

Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations as Predictors of Pupils' Academic Self-concept among Non-formal Primary School Pupils in Ruaraka, Division, Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore if perceptions of teachers' expectations predicted pupils' academic self-concept. There is evidence to suggest that primary school pupils' performance in national public examinations in Kenya, especially those from poor backgrounds and learning in non-formal schools, is skewed towards the poorer mean scores. The poor performance has been mainly ascribed to school ecological factors and minimum research has been carried out on psychological influences which may account for pupils' academic achievement. Pupils' behavior and academic performance is greatly influenced by the expectations teachers form about them. When teachers express messages of differential expectations, this confirms the self-fulfilling prophecies. The outcome of self-fulfilling prophecy is an important affective variable in academic self-concept formation of pupils. The study adopted an *ex post-facto* research design. The study sample consisted of 367 pupils from 10 non-formal schools. Stratified, systematic and purposive procedures were used in the selection of schools and participants. Research instruments used to collect study data included pupils' questionnaire and academic self-concept ladders. Perception of Teachers Expectation Scale was adapted to measure perception of teachers' expectations and the 10-step ability ladder was modified to measure academic self-concept. The study findings provided evidence that pupils' perceptions of teachers' expectations significantly predicted their academic self-concept. A major recommendation of the study was that teachers, parents and other stakeholders in education should collaborate in creating favourable school and home environments for nurturing the development of positive academic self-concept among non-formal primary school pupils. The study further recommended that teachers should be conversant with the diversity of issues and sensitivity when handling pupils in order to ensure that they interact with them in ways that nurture optimism and motivation important factors in the development of positive academic self-concept.

Key words: Perceptions of teachers' expectations, Academic self-concept, Non-formal primary schools

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations as Predictors of Academic Self-concept

The expectations that teachers hold for their students in terms of capability to learn suggests that these expectations often play a role in students' achievements (Cooper, 2004). Empirical evidence has explored the perceptions of teachers' expectation phenomenon and its predictive power on students' self-evaluations. A study by Rubie-Duvies (2007) tracked self-evaluation outcomes of 256 learners from 12 dissimilar grades attending 8 elementary schools in Auckland area of New Zealand. Their teachers held different expectations for them. Early in the academic year the learners filled adapted subscales of the Self-Description Questionnaire-1 (SDQ-1; Marsh, 1990) in perceptions of teacher expectations, Reading, Mathematics, Physical Abilities and Peer Relations. No statistically significant differences between the expectation groups in any of the academic or teacher opinion scales were noted. However, at the end of the academic year statistically significant differences were found in the academic and teacher opinion areas. This variance was due to the degeneration in the self-concepts of the students with the low-expectation teachers. Although the findings of this study revealed that teachers' expectations predicted pupils' academic self-concept, the sample was drawn from a developed country and the study was longitudinal. Given that Kenya is a developing country there was a need to conduct a similar study in order to report on the cross-cultural differences or similarities, if any. The current research was a one day survey where participants took only one hour to respond to the questionnaire.

Another study is by Kuklinski and Weinstein (2001) whose sample was drawn from fifth grade. Using Teacher Treatment Inventory they investigated how high and low-performers perceived teacher expectations. The results of their study indicated that low performers felt that teachers were more confident with high performing students, portrayed high expectations and allowed them more choice in their classroom experiences. The study further found out that teachers held negative expectations towards the low performing learners and tended to direct them more in their learning. In this study the sample was drawn from the lower section in elementary school. There was need to conduct a similar study with more mature primary school pupils, hence the class 8 sample in the current study in order to determine the differences if any.

In a further study, Weinstein (2002) interviewed 133 4th year students to investigate how their teachers perceived their academic ability. The findings reported that students gauged their teachers' perceptions from the scores attained, from pedagogical procedures and generally from the warm classroom climate. The learners were able to interpret teachers' expectations and gave several occasions when teachers communicated supportive or negative criticism. The researcher in the current investigation decided to use self-reports instead of interview and the questionnaire was group-administered to pupils in a single sitting in selected non-formal primary schools in order to report on any similarities.

