



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Effects of Form One Placement Styles on Students' Psychological Adjustment in Public Secondary Schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the effects of form-one placement styles on students' psychological adjustment in public secondary schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Kenya. The study was spurred by concerns regarding prevalent issues such as truancy, poor academic performance, and limited engagement in extracurricular activities among students. The study was guided by Social Cognitive Theory. The study adopted a convergent parallel design in the mixed-method approach. The population comprised 48 public schools, 18,000 form one students, 61 class teachers, 61 parent representatives, 48 Counsellors and one Quality Assurance and Standards Officer. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques, specifically, stratified, systematic and purposive sampling techniques, were used. Questionnaires and in-depth interview guides were used as data collection instruments. Analysis of quantitative data involved both the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics involves the use of percentages. Inferential statistics involved the use of ANOVA. The study concluded that Form One students' placement styles greatly affect their psychological well-being. Parental school choices and student decisions align with interests positively. The study recommends that education stakeholders acknowledge students' unique traits for positive outcomes. Provide varied support systems for psychological adjustment. Align placement criteria with past performance. Parents should evaluate schools thoroughly. Educators must empower students' growth and success.

Keywords: Form one, placement styles, psychological adjustment

1. Introduction

Placement of form one students in Kenya can be done by parents/guardians' choice, the choice of the ministry of education, or the choice of students. The Ministry of Education allocates students to secondary schools based on a range of factors, which may include but are not limited to, the preferences specified by parents or guardians (Elzinga, 2019). It involves a systematic approach to the allocation and arrangement of students into specific educational institutions, particularly at the beginning of their academic journey (Napompech, 2021). Placement may also mean that students may be placed in schools far from their homes or in institutions that do not align with their personal preferences, potentially affecting their motivation and performance (Petersen & Mortimer, 2018).

According to the current study, it means Ministry of Education placement styles, parent/guardian placement styles and self-selection placement styles. During the transition from primary to secondary school, parents or guardians play a significant role in determining the secondary schools their children attend (Spernes, 2020). It is common for these preferences to be influenced by factors such as the academic reputation of the school, the quality of its facilities, its location in relation to the student's home, as well as the extracurricular opportunities offered (Kate et al., 2023). The decision-making process involved in selecting a secondary school for a student often considers the teaching staff's credentials, the school's performance in examinations, the availability of specialized programs, and whether the institution aligns with the values and aspirations of the student and their family (Llemit, 2024). Parents and guardians may also take into account the safety and security measures in place at the school, the diversity of the student body, and the overall learning environment when making such choices. In essence, the preferences expressed by parents or guardians regarding their child's secondary education typically stem from a holistic assessment of the various educational, social, and personal factors that contribute to a well-rounded educational experience (Cheruiyot et al., 2024).

The transition process from primary school to secondary school is a critical juncture in a student's life, carrying the potential for far-reaching consequences on their well-being and lifestyle as they grow and develop (World Bank, 2021). This period is complex, marked by a confluence of physical, emotional, and intellectual transformations. As adolescents

navigate through this phase, they grapple with the intricacies of puberty, exploring their identity and self-concept amidst a changing environment teeming with new academic challenges and social dynamics (Rice & Frederickson, 2021).

Furthermore, the expectations and interactions that students encounter from various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and the broader community, metamorphose into more demanding and nuanced forms as they transition from childhood to adolescence. These shifting dynamics can significantly shape the trajectories of young individuals, influencing not only their educational outcomes but also their overall mental and physical well-being. In essence, the move from primary to secondary school symbolizes a pivotal point in a student's journey, where the amalgamation of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes converges to sculpt a foundation for their future growth and development (Atla, 2024).

