

Elements of reversing underachievement in academic performance among gifted secondary school students, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that contribute to underachievement and the role of varied strategies in reversing underachievement among gifted secondary school students. The study was carried out in Kiambu County because of its continued poor performance in KCSE examinations. The study was inspired by the researcher's experience in teaching. Questions of the role of the teacher in shaping the life of the learner are prominent: how are underachieving gifted learners managed given that they are found in every classroom, yet not many teachers understand them? The study employed the ex post facto research design to investigate possible cause-and-effect relationships by observing existing conditions for plausible causal factors. The target population of this study was 2,808 teachers in secondary schools in Kiambu County. A sample size of 306 teachers from 6 National Schools and 14 Extra-County Schools were selected. They were given the questionnaire to fill. Documentary evidence was utilized to identify learners who had been admitted with high KCPE marks but performed poorly in KCSE. Data was coded, analysed and presented in frequencies and percentages using tables. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 20) was utilized for analysis. Negative attitude was assigned 1 to 2 or <3 and positive attitude was assigned 4 to 5 or >3. Out of the sample of 306 teachers, 254 filled in the questionnaires. The areas under investigation were common characteristics, factors that contribute to underachievement, role of assessment of students' performance and intervention strategies – Communication, Expectations, Role Model, Skill deficiencies and Reinforcements. It emerged that underachieving gifted have such characteristics as rebellion, perfection & passivity, and that there are factors that contribute to the state of underachievement like unfavourable home environment, intellectually unstimulating classrooms and peer pressure. The study results also revealed that assessment of underachieving gifted students is critical to reversing underachievement because it can manifest itself in varied ways in the school environment, and that reversal strategies like high expectations from teachers & peers, correction of skill deficiency and modification of reinforcement are important in reversing underachievement. The study recommends that teachers and parents be sensitised on reversal strategies for early identification, treatment and better collaboration between them. It further recommends that curriculum developers and policy makers design programmes and activities that facilitate the reversal of underachievement among gifted secondary school students.

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