A study by McKown and Weinstein (2008) yielded two data-sets with 1,872 elementary aged children in 83 classrooms in United States. Studies at Time 1 and Time 2 looked at the function of classroom environment in moderating the correlation between child ethnicity and pupils' perceptions of teacher expectations and the resultant academic self-concept. Pupils completed the Teacher Treatment Inventory (TTI; Weinstein & Middlestadt, 1979) to measure the level of perceived differential treatment (PDT). In the TTI the children were asked to rate the frequency of their teachers towards a hypothetical high- or low-achieving students. The children were randomly assigned to complete the TTI and the questionnaire was administered in small groups. For Study 1 overall and Study 2 mixed-grade classrooms in ethnically diverse classrooms, students reported high levels of differentiated teacher treatment (PDT) towards high and low achieving students. Teacher expectations of European American and Asian American students were .75 and 1.00 standard deviations higher than teacher expectations of African American and Latino students with similar records of achievement. Regression analysis evaluated the predictive relationship between child ethnicity, the main independent variable and teacher expectations, the dependent variable with prior achievement as a covariate. The results of the findings indicated that child ethnicity was

predictive of teacher expectations which in turn resulted in either low or high academic self-concept. The teachers ranked European American and Asian American a little higher in achievement compared to African American and Latino students with identical records of achievement. There was a need to conduct a similar study in schools in an informal settlement in Kenya to report on how teachers' differential treatment due to their disadvantaged background affected their academic self-concept. The social inequality may help the government design social and educational policies to promote greater equality and by extension optimal youth development and a healthy society. The sample in the present study was purposively selected and from only one ethnic background and the study was a one day survey where participants completed self-reports questionnaire in approximately one hour.

A study in Ethiopia by Mekonnen (2014), explored the interactions occurring among pupils' perceptions of teachers' expectations and various student variables. The study further investigated whether there were significant gender differences in the way boys and girls perceived their teacher expectations, motivation, academic self-concept and academic achievement. The sample comprised of 300 students (146 males and 154 females). The instrument administered had three sub-scales; the Perceptions of teachers' expectations sub-scale registering a reliability of 0.79, the motivation sub-scale posting a reliability of 0.89 and academic self-concept sub-scale recording a reliability of 0.83. To analyse data, the inferential statistics used were Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient and independent samples t-test. The findings showed statistically significant correlations among the variables at the 0.05 alpha levels except for the relationship of gender with academic self-concept and motivation as well as the correlation of motivation and perception of teachers' expectations with students' academic achievement. The results of independent t-test also showed that there were significant mean gender differences in academic achievement and perceptions of teachers' expectations. Male students achieved higher mean achievement scores, while females claimed higher levels of teachers' expectations (i.e. favourable expectations) than boys. But no mean differences in motivation and academic self-concept were observed between boys and girls. The sample in this investigation comprised of secondary school students in grade 9 and 10 in Ethiopia. There was need to conduct a study using pupils in upper primary to find out the whether there was a relationship between perceptions of teachers' expectation and academic self-concepts in another African country to find out if there are any similarities.

In Kenya, although researchers have not directly investigated the relationship between perceptions of teachers' expectations and academic self-concept, this relationship can be inferred from a study by Mwema and Matee (2013). Their study sought to find out the effects of teacher labeling and communicating these labels on students' self-concept. The study employed an *ex post facto* research design. The target population comprised of 360 Form 4 students in six public secondary schools in Mwala District, Machakos County. Using proportionate random sampling 186 students were selected for the sample. A 5-likert scale adopted from Coopersmith (1967) was used to measure the teacher labeling in order to assess the students self-concept. The instrument comprised of six statements concerning the manner in which teachers reacted to the students' academic performance indicating the students' level of agreement or disagreement with each statements related to their self-concept. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to process and analyse data. Findings showed that teachers respected and encouraged students in their academic work. Teachers acknowledged their academic capabilities and were always ready to assist the students. Pearson correlation to test the variables indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between teacher labeling and self-concept ($r=.493, p<0.01$).