Psychological adjustment plays a pivotal role in the overall adaptation of a student, encompassing various facets crucial to personal well-being. The term psychological adjustment encompasses self-acceptance, the ability to exercise autonomy, fostering healthy and positive relationships with others, mastering tasks in one's environment, nurturing personal growth, and finding purpose in life (Stoddard & Pierce, 2021). This adjustment also involves feeling a sense of control over one's life, receiving support from others, and experiencing an overarching sense of satisfaction with one's existence (Winefield et al., 2022). It acts as an indicator of integration, reflecting the harmonious behaviour of individuals and how they are perceived by society. The process of adjustment begins from birth and continues throughout one's lifetime, shaping responses to the social environment's demands and pressures. In essence, psychological adjustment is a multifaceted journey that evolves alongside the individual, influencing interactions with others and shaping overall well-being (Gill, 2024).

The demands faced by individuals can stem from various sources, such as societal expectations or educational requirements, prompting them to respond accordingly. Achieving effective student adjustment hinges on attaining a harmonious equilibrium between their diverse needs and levels of contentment. Optimal adjustment for students encompasses striking a fine-tuned balance not only in academic pursuits but also across intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions, among other aspects (Atobatele et al., 2024). It is within the realm of adjustment that one of the fundamental psychological processes of human existence unfolds, underscoring the essence of adaptability throughout life's journey. In navigating the complexities of different scenarios, authenticity and competence emerge as pivotal factors that underpin psychological resilience, while the pursuit of profound self-awareness stands as a cornerstone for facilitating adaptive responses (Kernis, 2018).

For many students, the transition to form one placement in primary education often proves to be a significant milestone that poses challenges for both their academic progress and emotional well-being as they adjust to the new school environment. This pivotal period is characterized by a heightened focus on academic performance and competition, along with a notable decrease in the perceived emotional support provided by teachers and a diminishing sense of belonging within the classroom setting, as noted (Salmela-Aro, 2019).

Furthermore, the shift to form one placement exposes students to a myriad of environmental, social, emotional, and psychological changes, as highlighted in the research conducted (Rens et al., 2018). It is during this transition that students may experience various psychological impacts, both positive and negative, based on the challenges they encounter. Factors such as the method of placement for form one, including options such as Ministry of Education placement, parent placement, and self-selection, play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences and outcomes during this crucial phase of their education journey.

There are prevalent psychological adjustment challenges faced by a significant number of students placed in new schools (Famakinwa et al., 2019). These challenges, observed within school hours among their peers, encompass a wide spectrum of distressing experiences ranging from suicidal ideation, bullying, substance abuse, and even instances of sexual harassment within the school environment. In essence, schools are expected to serve as nurturing environments for positive social growth and development. However, when students are confronted with multifaceted challenges in their new academic settings, it often leads to the emergence of various psychosocial issues (Knitzer & Lefkowitz, 2020).

Educational institutions, through their profound comprehension of the crucial importance of creating and maintaining supportive academic environments that genuinely address the emotional and psychological needs of students, wield a crucial influence on cultivating the prosperity of both the educational setting and the students it serves (Obeagu et al., 2024). It is vital to recognize the substantial impact that institutions have in nurturing not only the academic prowess but also the mental well-being of learners, highlighting the proactive measures necessary to nurture a holistic educational experience. By acknowledging the intricate interplay between emotional welfare and academic success, educational entities not only promote a culture of support and understanding but also underscore the essential role they play in shaping the overall development and progress of individuals within the educational framework (Upreti et al., 2024).

Through prioritizing the psychological welfare of students and implementing strategies to enhance emotional resilience, educational institutions contribute significantly to building a foundation that supports not only scholastic achievements but also personal growth and fulfilment. This emphasis on fostering a positive mental outlook and providing resources for mental health underscores the deep commitment of educational institutions to creating an environment where learners can thrive academically and emotionally to realize their full potential and flourish (Kanwal & Ullah, 2024).

