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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SCHOOL CULTURAL PRACTICES AND LEARNERS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RWANDA: A CASE OF GASABO DISTRICT

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of positive cultural practices in schools on the academic performance of learners in public primary schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda. It focuses on three key objectives: identifying the cultural practices upheld by school leaders, assessing the correlation between these practices and learners' academic outcomes, and determining the overall influence of these practices on academic achievement. The research adopts both descriptive and correlational research designs, with data collected from a sample of 168 respondents through questionnaires and interviews. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 24, employing descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses to address the research questions. The findings reveal that 48.6% of schools do not prioritize cultural practices as a mean to enhance academic performance. However, 78.8% of respondents indicated that academic outcomes, including promotion, graduation rates, repetition rates, and test scores, are significantly influenced by the daily operations of schools. Additionally, 56.3% of respondents agreed that school norms, vision, goals, teacher-learner relationships, and assessment methods play a crucial role in academic success. Regression analysis demonstrated that school cultural practices account for 79.3% of the variance in academic performance (R-square), with a strong positive correlation (Pearson's coefficient = 0.916, p-value < 0.01) between these practices and academic outcomes. The study concludes that the implementation of shared goals, school symbols, norms, and positive teacher-learner relationships can significantly enhance academic performance. It recommends that the Rwandan Ministry of Education and educational planners provide training on cultural practices to school leaders to further improve learner outcomes.

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Introduction:-

Education is a pillar of human development, acting as a critical tool for personal improvement and societal advancement. Numerous factors influence educational quality, with school culture emerging as a crucial regulator of students' academic achievement. The common values, beliefs, traditions, and practices that create the learning environment inside an educational institution are referred to as school culture (Deal & Peterson, 2019). Globally, the relevance of school culture has been recognized as a critical aspect of educational system success. Several studies in

the United States of America (Hoy & Hoy, 2018), the nation of England (Bolam et al., 2018), and Australia (Duignan, 2020) have indicated that educational culture has a major impact on students' academic outcomes.

The impact of school culture on academic attainment in Africa is gaining attention. Research from South Africa (Mncube&Harber, 2017), Nigeria (Adeyemi, 2019), and Kenya (Mutisya, 2018) highlight the crucial importance of school culture in determining students' learning experiences and outcomes. These studies show that a supportive and culturally responsive school culture corresponds with greater academic achievement, giving important insights into African education policy and practice.

