

**INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ON STUDENTS
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF
TONGAREN SUB-COUNTY, BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools of Tongaren Sub-County, Kenya. The study sought to determine the influence of clearly defined shared expectations of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance and to investigate the influence of effective instructional leadership strategies by principals' on students' academic performance. The study was guided by two theories: Model for instructional leadership developed by Weber (1996) and Social Cognitive theory by Bandura. Descriptive survey research design was applied in the study. Target population comprised 446 participants from the public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County. The study adopted a stratified random sampling technique and sample size of 210 determined using Krejcie & Morgan table (1970). The study used structured questionnaires as the main tool of data collection. Data were descriptively analyzed using means and standard deviations, and inferentially by Pearson's correlation analysis to measure strength and direction. Results demonstrated that principals' instructional leadership (clearly defined shared expectations and effective instructional leadership strategies) all yield statistically significant effect on students' academic performance as indicated by enhanced communication and improved performance. The study recommends more pursuit of principals' instructional leadership involvement into students' perception, clearly defined shared expectations and effective instructional leadership strategies that would greatly benefit from this study as it provides viable insights that could guide decisions to serve their interests on the critical subject of enhanced students' academic performance.

Keywords: *Clearly Defined Shared Expectations, Effective Instructional Leadership Strategies, Academic Performance*

INTRODUCTION

Principals, as instructional leaders, significantly influence students' academic performance through the development and implementation of educational objectives tailored to their schools. They orchestrate learning environments by selecting, supporting, nurturing, and retaining proficient educators, who directly shape students' learning outcomes and academic achievements (Garza, 2018). Moreover, they demonstrate a profound comprehension of recognizing and fostering effective teaching and learning methodologies within their educational institutions.

School principals are the leaders who impact the direction of schools through their decision making, engaging of instructional and managerial practices, and building relationships. Multiple studies have revealed the positive connection principals have to impact the instructional programs of schools (Goolamally and Ahmad, 2014). Principals, by title and position, serve as the individuals who provide direction, influence, and support to teachers, staff, and students, and many often consider principals the primary leaders of their schools. Yet, a principal is not the sole influencer of a school. In fact, the idea of instructional leadership extends to others like teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and assistant principals. Principals cannot accomplish the full task of school leadership alone, and the presence and support from individuals such as assistant principals enable principals to meet school improvement goals through shared instructional leadership practices (Mercer, 2016)

Rousmaniere (2013) notes a paradigm shift in education that began in the early 1980s, emphasizing state and federal accountability for student academic progress. With the noticeable decline in academic performance in many American public schools, primarily evident in standardized test scores, societal concerns regarding youth development both within and beyond educational settings prompted the emergence of educational policies advocating for school choice. School choice gave public education competition through the options of school vouchers, tuition tax credit, charter schools, and public-school open enrollment policies. School choice also led to increased demands placed on school principals for school improvement. Educational reform movements and high-stakes testing forced principals to increase student achievement levels by providing competitive options for students through innovative school improvement plans .

Many of the school reform initiatives forced principals into managerial roles. These roles were needed to ensure an effective implementation of initiatives but provided little time for principals to act as leaders (Kowalski, 2010). Eventually, the changing demographics, politics, and economics of schooling led to the role of principals as instructional leaders who would move schools toward improving students' academic outcomes; a strong correlation exists between instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement outcomes (Bendikson et al., 2012; Valentine and Prater, 2011). In an interview with eight primary and secondary school principals, Mestry (2013) surveyed principals' self-perception of their instructional leadership behaviors and found that principals who placed importance on instructional matters were managing and leading schools effectively and attaining high student achievement.

In order for schools to achieve their primary objective which is exemplary academic performance, principals are expected to largely concern themselves with instructional activities. However, this is not largely the case as a lot of emphasis has occasionally been directed towards managerial issues as a result of the great pressure emanating from the increase in their work. These actions have largely contributed in widening the gap that exists between principals, their staff and learners. Study shows that effective schools have unique characteristics in instructional leadership that are correlated with student success and great achievement (Lezotte, 2010).