In Ghana, a comprehensive study conducted by Atindanbila and Azasu (2021) shed light on the diverse range of psychosocial challenges faced by distance learning students in the country. The research unveiled a multitude of interconnected factors that contribute to the difficulties encountered by these students. Among the most noteworthy issues identified were the persistent struggle with inadequate teaching methods that fail to effectively engage learners and subpar tutorial systems that lack the necessary support and guidance for remote students. Additionally, the study

highlighted a myriad of academic, administrative, and socio-economic obstacles that pose significant barriers to the psychological well-being of students pursuing their education from a distance.

These impediments not only impact the academic performance of distance learners but also have far-reaching implications on their overall mental health and emotional resilience. The persistence of outdated teaching techniques and the absence of robust tutorial systems not only hinder the learning process but also contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection among students. Furthermore, the prevalence of academic, administrative, and socio-economic challenges exacerbates the stress and anxiety experienced by distance learners, further straining their psychological welfare (Atindanbila & Azasu, 2021).

In Kenya, the primary school leaving certificate Examination is a crucial part of selecting students for secondary school placement. The transition to secondary school in Kenya often introduces new social and educational challenges for adolescents (Obikoya, 2021). This adjustment phase can be especially stressful for students who may not have the necessary preparation for the psychological, emotional, and academic demands of secondary education. The study will focus on Kwanza Sub-County, which comprises various types of secondary schools, including Extra County, county and sub-county schools.

Within this sub-county, numerous students face challenges when they begin their secondary school journey in form one. These students often struggle to acclimate and adapt to the new school environment, whether they were placed based on their parents' preferences, the Ministry of Education's decisions, or their own choices. The adjustment process for form one students has emerged as a significant concern in Kwanza Sub-County. Reports have shown a concerning trend of issues such as truancy, poor academic performance, and lack of engagement in extracurricular activities among students in public secondary schools (Bundotich, 2021).

2. Findings

2.1. Ministry of Education Placement Style and Psychological Adjustment of Form One Students

The primary objective was to investigate whether there exists a significant correlation between the Ministry of Education's placement style and the psychological adjustment of form one students at public secondary schools.

A p-value less than 0.05 is typically considered to be statistically significant, in which case the null hypothesis should be rejected. A p-value greater than 0.05 means that deviation from the null hypothesis is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is not rejected.

- *Ho1: There is no significant relationship between the Ministry of Education placement style and psychological adjustment of form one students in public secondary school.*

The aim of this study was to investigate the correlation between the Ministry of Education placement style and the psychological adjustment of form one students in public secondary schools. Through the utilization of a statistical method known (ANOVA), the connection among the different categories was scrutinized. The data presented in table 1 from the analysis offer valuable insights into the potential implications of the relationship between Ministry of Education placement styles and the psychological well-being of form one students.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between groups	13.781	1	12.570	256.561	.000
Within groups	2.456	47	.045		
Total	16.139	48			

Table 1: Ministry of Education Placement Style and Psychological Adjustment of Form One Students

Source: Research Data, 2024

The statistical findings unveiled a highly significant F-value of 256.561, alongside a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Consequently, based on these results, it became imperative to reject the null hypothesis asserting no substantial relationship between Ministry of Education placement style and the psychological adjustment of form one students in public secondary schools and conclude that there was a significant relationship between Ministry of Education placement style and psychological adjustment of form one students in public secondary school.

2.2. Parents' Placement Style and Psychological Adjustment of Form One Students

The objective of the study was to determine if a significant correlation could be identified between the placement styles employed by parents and the psychological adjustment levels observed in form one students attending public secondary schools. A key focus was placed on analyzing how different parents' placement styles may impact the well-being and emotional development of these students during their transition period.

- *Ho2: There is no significant relationship between parents' placement style and psychological adjustment of form one students.*

By employing the ANOVA statistical method, the study examined the interrelation among the various placement categories. This is presented in table 2.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between groups	14.574	1	11.460	206.785	.005
Within groups	1.357	47	.038		
Total	15.259	48			

Table 2: Parents' Placement Style and Psychological Adjustment of Form One Students
Source: Research Data, 2024

Table 2 shows an F-value of 206.785 and a p-value of 0.005, which is less than the standard threshold of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and concluded that there was a significant relationship between parents' placement style and psychological adjustment of form one students.