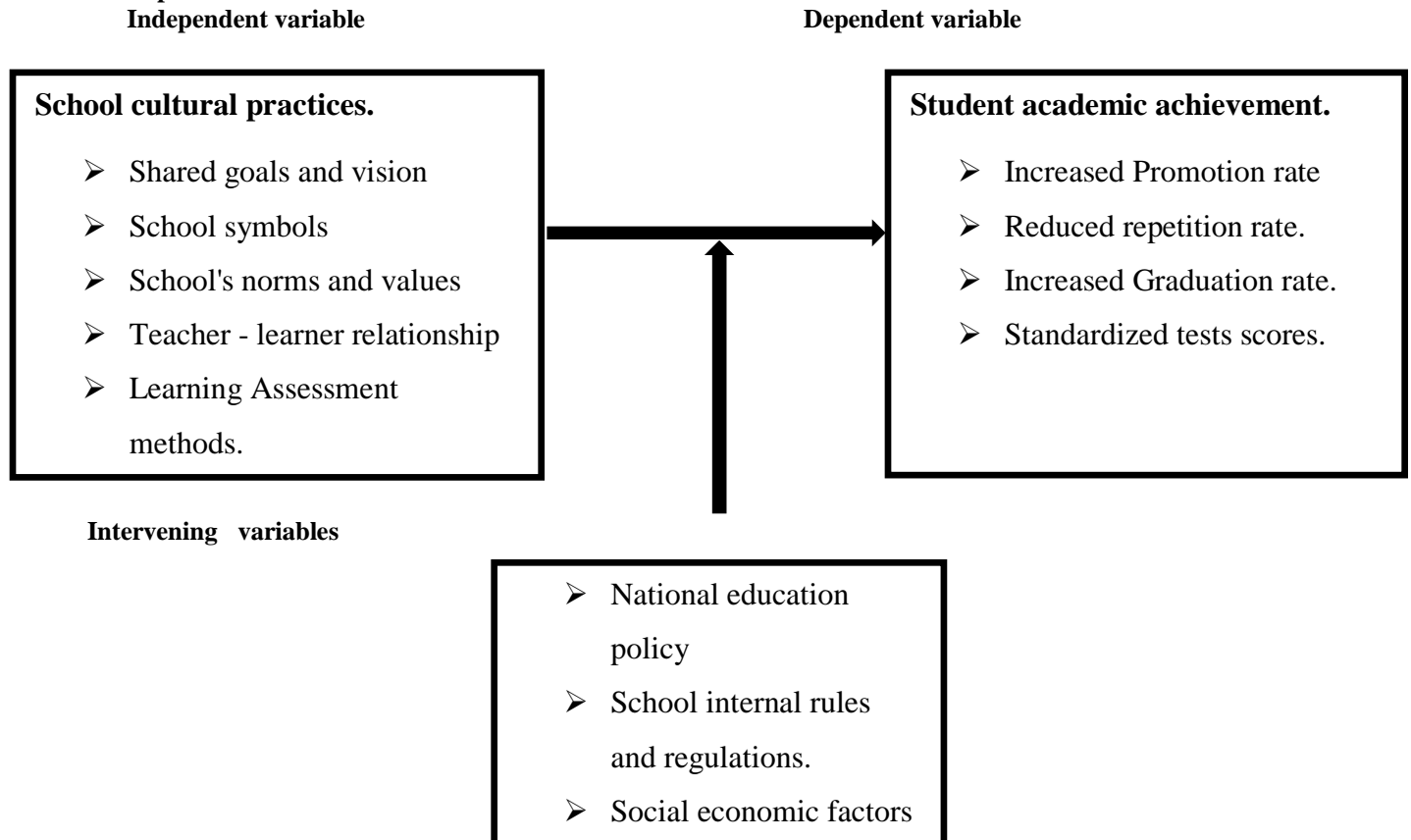
General Objective:-

The overall goal of the study is to gain insight into the impact of school cultural practices on students' academic progress in public primary schools in Gasabo district, Rwanda.

Literature Review:-

In the perspective of Fullan (2007), school culture entails administrative philosophies and standards that are manifested on the performance of a school. The term school culture tackles all the assumed and expected beliefs, patterns of behavior, and norms that dictate the efficiency of a school. David Garrick (2019) articulated that whereas Consideration of culture is all over, the supporting environment with tall desires, Locked staff, locked-in understudies, a folio to long-lasting learning, and a Holistic sense of duty defines school culture success. Building a strong culture, requires addressing these aspects in a way that reflects the group's goal and standards, both inside and outside of the classroom. Concisely, UNESCO-IBE (2022) describes school cultural practices as a fundamental system of beliefs or shared assumptions that shapes a school's character, govern mode of operations, and prescribe behaviors conceived by head teachers, teachers, support staff, and learners. Written and unwritten laws that shape and influence all aspects of how a school works.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology:-

Research Design

Betensky (2017) defines research design as a logical technique that connects numerous aspects of an examination to address the study's issue effectively. The plan guides data collection, evaluation, and analysis. In this study, The researcher utilized a descriptive survey because it included both qualitative and quantitative data. A correlational research design was used to assess the effect of school cultural practices on student academic performance.

Target Population

Mugenda (2016) defined the target population as the group to which the researcher aims to generalise the study's findings. The researcher conducted this study in Gasabo District. However, Remera, Kimihurura, Kinyinya and Ndera do not have full elementary schools, they only have private and semi-public ones. Therefore, the research was carried out in precisely 11 selected schools, demonstrating those 11 sectors that have fully-fledged public elementary schools. Therefore, the target population of the study consisted of 278 teachers and leaders in these 11 schools.

