

An Examination of Factors with in the Geographical Location that May Impact Students' Academic Performance at Ward Secondary School in Rorya District, Tanzania

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine factors within the geographical location that may impact students' academic performance at ward secondary school in Rorya District, Tanzania. The study employed a mixed research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to thoroughly explore the influence of ward secondary school geographical location on students' academic performance. The quantitative aspect utilized a non-experimental correlational design to assess the relationship between school location and academic outcomes, analyzing numerical data through questionnaires. In contrast, the qualitative component involved interviews to gain deeper insights into the issues affecting performance. A sample of 64 teachers and 6 school heads from Rorya District was selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques, respectively. Data collection involved questionnaires in Kiswahili and in-depth interviews, both validated through pre-testing and ensuring reliability with multiple instruments. Analysis was conducted using SPSS for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research question. The study identifies that factor such as the availability of educational resources, infrastructure quality, proximity of schools to homes, socio-economic conditions, and safety are critical in influencing students' academic performance in Rorya District. To improve outcomes, it is recommended to enhance these educational resources, strategically place new schools closer to communities, improve transportation options, and address socio-economic challenges through community support.

Keywords: Geographical Location, Students' Academic Performance and Ward Secondary School.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education stands as a cornerstone of development, pivotal to the advancement of both individuals and nations. It enriches lives, enhances understanding, and fosters social and economic benefits across communities (Abayo, 2017). In every country, the quality of education and academic achievement serve as key indicators of future prosperity and stability. As such, the academic performance of students directly correlates with their potential for future success and the broader development of their country (Mhagama, 2015; World Report, 2019).

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of how the geographical location of educational institutions can significantly impact students' academic performance. This is particularly evident in secondary schools where the distance between students' homes and their schools plays a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes. Studies have shown that long travel distances to school can lead to late arrivals, missed lessons, and general disruptions in the learning process

(Oneya & Onyango, 2021). Such issues are compounded in developing regions where transport challenges and other logistical barriers further exacerbate the situation (Melack, 2014; World Bank Report, 2019).

The impact of distance on educational outcomes is not uniform across the globe. In more developed regions like Europe, the relationship between school distance and academic performance is less pronounced, partly due to better infrastructure and socio-economic conditions (OECD, 2011). Conversely, in many African countries, including Tanzania, the challenge of long-distance schooling is more acute. For instance, students in Zimbabwe and Nigeria often traverse considerable distances to reach their schools, negatively affecting their academic performance (Chinowaita, 2015; Adewuyi & Sanni, 2022). Similarly, research in Botswana has highlighted how extended travel times can impede academic achievement (Baliyan & Khama, 2020).

Tanzania's approach to expanding secondary education through the establishment of ward secondary schools has seen mixed results. While the initiative aimed to make education more accessible by building schools within each ward, it did not always account for the practical challenges faced by students, such as the distance from their homes to these schools (Abayo, 2017; Oneya & Onyango, 2021). The geographical placement of these schools often overlooks critical factors like transport, safety, and food availability, which can further influence students' academic performance.

The issue of school location is particularly pertinent in Rorya District, where ward secondary schools are situated at varying distances from the communities they serve. This study seeks to explore how the geographical location of these schools impacts students' academic performance, focusing on the distance students travel, the means of transportation used, and the associated challenges they face. By examining these factors, this research aims to provide valuable insights into how geographical location influences educational outcomes and offer recommendations for improving student performance in this context.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework serves as a fundamental structure for organizing and understanding complex ideas and concepts within a specific field of study or research (Van der Waldt, 2020). It establishes the theoretical foundations and existing knowledge related to the topic, setting the stage for the subsequent development and application of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework of this study is presented in Figure 2.1