2.3. Self-selection Placement Style and Psychological Adjustment of Form One Students

The hypothesis was to assess whether a relationship exists between the self-selection process and the levels of psychological adjustment among Form One students.

- *Ho3: There is no significant relationship between self-selection placement style and psychological adjustment of form one students.*

By employing the ANOVA statistical method, the study examined the interrelation between self-selection placement style and psychological adjustment. This is presented in table 3.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between groups	15.004	1	12.580	287.995	.001
Within groups	1.248	47	.050		
Total	16.805	48			

Table 3: Self-selection Placement Style and Psychological Adjustment of Form One Students
Source: Research Data, 2024

From table 3, an F-value of 287.995 and a p-value of 0.001 were obtained. This was less than the standard threshold of 0.05. As a result, it was deemed necessary to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, there was a significant relationship between self-selection placement style and psychological adjustment of form one students.

3. Conclusions

The study draws the following conclusions based on its findings:

The decision-making process for Form One students, whether autonomously guided by parental or guardian advice or through the Ministry of Education, significantly impacts their psychological adjustment. Form One students' sense of belonging and acceptance in their school environment significantly impacts their well-being and academic performance. Effective time management skills enable them to excel academically and socially, enabling them to navigate transitional challenges and cope with stressors.

The placement style used by the Ministry of Education for Form One students is mainly based on their Class Eight performance, which is closely tied to their KCPE exam results. This process contributes significantly to the students' psychological well-being by fostering confidence and a sense of achievement.

Parents choose schools based on affordability, convenience, and bursary availability. The school's religious ethos also influences its decision-making process. These factors positively impact the psychological adjustment and well-being of form one students. A school environment aligning with parents' values and providing financial support fosters a sense of security and belonging, contributing to their mental and emotional welfare.

Form One students make decisions about their schools based on career aspirations, discipline, sports reputation, national examination performance, and music festival participation. This deliberate approach positively impacts their psychological adjustment by aligning their educational environment with their personal interests. This leads to increased motivation, engagement, and contentment in their academic journey, promoting healthy psychological well-being.

4. Recommendations

It is crucial to acknowledge and respect the unique characteristics that shape each student's approach to making decisions. By offering tailored support and guidance, educators can help cultivate a supportive environment conducive to enhancing positive outcomes in students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and personal development. Recognizing the diverse ways in which students navigate choices and challenges plays a vital role in fostering a holistic growth experience that nurtures their emotional resilience, cognitive development, and overall success in various aspects of their lives.

In order for form one students to adjust psychologically, it is imperative that they have access to a variety of critical support systems. These support systems, including School Counseling Services, Peer Support Programs, Parental Involvement, and Psychosocial Workshops, play instrumental roles in helping students navigate the challenges they may face during their transition to secondary school. By providing a network of resources and guidance, these programs create a safe space for students to seek help, share their concerns, and develop important coping skills.

By considering students' past academic performances and aligning placement criteria accordingly, it is strongly recommended that the Ministry maintains its focus on prioritizing this approach. Emphasizing this process will effectively

ensure that students are consistently assigned to educational settings that effectively nurture their ongoing progress and personal development.

When parents are considering the best school for their child's education, it is crucial for them to take the time to thoroughly evaluate various factors, including the school's values, fee structures, available financial aid options, and the overall environment provided. This in-depth assessment will help parents make an informed decision that aligns with the educational needs and goals of their child.

It is highly recommended that educators and administrators dedicate consistent effort towards guiding and empowering students to navigate their educational journey with purpose and passion, aligning with their unique aspirations and cultivating a nurturing environment that fosters ongoing and substantial psychological development to promote well-being and scholastic success.

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