In Malaysia, a study by Siti and Umi (2022) on the relationship between instructional leadership practices` and school performance excellence found that principals' practices of defining school mission and managing instructional programs were significantly associated with high academic performance, however, promoting professional development and motivation of teachers as a way of creating positive school climate was not significantly associated with academic performance. The study also found that in the schools sampled principals were conversant with instructional leadership and were engaged in instructional leadership practices; however, what differed was the intensity with which they practiced them

In regions like Africa, notably Ghana, instructional leadership assumes a pivotal role in enhancing academic outcomes. It encompasses various components aimed at enabling school principals to effectively enforce leadership objectives, including the development of instructional activities, monitoring learner progress, and providing constructive feedback on classroom instruction. The instructional leadership has important components that are intended to help the school principal enforce his or her leadership aims. It provides a trustworthy means to create instructional activities, such helping learners, and track learners' performance, in order to track as well as provide comments on the classroom instruction. The prototype also calls for school heads to be part of the curriculum, speaking with children and educators, supplying education and learning assets, and constructing teacher effectiveness and able to share skills (Sansotti, 2012). These actions help to create an anticipation of collaborative teacher valued and crucial components crucial to creating and sustaining high performance rates. The principal is also responsible for motivating teachers to learn further about student accomplishment through data analysis and opportunities for professional development that are in line with the academic objectives of the school (Leithwood & Beatty, 2019; Wallace Foundation, 2016).

In Kenya the Ministry of education Science and Technology and the Teachers Service Commission recognizes the school principal as the leaders of all instructional programmes and other activities in the school, hence accountable for all that happens in the school. In particular, the school principal has to employ educational instructional leadership skills that creates an environment which is supportive and geared to the teacher and students' motivation as well as learning and teaching.

A study by Ibrahim (2011) on preparation and development of public secondary school's principals in Kenya established that formal training of prospective principals is non-existent in Kenya and access to current literature on effective school leadership and research on best practices is limited. The only training undertaken by principals are in-service, principals' conferences and personal initiative which are insufficient. A study by Ibrahim and Orodho (2014) in Kenya established a significant relationship between management of schools and student academic performance. However, Ibrahim and Orodho (2014) did not provide the expected principals' practices as an instructional leader and how they influence academic achievement of students. In this regard, the current study seeks to establish the influence of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub County.

Research conducted in Bungoma County highlights the adverse impact of principal leadership styles on secondary school performance. The study results indicated that there was a negative relationship between the autocratic leadership style of the school's principals and school performance (-0.65) and also a strong negative correlation between the laissez-faire leadership style and school performance in secondary schools (-0.66) (Okwaro, Kathambia & Sitati, 2020). However, there remains a gap in understanding how principals' instructional leadership practices directly influence students' academic performance in specific contexts like Tongaren sub-county, where disparate leadership styles coexist, contributing to varying academic outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to elucidate the influence of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance in Tongaren Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission have entrusted principals and heads of institutions with the responsibility of promoting learning. However, despite having trained teachers and adequate facilities, there exist significant gaps in learning outcomes, as evidenced by poor results in national examinations, particularly in Tongaren

sub-county. This concerning trend highlights the need to examine the influence of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance in Tongaren sub-county. Although instructional leadership is recognized for its significance in enhancing teachers' instructional practices and students' achievement, no previous studies have investigated this relationship in Tongaren sub-county. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether principals have adopted instructional leadership practices in their schools. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by investigating the influence of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance in Tongaren sub-county, where students consistently demonstrate poor examination results in Bungoma County, Kenya.