The findings indicate that the kind of teachers' response to students' academic performance and ability influence their self-concept leading to the improvement in academic performance. Teachers should focus on constructive criticism in order to encourage students to work hard. However, some teachers may be influenced by various student characteristics, for example label students as 'less able', use differential practices and behaviour. This kind of teacher predisposition may have undesirable results on pupils' academic self-concept perceptions, which is detrimental to their personal judgment about their

capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce desirable educational outcomes (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). It is therefore expected that students will live up to their teachers' 'expectations, predictions or preconceived notions' regarding their behaviour and academic performance (Boehlert, 2005).

2.1 Statement of the Problem

There has been a perennial problem of poor academic performance in non-formal schools in Ruaraka Division of Kasarani District in Nairobi County, Kenya. Poor academic performance may be a consequence of poor academic self-concept which may result from pupils' perceptions of teachers' expectations. On the one hand, when teachers communicate positive expectations towards learners' academic performance they engage in supportive behaviors that energize pupils to work even harder for academic success which boosts the learners' academic self-concept. On the other hand when teachers communicate negative expectations, they engage in non-supportive behaviors that result in learners repeated failure and consequent poor academic self-concept which demotivates learners further. This results in wastage, academic disengagement, grade repetitions, low retention rates, poor transition, school dropouts and low completion rates. All these factors lead to the inability of the learners to ever rise above the poverty. This may result in loss of many rewarding life opportunities either for the individual pupil or for the society in general. Whereas learners may miss opportunities to further education, society may lack enough skilled human resource needed for wealth generation. Therefore, there was need to study perceptions of teachers' expectations as a predictor of academic self-concept.

2.2 Study Objectives

The following objectives were developed to guide the study:

- i. To establish how learners perceived the teacher's positive attitude towards them.
- ii. To investigate the extent to which learners felt that the teacher was encouraging.
- iii. To find out the extent to which learners perceived that the teacher paid attention to them.
- iv. To establish the extent to which learners felt that teachers gave them feedback.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Robert Merton's Theory of Self-fulfilling Prophecy (1948)

The study was informed by Robert Merton (1948) Self-fulfilling Prophecy Theory. According to this theory, people form expectations about other people's behaviors and these expectations make people behave in certain ways consciously or unconsciously thus eliciting the expected behaviors from the other persons. For purposes of this study, if a teacher believes that a student or a group of students have the intellectual capacity to perform well in examinations he or she behaves in a supportive manner and consequently elicits positive behaviors from students who work hard, pass the examinations and hence confirm the teacher's belief. On the other hand a teacher who believes that a student or a group of students is academically weak may consciously or unconsciously fail to provide the support students need for them to perform well academically. Consequently the students do not work hard and hence fail in the examination confirming the teacher's belief. This may take a cyclic pattern that may lead to perennial poor academic performance leading to wastage of human resources.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The following was the conceptual framework of the study:

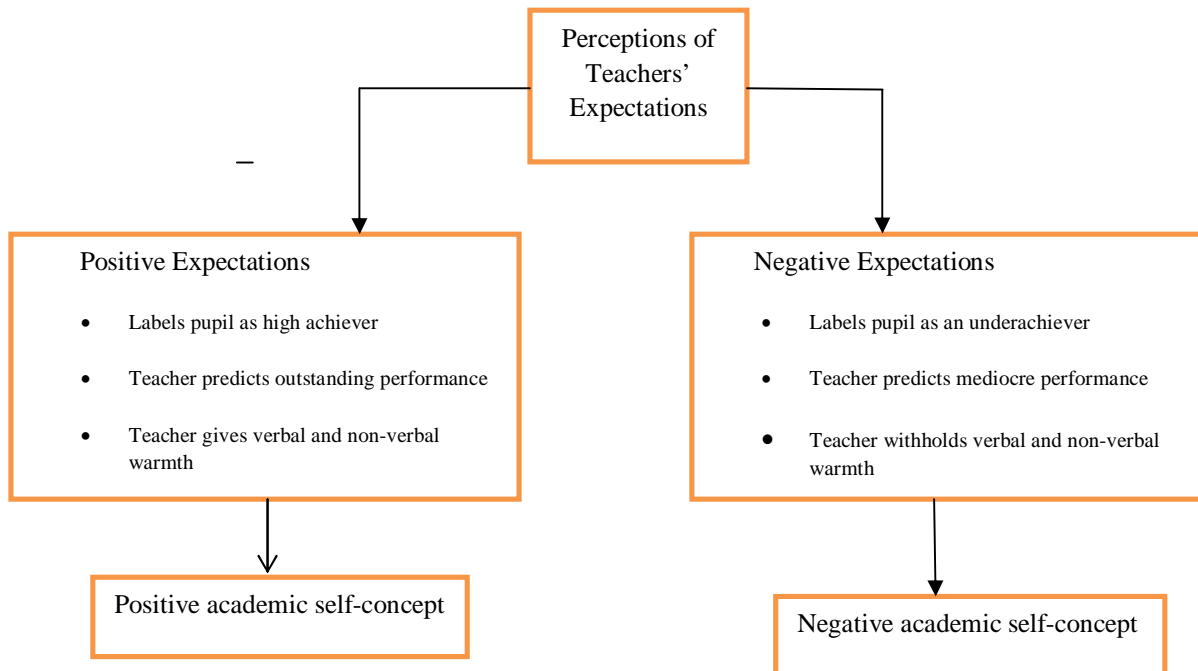


Figure 1 Perceptions of teachers' expectations as predictors of academic self-concept

Figure 1 presents the possible interrelationships between the predictor variable (perceptions of teachers' expectations) and the outcome variable (academic self-concept). When the teacher believes that a child is a high achiever; he/she predicts outstanding performance. The teacher then creates a warm social-emotional relationship with the student and places the pupil at the front rows. The teacher praises the pupil, encourages, pays more attention and gives more feedback on performance. The pupil internalizes that he/she is the kind of pupil the teacher believes him/her to be. The pupil gains confidence putting more effort in academic work consequently passing examination and thus fulfilling the teacher's expectations while acquiring a positive academic self-concept.

On the other hand, when a teacher believes that a child is a low achiever, he/she predicts average or below average performance and becomes less friendly, criticizes the pupil more, pays less attention and gives less feedback on performance. The pupil tends to be placed further away from the teacher. The pupil internalizes this inappropriate reinforcement and negative teacher expectations. The prediction becomes negative academic self-concept.

3.1 Research Methodology

The study employed an *ex post-facto* research design. The location of the study was Ruaraka slums in Ruaraka Division of Kasarani District in Nairobi County. Statistics from the District Education Officer (DEO), Kasarani District revealed that there were 155 primary schools in the District that had pupils up to class 8. Of these primary schools, 25 were public, 55 were private

and 75 are non-formal schools. The fact that the bulk of the schools were in the non-formal category was one of the reasons that prompted this study. The choice of the location was also informed by the performance of the schools at the national examination. According to the 2014 KCPE analysis, out of the maximum 500 marks, Kasarani District mean score was 280.30 which may be considered as an average performance by the stakeholders in education. When the districts mean score is broken down into school categories, the mean score for the private schools was 311.64, for the non-formal schools was 266.70 and public schools was 234.89. With such an average district mean score it means not many pupils join the national or prestigious county secondary schools due to the poor performance in the KCPE.

Ruaraka Division had 69 non-formal schools of which 35 were government funded and 34 were non-funded with a standard 8 population of 1,715 pupils at the time of the study. Stratified random sampling was used to select the schools for the study yielding a sample of 10 schools. The pupils sampled were 367 of which 176 were males while 191 were female. Data were collected through the pupils' questionnaire and school mark sheets.