To determine the sample size Slovin's formula as used in Yamane (1967) was used as: The formula employed is.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$
 Therefore, the determined sample size of the research was:

$$n = \frac{289}{1+289(0.05)^2} = 167.7 = 168 \text{ Respondents.}$$

Population elements and sample size

No	Participant	Population	Sample size	Sampling technique
1	Teachers	278	157	Simple Random
2	Headteachers	11	11	Purposive sampling
3	Total	289	168	Simple random

Source: Primary data, (2024)

The researcher used questionnaires and interview guides to conduct this study. To augment quantitative data from public elementary school teachers, questionnaires were employed, and interview guidelines were used to acquire qualitative data from head teachers. Questionnaires consisted of closed-ended questions which were completed in a short amount of time, since respondents were reluctant to answer the questions if they take a long time to complete. Questions were like this because they allow respondents to express their views on the subject under study and also help researchers collect data easily with anonymity (Gay, 1992).

Results and Discussion:-

Considering the research objectives, the presentation of findings was done referring to specific research objectives of this study which were: To evaluate the level at which public primary schools head teachers maintain school cultural practices in Gasabo district-Rwanda, to evaluate the level of learners' performance in full public primary schools in Gasabo district-Rwanda and to examine the influence of school cultural practices on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Gasabo district-Rwanda.

Coefficients of school cultural practices and learners' academic performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.650	.537		1.296	.187	-.341	.491
	Shared goals and vision	.232	.081	.163	2.535	.014	.048	.373
	School norms and values	.637	.063	.596	7.682	.000	.192	.784
	School symbols.	-.153	.076	-.047	-1.497	.176	-.283	.027
	Teacher - learner relationship	.235	.079	.120	1.737	.006	.018	.280
	Learning assessment methods	-.007	.073	-.001	-.039	.743	-.153	.137

Source: Field data(2024),a. Dependent Variable: Effective learners' academic performance

It is showing the contribution of each indicator in the influence of school culture on learners' academic performance. It was found that school norms and values contribute much in the influence of learners' academic performance while school symbols contributes less. This shows that public primary schools do not put more efforts in school symbols. Respondents found that school norms and values had a significant impact on students' academic achievement ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), supporting the regression equation. Conclusion was drawn that there is greater influence of school cultural practices on students' academic performance. Thus, we have 95% confidence that the slope of the real regression line is between percentage of 19.2 and 78.4. It is followed by the influence of shared goals and vision on learners' academic performance with significance level of $P = 0.014 < 0.05$ and the regression line is somewhere between 4.8 percent and 37.3 percent as shown in the table 4.11. The table 4.11 also revealed that the influence of effective teacher - learner relationship on students' performance is significant too as p value is equal to $0.006 < 0.05$ and the regression line is somewhere between 1.8 percent and 28 percent. It is also revealed that the influence of learning assessment methods and on students' academic performance is not significant as p value is equal to $0.743 > 0.05$ and the regression line is somewhere between -15.3 percent and 13.7 percent. Finally, there is an influence schools symbols on academic performance of the learners as the table above indicates that is not significant with $p=0.176 > 0.05$ and the regression line is somewhere between -28.3 percent and 2.7 percent.

Public primary school leaders chosen from Gasabo district, also argued that, positive school cultural practices play a vital role in the students' high academic performance once it is maintained and practiced constantly within the school and outside in the school community. According to Hürriyet A. Karaduman (2021), school culture encompasses the school, its history and current successes, circle of friends, school uniforms, and social activities. School culture has an impact on students' academic progress in terms of motivation, a sense of competition, and overall social and physical development.

Conclusion:-

To address the research questions raised based on the three particular research objectives, conclusions were formed from the analysis of the findings. The first research question provided for this study was: "At which level are school cultural practices maintained in public primary schools in Gasabo district-Rwanda?" Checking shared goals and vision, school symbols, school norms and values, teacher learner relationship and learning assessment methods as school cultural practices indicators. It was revealed at the level of 48.6% that public primary schools in Gasabodon't maintain the school culture as a routine, the need to improve on the school cultural practices was found.

Regarding question number two which stated "what are the school's academic achievements influenced by school culture?" "Increased promotion rate, reduced repetition rate, increased graduation rate and standardized tests scores are the indicators of learners' academic performance where the respondents, having confirmed it at 55.7% that there is low learners' academic performance, have shown that school cultural practices affect learners' academic performance when executed successfully.

Basing on the third research question of this study which was "How far do school cultural practices contribute to students' academic performance?" "Therefore, it was determined that the successful integration of school cultural practices has a significant impact on learners' academic performance, estimated to range from 19.2 percent to 78.4 percent."

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