Objectives

- i. To determine the influence of clearly defined shared expectations of principals' instructional leadership on students' academic performance
- ii. To investigate the influence of effective instructional leadership strategies by principals' on students' academic performance

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Review

Teachers hold high academic expectations of their students, they tend to know their students well, value them as learners and understand how to progress their learning. When teachers expect students to perform well at high levels, students tend to focus on this expectation. According to Babad (2016) High expectations promote both students' academic achievement and their wellbeing. Research shows that the expectations of teachers, parents and peers affect students' self-esteem, feelings of self-efficacy and their academic motivation. These motivational factors are strongly linked to learning and achievement. Research also suggests that teachers adjust their teaching behaviours in line with the expectations they hold of their students. As students typically adjust their own expectations and behaviours to match those of their teachers, it is essential that teachers model high expectations for all of their students. However a more detailed study should be done to shade more light on defined shared expectations on students' academic performance of which is the aim of this study in Tongaren Sub County.

Previous study indicates that many of the principals are sensitive and cater for the needs of adolescents and help them to know themselves and navigate through life. Having favorable strategies by the principals' influence on academic behavior gives learners a head start in the realization of desired academic outcomes. Favorable strategies by the principals' influence on academic behaviors also encourage learners to work towards the achievement of their academic goals. This finding supports Wallace Foundation (2012) claim that principals contribute 25% of the variation in school academic performance by bringing school factors together and galvanizing the school environment.

Leadership determines the success and significance of an organization and is a key component of school improvement (Goolamally and Ahmad, 2014). With school improvement as a primary responsibility of principals and shared by assistant principals, identifying and understanding instructional leadership practices that lead to school improvement is paramount. Additionally, a school leader needs to not only be aware of their impact through instructional leadership practices but also be engaged in self-reflection to better understand their own instructional leadership practices. School principals are the leaders who impact the direction of schools through their thinking, practices, and relationships reiterating the idea of leaders thinking in the long term, looking outside as well as inside, in an effort to influence constituents is vital (Bolman and Deal, 2013). Common strategies of principals within schools classified as effective and successful include noting examination of assessment results, work driven by clear morals and ethical values, respect

and trust of and among staff and parents, varied learning opportunities, and use of data as related strategies of instructional leadership practices (Day, Gu, and Sammons, 2016). Additionally, successful principals are those with qualities of intuition, knowledge, and strategy with practices that promote cultures of learning, engagement, and increased student achievement. Successful school principals impact student outcomes through an interactive process dependent upon core values and beliefs (Mulford and Silins, 2011). Furthermore, outcomes related to academic achievement, social development, and student empowerment were found to be factors influenced by principal leadership as well as evaluation, capacity building, and student social skill development served as common factors in successful schools.

A study conducted by Mwangi (2014) on the influence of principals' instructional Leadership practices on student performance in Kenya Certificate Secondary Education in Matuga District, Kenya showed that classroom visitation was one of the key duty of the school principal where he found out how learning was taking place in the classroom environment and made plans to improve teaching / learning process so as to achieve the educational goals. According to Mutinda (2016) principals' instructional leadership practices on students' performance in Kenya Certificate Secondary Education in Yatta showed that majority of principals never frequently checked professional records which led to poor performance in national examinations. Study reveal that principals' strategies influences students' academic goals, however a more research should be done on this. The study was done in Tongaren Sub County.

Theoretical Framework

Model for Instructional Leadership Theory

Model for instructional Leadership theory developed by (Weber, 1996). Weber's Model identified five crucial domains of instructional leadership: defining the school's mission, managing curriculum and instruction where principals' provide resources and support for teachers to implement effective instructional practices based on current research. Fostering a positive learning climate, the principals' create a positive school culture where students feel valued and motivated to learn. Observing and improving instruction by providing opportunities for professional interactions and development for teachers. Assessing the instructional programme by working with necessary stakeholders to set and assess school goals for students' performance Weber (1996)