The pupils' questionnaire had two parts A and B. Part A consisted of the participants' bio data (gender and age), school characteristics (government funded or non-funded) and the name while part B sought information on participants' perceptions of teachers' expectations. A more detailed description of the questionnaire is given next.

a. Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations

Perceptions of teachers' expectation score was measured using a scale adapted from Perceptions of Teacher Expectations Sub-Scale by Kususanto, Ismail & Jamil (2010) on the *teacher supportive behavior* with 10 items describing teachers' behaviour towards the pupils. The items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1= *Never* to 5=*Always*. Thus the scores could range from 10 to 50. The scoring was further categorized to indicate low, average or high levels of occurrence of the stated behaviour. A low score was 10 to 30 and was categorized as 1.0 to 3.0, average score was 31 to 40 and categorized as 3.1 to 4.0 and a high score was 41 to 50 categorized as 4.1 to 5.0. A high score on the scale indicated a higher level endorsement stated by the teacher behaviour towards the respondents.

b. Rating Scales

Academic ability ladders were used to measure the pupils' academic self-concept in each of the main subjects, that is, Mathematics, English, Kiswahili, Social Studies/Religious Education and Science as evidenced by the school mark sheets. In the present study the researcher used a 5- step ability ladder shown in Figure 2.

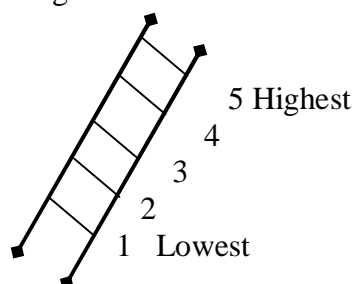


Figure 2 – The 5-step ability ladder

Source: Modified from 10-step ability ladder by Kilpatrick and Kantril (1960)

When analyzing the results on the ladders the following codes were used;

Step 5: High academic self-concept

Steps 2, 3 and 4: Average academic self-concept

Step1: Low academic self-concept.

The average academic self-concept rating was calculated for each pupil from the self-ratings in the five subject areas. This gave an overall single measure of academic self-concept (ASC) for each pupil that was used in the Simple Regression analysis.

3.2 Findings of the Study

The following were the results of the study

3.2.1 Demographic Analyses

(a) Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The distribution of the respondents in the funded and non-funded schools by gender showed that majority of the pupils in the study sample were female, 191 (52.04%), while the males constituted 176 (47.97%) respondents. The gender ratio in the sample was almost balanced. The girls' ratio to boys was 191:176 = 1.08:1. The lower enrolment for boys in the slum schools could be attributed to the fact that boys may be more engaged in economic activities than girls. Interventions should be put into place to rescue the boy child in the Ruaraka slums.

(b) Distribution of Respondents by Age

The distribution of respondents by age showed that 291 (79.3%) of the respondents were between 12 to 14 years old, 76(20.7%) were between 15 and 20 years of age. It is noted that the participants in this study were class 8 in non-formal primary schools in Kenya. A pupil who has gone through the formal education system in Kenya from class one where the recommended age for enrollment is seven years, the child is expected to be around 13 to 14 years of age by the time they reach class 8. Thus any pupil, who is above this age and in class 8, has definitely experienced some form of delay in their schooling. This delay may have been occasioned by class retention, truancy, sickness, juvenile delinquency, poverty or other factors which may limit the child's capacity to effectively participate in school.

3.2.2 Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations as a Predictor of Pupils' Academic Self-concept

(a) Description of the participants' perceptions of teachers' expectations as a predictor of pupils' academic self-concept

The intention of the study was to establish the contribution of perceptions of teachers' expectation in the establishment of academic self-concept among pupils in non-formal primary schools. This was established by using descriptive statistics provided by the responses of the pupils. The perceptions of teachers' expectation questionnaire had 10 items describing teachers' behaviour towards the pupils. Pupils were instructed to rate the teachers behaviour on a five-point likert scale giving the occurrence of that behaviour as *always* (5), *often* (4), *sometimes* (3), *not sure* (2), and *never* (1). The highest score per item was 5 indicating that behaviour was always communicated to the pupils to mean the teacher viewed the students' academic ability positively. The lowest score per item was (1) indicating that the teacher never communicated that perception meaning they viewed the pupils' academic ability negatively.