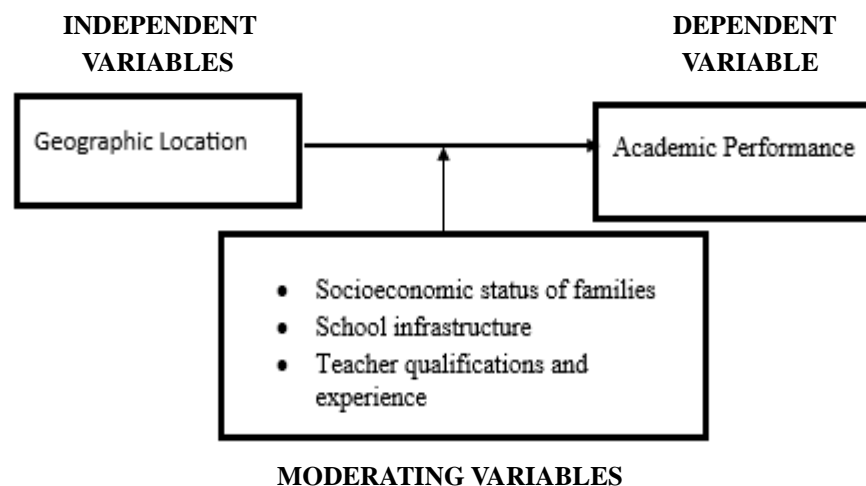


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2024)

The connection between geographical location and academic performance is multifaceted, significantly influenced by various moderating variables such as the socioeconomic status of families, school infrastructure, and teacher qualifications and experience.

Geographical location inherently affects academic performance by determining access to educational resources and opportunities. Schools in remote or rural areas often face challenges such as limited access to advanced learning materials, fewer extracurricular activities, and less exposure to educational advancements compared to urban schools. These disparities can result in lower academic performance among students in geographically isolated regions.

Socioeconomic status of families plays a crucial role in moderating the impact of geographical location on academic performance. Families with higher socioeconomic status tend to provide better educational support, such as private tutoring, access to technology, and a conducive learning environment at home. Conversely, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may struggle with inadequate study resources and financial constraints, exacerbating the negative effects of a less advantageous geographical location.

School infrastructure is another significant moderating variable. Well-equipped schools with modern facilities, laboratories, libraries, and safe, stimulating learning environments can enhance academic performance, even in less favorable geographical locations. On the other hand, poorly maintained schools with inadequate facilities can impede students' learning experiences and outcomes, regardless of their geographical setting.

Teacher qualifications and experience further moderate the relationship between geographical location and academic performance. Highly qualified and experienced teachers can employ effective teaching strategies, adapt to various learning needs, and inspire students to achieve higher academic standards. In contrast, schools in remote areas often face difficulties attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers, leading to a reliance on less experienced educators, which can negatively affect students' academic performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to thoroughly explore the influence of ward secondary school geographical location on students' academic performance. The quantitative aspect utilized a non-experimental correlational design to assess the relationship between school location and academic outcomes, analyzing numerical data through questionnaires. In contrast, the qualitative component involved interviews to gain deeper insights into the issues affecting performance. A sample of 64 teachers and 6 school heads from Rorya District was selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques, respectively. Data collection involved questionnaires in Kiswahili and in-depth interviews, both validated through pre-testing and ensuring reliability with multiple instruments. Analysis was conducted using SPSS for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research question.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study identified several key factors within the geographical location that impact students' academic performance at ward secondary school in Rorya District, Tanzania. Understanding these factors is essential for formulating strategies to enhance students' academic performance. Table 1 presents a summary of teachers' responses on factors within the geographical location that impact students' academic performance at ward secondary school in Rorya District, Tanzania.

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on Within the Geographical Location That Impact Students' Academic Performance (n = 64)

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The availability of educational resources in the geographical location positively affects students' academic performance.	2 (3.1%)	4 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	28 (43.8%)	30 (46.9%)
The quality of infrastructure in the geographical location impacts students' academic performance.	4 (6.3%)	16 (25%)	4 (6.3%)	38 (59.4%)	2 (3.1%)
The proximity of students' homes to the school affects their academic performance.	4 (6.3%)	14 (21.9%)	2 (3.1%)	22 (34.4%)	22 (34.4%)
The socio-economic conditions in the geographical location influence students' academic performance.	6 (9.4%)	8 (12.5%)	14 (21.9%)	34 (53.1%)	2 (3.1%)
The availability of extracurricular activities in the geographical location enhances students' academic performance.	0 (0%)	2 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	30 (46.9%)	32 (50%)

The safety and security of the geographical location positively impact students' academic performance.	4 (6.3%)	4 (6.3%)	6 (9.4%)	34	2 (3.1%)
The accessibility and quality of healthcare facilities in the geographical location affect students' academic performance.	0 (0%)	4 (6.3%)	2 (3.1%)	36 (56.3%)	22 (34.4%)
The availability of transportation options in the geographical location affects students' academic performance.	6 (9.4%)	8 (12.5%)	4 (6.3%)	40 (62.5%)	6 (9.4%)
The cultural environment in the geographical location influences students' academic performance.	2 (3.1%)	16 (25%)	4 (6.3%)	20 (31.3%)	22 (34.4%)
The availability of support services (e.g., tutoring, counseling) in the geographical location impacts students' academic performance.	6 (9.4%)	12 (18.8%)	6 (9.4%)	32 (50%)	8 (12.5%)

Source: Field Data (2024)

The study conducted in ward secondary schools within Rorya District, Tanzania, has unveiled critical insights into the multifaceted factors shaping students' academic performance. Through teachers' responses, as summarized in Table 4.5, a comprehensive understanding has emerged regarding how environmental and socio-economic factors intricately influence educational outcomes in this region.