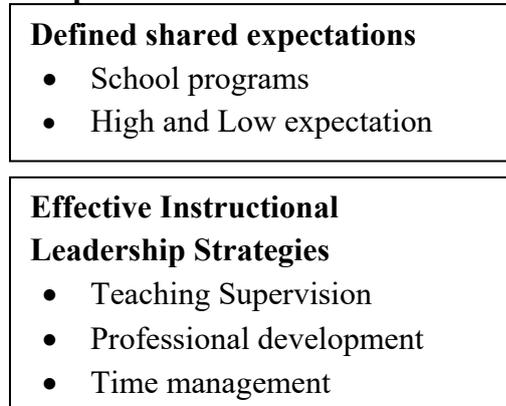
Social Cognitive Theory

Known as the father of cognitive theory, Bandura and his work have influenced education, communication, health science, and psychotherapy (Bandura, 2006). Prior to social cognitive theory, Bandura published a book in 1977 entitled Social Learning Theory that focused on how behavior is developed. Social learning theory (SLT) is based on the idea that learning occurs from human observations within the environment. Through Bandura's famous Bobo doll human aggression studies, Bandura demonstrated how a child is directly influenced by what is observed from the adults in the environment in which he lives. The studies placed value on how behavior is shaped through modeling, observation, and imitation of environmental factors not simply through genetic factors. Thus, SLT theorizes that people learn from each other by observation, imitation, and modeling with cognition playing a crucial role in behavior acquisition and retention. Principals' beliefs and cognitive competencies influence instructional leadership engagement, affecting academic performance.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows the expected relationships between variables. It defines relevant objectives for research process and maps out how they come together to draw a coherent conclusion George (2022).

Independent Variables



Dependent Variable

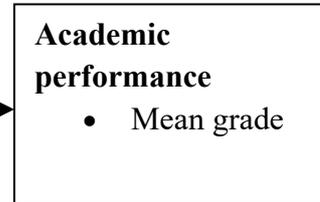


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive survey research design with mixed method approach. The study was carried out in Tongaren sub-county public secondary Schools in Bungoma County which lies within latitude in decimal degrees 85 and longitudes in decimal degrees 34.92. The target population was 446 respondents which was comprise 2 Curriculum Support Officers, 24 principals, 360 teachers both for TSC and BOM and 60 student leaders out of which at least 30% of them was sampled out and given questionnaires to complete. Krejcie and Morgan used the table to establish the sample size (1970). The table shows that a target population of 446 people equals a sample size of 210. The sample represents 47.08% of the population, and the 20% recommended for educational research is sufficient (Van Dalen 2019). Stratified random sampling was utilized to achieve desired representation from various subgroups in the population. Schools were sampled in subgroups of national, Extra County, county and sub county schools. Each category (strata) was randomly sampled so as to be given a chance to participate in the study.

The instrumentation in this study was the administration of questionnaires. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistical data analysis such as mean, frequencies and percentages and the results was presented using tables. Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis. The researcher conducted a Pearson moment correlation in order to determine the correlation of the study variables.

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Response Rate

The research sought to know the response rate of the respondents. The study sampled two hundred and ten (210) respondents from the public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County. However, out of the 210 questionnaires distributed, one hundred and thirty six (136) respondents completely filled in and returned the questionnaires which comprised 64.76% of the respondents. This response is reliable for data analysis. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) explained that a response rate of 60% is good and a response rate of 70% and over is excellent.

Descriptive Statistics

Before proceeding with the inferential analysis of the data, it was well analyzing the common descriptive statistics of the study sample data.

Clearly Defined Shared Expectations and Students' Academic Performance

A five-point Likert scale was utilized in the analysis. The results, which included mean and standard deviation, were presented in table 1.