(b) Levels of Participants Perceptions of Teachers Expectations

The participants' perceptions of teachers' expectations score was used to categorize the respondents having low, average or high level of perceptions of teachers' expectations. The cut-off scores of category of *low* was 1.0 to 3.0, *average* was 3.1 to 4.0 and *high* was 4.1 to 5.0. The results showed that the students who felt that teachers communicated their academic ability as high were 166 (45.5%) and the majority 192 (52.5%) thought that teachers rated them as average. Only 7 (2.0%) felt that teachers viewed their academic ability as low. Therefore, majority of the respondents felt that teachers communicated positive views on their academic ability.

The participants' perception of teachers' expectations were further analyzed by gender to get the range, maximum, minimum, mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis.

(c) Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations by Gender

Results showed that the mean of perceptions of teachers' expectations was 3.94 (SD=.39) and 3.95 (SD=.44) for boys and girls respectively. This means that teachers quite often viewed their pupils' academic ability positively. The range of 2.4 for the girls' scores was wider while for the boys the range of 1.9 was narrower. The standard deviation for boys was smaller hence their views were more homogeneous. The negative skewness indicated that a big number of values were above the mean. This meant that the respondents rated themselves highly in the way teachers viewed their ability. The negative kurtosis meant that the distribution of the perceptions of teachers' expectation scores was more peaked than normal.

3.2.3 Relationship between Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations and Pupils' Academic Self-concept

The objective of the study was to describe the extent to which perceptions of teachers' expectations predict pupils' academic self-concept in non-formal primary schools. In relation to this objective it was hypothesized that perceptions of teachers' expectations do not significantly predict academic self-concept of the pupils in non-formal primary schools. A simple regression analysis was conducted to establish the significant amount of variation in the values of academic self-concept. The results included Model Summary, ANOVA and coefficients.

The Model Summary provided the correlation coefficient (R) and coefficient of determination (R^2) for the regression model. The results showed that the correlation between perceptions of teachers' expectation and academic self-concept was = .32. Perceptions of teachers' expectations accounted for R^2 of .106 of the total variation in academic self-concept. Therefore perceptions of teachers' expectation accounted for 10.6% of the pupils' academic self-concept.

The ANOVA tells whether the regression model explains a statistically significant proportion of the variance. Specifically it was to determine the significance of perceptions of teachers' expectations on pupils' academic self-concept at 0.05 alpha levels. The ANOVA indicated that the model of academic self-concept as a dependent variable and perception of teachers' expectations as the predictor variable is significant ($F_{1,353} = 41.71$, $P < 0.05$).

The regression coefficient analysis to show perceptions of teachers' expectations significant prediction of pupils' academic self-concept indicated that perceptions teachers' expectation is a significant predictor of academic self-concept ($\beta = .32$, $t = 6.45$, $P < 0.05$) with a constant of 1.905.

The regression equation is; predicted academic self-concept =1.905+ .32 (perceptions of teachers' expectation). Therefore perceptions of teachers' expectations are a significant predictor of academic self-concept.

The simple regression analysis to ascertain the extent to which perceptions of teachers' expectations predict academic self-concept established that perception of teachers' expectations explain a significant amount of variance in the values of academic self-concept. A strong positive correlation was found between perceptions of teachers' expectations and academic self-concept ($R=.32$) and the regression model predicted 10.6% of the variance. The model was a good fit for the data ($F_{1,353} = 41.71, P<0.05$). From the results, the research findings rejected the null hypothesis stated that perception of teachers' expectations do no significantly predict pupils' academic self-concept. This means that perceptions of teachers' expectations are critical predictors of pupils' academic self-concept accounting for 10.6% variance. This is an indication that pupils' perceptions of teachers' expectations is an important factor in academic self-concept formation.