Foremost among these factors is the availability of educational resources, identified by an overwhelming majority (90.7%) of teachers as a pivotal determinant of academic success. Adequate resources encompass not only textbooks and classroom materials but also digital tools and facilities essential for modern learning environments. The consensus underscores the profound impact that resource availability has on facilitating effective teaching practices and enhancing student engagement and achievement.

Similarly, the quality of infrastructure emerges as a significant factor, with 62.5% of teachers highlighting its importance in supporting academic success. Well-maintained school buildings, classrooms, and amenities provide students with a conducive environment for learning, promoting a sense of safety, comfort, and pride in their educational surroundings. Conversely, inadequate infrastructure can pose challenges that hinder educational progress and diminish overall student outcomes.

The proximity of students' homes to schools also emerges as a crucial consideration, with nearly 70% of teachers agreeing on its positive impact on academic performance. Reduced commuting distances contribute to improved attendance rates, punctuality, and overall student engagement in school activities. This aspect underscores the practical implications of geographical location in facilitating access to education and minimizing logistical barriers that students may face.

Moreover, socio-economic conditions play a significant role, as recognized by a majority (56.3%) of teachers. Economic stability, access to supportive family environments, and community resources are integral in shaping students' educational trajectories. Addressing socio-economic disparities through targeted interventions and community partnerships is essential for promoting equitable educational opportunities and fostering academic success among all students.

Extracurricular activities are unanimously regarded as beneficial, with 96.9% of teachers affirming their positive impact on academic performance. These activities provide avenues for students to develop crucial life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and creativity, complementing their academic achievements and promoting holistic development.

Safety and security within the geographical location are also highlighted, with 87.5% agreement among teachers regarding their positive influence on academic performance. A secure environment fosters students' physical and psychological well-being, creating a conducive atmosphere for focused learning and active participation in educational activities.

Furthermore, healthcare accessibility and quality are emphasized, with 90.7% of teachers acknowledging their influence on academic performance. Access to healthcare services ensures that students can maintain good health, enabling regular school attendance and active participation in academic pursuits.

Transportation options are deemed important by 72% of teachers, emphasizing the need for reliable transport systems that facilitate students' access to educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas like Rorya District.

Cultural factors are also recognized, with a majority (65.6%) of teachers identifying their impact on academic performance. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in educational practices contribute to a supportive learning environment that respects and values students' diverse backgrounds and identities.

Lastly, the availability of support services such as tutoring and counseling is acknowledged by 62.5% of teachers for their positive impact on academic performance. These services play a crucial role in addressing individual student needs, providing academic assistance and emotional support that empower students to overcome challenges and achieve their educational goals.

5. CONCLUSION

The study highlights several critical factors within the geographical location of ward secondary schools in Rorya District, Tanzania, that significantly affect students' academic performance. Key findings indicate that the availability of educational resources, quality of infrastructure, proximity of homes to schools, socio-economic conditions, and safety are pivotal in shaping academic outcomes. Teachers overwhelmingly agree on the importance of these factors, with educational resources and infrastructure being particularly influential. Additionally, proximity to schools, healthcare accessibility, and transportation options also play vital roles. The study underscores the need for targeted strategies to address these factors, enhance educational resources, and improve infrastructure, thereby fostering a more supportive learning environment and promoting better academic achievement.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that efforts be focused on improving the availability of educational resources and infrastructure in ward secondary schools to enhance academic performance. Proximity to schools should be optimized by strategically locating new schools closer to student communities, and reliable transportation options should be developed to facilitate easier access. Additionally, addressing socio-economic challenges through community support programs and ensuring safe and secure learning environments are crucial. Expanding access to healthcare services and extracurricular activities will further support student well-being and holistic development. Implementing these recommendations will create a more conducive educational environment and promote better academic outcomes in Rorya District.

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