Table 1: Clearly defined Shared Expectations

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|-----|-------|-----------|
| That share expectations improve academic performance | 136 | 3.934 | .8925 |
| Principals' enforce expectation concerning school programs | 136 | 3.984 | .9126 |
| Principals' ensure communication with learners' hence enhanced grades | 136 | 3.612 | .9327 |
| That principals' discuss high and low expectations with learners | 136 | 3.936 | .9225 |

Source: Field Data, (2024)

According to Table 1, the respondents indicated that principals' share expectations to improve academic performance ($M = 3.934$; $SD = 0.8925$) and that principals' enforce expectation concerning school programs ($M = 3.984$; $SD = 0.9126$). That principals' discuss high and low expectations with learners and ensure communication with learners' hence enhanced grades ($M = 3.612$; $SD = 0.9327$) and ($M = 3.936$; $SD = 0.9225$). This is in agreement with Wanyama, (2013) who argues that an effective principal should practice supportive leadership and supervision. This is supervision that is concerned with expressive needs. The principal as the instructional leader and supervisor should ensure that potentially stressful situations are avoided in the school environment. He/she should also try to remove stress from the teachers, reduce stress that may be affecting the teachers and also help them to adjust stressful situations that they may have no control over. Furthermore, (Wanyama, 2013) determines that the principal ought to likewise be accessible, available and approachable. The principal should impart trust in the teachers, give guidance and disregard disappointment or overlook failure when circumstances grant. Wanyama further stresses that principals should sanction and share obligations for different resolutions. The principal should also provide opportunities where teachers are able to function independently in achievement and possible success in various tasks.

Teachers hold high academic expectations of their students, they tend to know their students well, value them as learners and understand how to progress their learning. When teachers expect students to perform well at high levels, students tend to focus on this expectation. According to Babad, (2016) High expectations promote both students' academic achievement and their wellbeing. Research shows that the expectations of teachers, parents and peers affect students' self-esteem, feelings of self-efficacy and their academic motivation. These motivational factors are strongly linked to learning and achievement. Research also suggests that teachers adjust their teaching behaviours in line with the expectations they hold of their students. As students typically adjust their own expectations and behaviours to match those of their teachers, it is essential that teachers model high expectations for all of their students.

Effective Instructional leadership Strategies and Students' Academic Performance

The study sought to investigate the influence of effective instructional leadership strategies by principals' on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County, Kenya. The results, which included mean and standard deviation, were presented in table 2.

Table 2: Effective Instructional Leadership Strategies

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|-----|-------|-----------|
| Supervising teaching and learning | 136 | 4.174 | .6544 |
| Provision of adequate teaching/learning resources | 136 | 3.937 | .7638 |
| Motivation of teachers and students | 136 | 3.993 | .7337 |
| Mentorship to students | 136 | 3.946 | .9846 |

Source: Field Data, (2024)

The findings in Table 2 show that the respondents indicated supervising teaching and learning. ($M = 4.174$; $SD = 0.6544$) and that there is provision of adequate teaching/learning resources ($M = 3.937$; $SD = 0.7638$). That there is motivation of teachers and students. ($M = 3.993$; $SD = 0.7337$) and that there is mentorship to students. ($M = 3.946$; $SD = 0.9846$). This is in agreement with Mwangi, (2014) who studied on the influence of principals' instructional Leadership practices on student performance in Kenya Certificate Secondary Education in Matuga District, Kenya showed that classroom visitation was one of the key duty of the school principal where he found out how learning was taking place in the classroom environment and made plans to improve teaching / learning process so as to achieve the educational goals.

Previous study indicates that many of the principals are sensitive and cater for the needs of adolescents and help them to know themselves and navigate through life. Having favorable strategies by the principals' influence on academic behavior gives learners a head start in the realization of desired academic outcomes. Favorable strategies by the principals' influence on academic behaviors also encourage learners to work towards the achievement of their academic goals. This finding supports Wallace Foundation, (2012) claim that principals contribute 25% of the variation in school academic performance by bringing school factors together and galvanizing the school environment.

According to Mutinda (2016) principals' instructional leadership practices on students' performance in Kenya Certificate Secondary Education in Yatta showed that majority of principals never frequently checked professional records which led to poor performance in national examinations. Study reveal that principals' strategies influences students' academic goals, however a more research should be done on this.