The findings of the current study supported those of earlier studies by Mekonnen (2014) in Ethiopia which reported positive and significant correlations between perceptions of teachers and academic self-concept. Similarly results of a study in Turkey by Erkman, Caner, Sart, Borton and Sahan (2010) showed that perceived teachers' acceptance was significantly correlated with boys' self-concept, academic self-concept and achievement.

The study findings concur with Blote's (2005) who conducted a study among Dutch students whereby teachers gave feedback effectively according to teacher expectances for students. Similarly, Burnett findings (2009) established the significance of teachers' verbal proclamations and demonstrated that teachers' positive comments were more favourable than negative criticisms to academic self-concept. The samples used by Hattie and Timperley (2007) were similar to the one used in the current study in terms of the level of schooling. The findings are supported by those of the current study that reported a positive relationship between perceptions of teachers' expectations and academic self-concept. Thus notwithstanding of cross-cultural differences and different study locations, pupils' perceptions of teacher expectations were found to be positively correlated to academic self-concept. The findings of these studies suggest that whatever expectations teachers communicate to their pupils, the learners live up to them affecting their academic self-concept either negatively or positively.

However, the findings of the current study did not agree with Lee and Smith (2001). Their findings indicated that race and social class composition influenced teachers' beliefs about students. Besides, findings of the current research do not support those by Diamond, Randolph and Spillane (2004) who demonstrated that positive teacher expectations were higher in circumstances where they viewed students as academically endowed. When students' weaknesses were underscoring, teachers assumed that students lack of enthusiasm, their family backgrounds and limited skills undermined teachers' capacity to teach efficiently impacting negatively on the students' performance and consequently their academic self-concept.

4. Conclusion of the study

The results of this study presented some evidence of the hypothesized predictions among perceptions of teachers' expectations and academic self-concept. This study supports the idea that teachers' expectations when communicated can become a self-fulfilling prophecy for students' self-concept. Students with high expectation were aware of their teachers' positive views not only of their achievement but also of their behaviour, interest, participation and motivation in class. Hence, when students are constantly being given encouraging messages from their teachers this goes a long way in boosting their self academic concept. In the current study, this may be one explanation why students' perception of their academic ability was rated as high and average. It is therefore important for teachers to be conscious of the significance of having high expectations for the improvement and enhancement of all students and particularly for low-achievers.

Since perceptions of teachers' expectations was found to have a significant predictive power on academic self-concept, it is therefore important that significant others like parents, teachers, classmates and peers are aware of the influence their actions have on academic self-concept of the learners. School practices aimed at fostering strong and positive academic self-concepts in pupils are likely to lead to higher levels of attainment in school related tasks and should therefore be encouraged. Generally, school experiences and other social interactions of the pupils were found to have a bearing on the pupils' development of academic self-concept. Hence, the findings of the study supported the self-fulfilling prophecies. Teachers should be aware of their function in generating classroom environments under which they promote rather than challenge students' academic potential. A thoughtful attendance to the day-to-day interactions is important for a positive academic self-concept construction. Teachers should be cognizant of their serious responsibility in influencing student outcomes and directly avoid discourses that fault students for under achievement.

5. Recommendations of the study

Raising perceptions of teachers' expectations' for the students can be an effective way to improve their learning and classroom performance. Both in-service and pre-service teachers should be trained to use more positive feedback for students' academic performance due to the strong positive relation between perceptions of teachers' expectations and academic self-concept. Teachers should consider strategies for framing criticisms in a positive manner as feedback perceived as negative can have disadvantageous effects on students' academic self-concept. Teacher institutions, practising teachers and families need to work collaboratively to ensure students remain optimistic, motivated and successful within the school environment. This way every child will have the opportunity to prosper and reach his or her potential in a classroom environment that is reassuring, helpful, inspiring and compassionate. Once teacher trainees are trained on skills that will enable them enhance pupils' self-concept of academic abilities, when they go to practice teaching, the teachers will be better placed to encourage their students to have a high or positive self-concept and this will lead to improvement in students' academic performance.

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