellence during academic trips, sporting events, music/drama festivals, etc. The findings in this study indicate the significant role of subordinate support staff in fostering overall academic performance and social and emotional development among primary and secondary school students in Kenya. In the current study, 88% of student respondents reported positively on the role of subordinate support staff in their schools. Consequently, the recommendations of the Kilemi Mwiria Task Force (2014) on support staff engagement in Kenyan Educational institutions should be fully implemented by the various Boards of Management (BOMs) appointed by the Cabinet Secretary for Education on behalf of the Government of Kenya.

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