Students' Academic Performance

The dependent variable in this investigation was students' academic performance. The researcher sought to establish the responses on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County, Kenya. Descriptive statistics, which involved mean and standard deviation, were jointly employed to summarize the responses as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' Academic Performance

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-------------|------------------|
| Enhanced communication | 136 | 3.862 | .9069 |
| Improved student to student relations | 136 | 3.764 | .8981 |
| Improved performance | 136 | 3.892 | .9781 |
| Mature leadership | 136 | 3.843 | .9806 |

Source: Field Data, (2024)

The findings in Table 3 showed that the respondents indicated that enhanced communication ($M = 3.862$; $SD = 0.9069$), and improved student to student relations ($M = 3.764$; $SD = 0.8981$). They indicated that improved performance ($M = 3.892$; $SD = 0.9781$) and mature leadership ($M = 3.843$; $SD = 0.9806$). This is in line with Wanyama, (2013) who assert that the students' performance depends on the school principal. This is because the principal is the focal system of a school through which all important functions rest. The principal is also the controller of all resources that may influence students' performance in a school. The principal has the authority that has been given to him/her by the teachers' employer to oversee the work of the teachers. The principal is therefore mandated to ensure that TSC policies are implemented.

Kiptum (2018) conducted research focused on the correlation between teachers' instructional leadership and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Baringo

County. The study used the Spearman Correlation and found that students taught by teachers that practiced high levels of instructional leadership in their classrooms had significantly high academic achievement. The study by Kiptum focused on teacher instructional leadership practices, but the current study focuses on principals' instructional leadership practices that have school wide influences on the overall academic achievement of students. Mavindu (2013) carried out a study that sought to determine the influence of principal's instructional supervision Practices on students' KCSE performance in Trans-Mara West district. Four research objectives were used to investigate the extent to which the principals in Trans- Mara West district undertook clinical supervision: classroom visitation, teacher observation, post observation conference and the extent to which teachers' professional records are checked by Principals.

The researcher used descriptive survey design. Two sets of questionnaires were administered; one for principals and the other one for teachers. The study revealed that principals checked teachers' records of work and ensured adherence to the timetable. Mavindu further focused on principal's instructional supervision practices on students' performance. From the reviewed literature, it is evident that principal's instructional leadership influences students' academic achievement. Most of the reviewed studies explain that there is a relationship between principal's instructional leadership and students' academic achievement, such study has never been done in Tongaren Sub County which was a major concern in this study.

Correlation Analysis

The study sought to establish the relationship between the dependent variable (students' academic performance) and the independent variables (clearly defined shared expectations, effective instructional leadership strategies). The researcher conducted a Pearson moment correlation in order to determine the correlation of the study variables and results presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

| | | Students' Academic Performance | Clearly defined Shared Expectations | Effective Instructional Leadership Strategies |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Students' Academic Performance | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 | | |
| | N | 136 | | |
| Clearly defined Shared Expectations | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .226** | 1 | |
| | N | 136 | 136 | |
| Effective Instructional Leadership Strategies | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | .206* | -.057 | 1 |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 |

Source: Field Data, (2024)

Forthcoming from Table 4, the results; clearly defined shared expectations ($r = 0.226$, p -value = 0.008) and effective instructional leadership strategies ($r = 0.206$; p -value = 0.016) portrays significant weak relationships with the dependent variable; students' academic performance.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of clearly defined shared expectations and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County, the study concluded that principals' need to put more emphasis on the mentioned variables, while carrying out clearly defined shared expectations in order to improve students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County

The study finding showed that effective instructional leadership strategies had statistically significant positive relationship with students' academic performance. Therefore, the study concluded that principals' need to embrace the effective instructional leadership strategies in order to increase students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tongaren Sub-County.

Recommendations

- i. The study recommended that principals' should share expectations to improve academic performance, enforce expectation concerning school programs, ensure communication with learners' is enhanced and discuss high and low expectations with learners within time lines in order to improve students' academic performance in public secondary schools.
- ii. The study recommended that principals' to improve on supervising teaching and learning, provision of adequate teaching/learning resources, motivation of teachers and students to enhance students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

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