



**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOAL SETTING AND PERFORMANCE OF CITY PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In recent years, performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations particularly by public primary schools has been on a steady decline. Studies have revealed that school leaders, especially head teachers, have a key role to play in setting high expectations, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes which ultimately translates to improved school performance. This study therefore sought to examine the relationship between goal setting practice and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. The study was based on the goal setting theory and adopted a concurrent embedded mixed method design. Questionnaires and interviews were utilized to collect the primary data whereas secondary data was collected through document analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were generated and regression analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis using F test at 5% level of confidence. The qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The study findings revealed a strong positive correlation between goal setting and school performance. The study therefore concluded that there is a positive relationship between goal setting and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya.*

**Keywords:** Goal Setting; Head Teacher; Public Primary; School Performance.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's era of intensified competition and expectations, head teachers are required to develop innovative leadership practices geared towards enhancement of teaching and learning as measured through improved pupil academic achievement in national examinations (Waweru & Orodho, 2013). Research on organizational effectiveness has found goal setting to be one of the most efficient and cost-effective strategies employers use to motivate their employees to perform (Teo *et al.*, 2016). Sauers and Bass (1990) describe goal setting as the practice of setting numeric or quantifiable performance targets for employees with an aim of increasing their level of motivation and performance. These authors assert that, goals promote effort, increase determination and lead to higher achievement of desired outcomes.

Locke and Latham (1990) also describe goals as observable or measurable results that are to be accomplished within a specific time frame. Subsequently, these researchers define goal setting as the process of consciously deciding on clear and practical targets or objectives, that an individual or organization aims to accomplish within a specific time frame (Moeller, Theiler & Wu, 2012). The power of goals originates in their ability to focus the attention of employees on desired targets, mobilize effort, and provide measures for evaluating progress (Locke & Latham, 2013).

In Kenya, the success of a school is measured in terms of good performance in national examinations. Poor performance is generally perceived as the head teacher's responsibility, and there is increasing evidence that, the quality of leadership makes a difference to the success or failure of a school (Reche *et al.*, 2012). This study intends to assist head teachers and other education stakeholders to understand the significant role of goal setting in enhancing school performance. Majority scholars that examined the association between goal setting and pupil academic achievement in public schools in Kenya such as;

Ng'ang'a *et al.* (2018), Obura *et al.* (2019), Odindo *et al.* (2020) have considered goal setting practice in relation to either teachers or pupils but there is limited literature on the impact of head teachers' goal setting practice on performance of public primary schools. This study sought to address this gap by examining the relationship between goal setting practice as employed by head teachers and its influence on performance of city public primary schools in Kenya.

### Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between goal setting and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. The study was guided by the following research hypothesis;

- $H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between goal-setting and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya.

### Statement of the Problem

In Kenya, despite the government's huge investment in education in support of Free Primary Education (FPE), performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations particularly by public primary schools has been unsatisfactory (Gakure, 2013). The trend in performance has been a source of concern among parents, education stakeholders and the general public. Substandard achievement in national examinations does not only undermine the pupils' chances of proceeding on with higher learning, but it also minimizes opportunities for job placements, consequently limiting their participation in national development (Republic of Kenya, 2012).

Majority of pupils who fail in national examinations end up feeling bitter and frustrated and are likely to become a security risk to society (Yakoboski & Nolan, 2011). Considering that, most of the studies on the relationship between of goal-setting and school performance have been carried out in the western world, there is need to conduct a local study to examine the correlation between goal-setting practice as employed by head teachers and

performance of city public primary schools in Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

This study was based on the goal setting theory developed by Locke and Latham (1990) which stipulates that goal setting enhances job performance. Studies have shown that individuals perform better when given goals that are clear, specific and challenging rather than vague and unchallenging (Locke & Latham, 1990; Rainey & Jung, 2014). In addition, goal clarity helps individuals to know what is expected of them and what behavior is effective for attaining the goals (Davis & Stazyk, 2014). Thus, by setting clear concise goals, the head teacher is able to assist teachers in focusing their attention and efforts on activities that enhance school performance. Robinson (2011) concurs that, goals provide a sense of purpose and priority in a school environment where a multitude of tasks can seem equally important and overwhelming.

The relevance of the goal setting theory to the present study is in line with the works of Locke and Latham (2002) which suggests there are four features that link goals to performance. The first feature is that, goals ought to be specific. This is due to the fact that, specific goals enable teachers to know what to aim for and facilitates them to monitor and evaluate their individual progress. Secondly, goals ought to be difficult but achievable. Bandura (1997) asserts that a major factor in goal accomplishment is self-efficacy which refers to an individual's internal belief in their level of competency and capability. Thus, the author asserts that it is important for head teachers to encourage teachers' self-efficacy. Thirdly, goals ought to be acknowledged by the teachers. Lezotte (2010) states that one way of ensuring goal acceptance in schools is by allowing teachers to participate in the goal setting process. The author further asserts that, participation in the goal setting process makes teachers to own the process and to be commitment

to the set goals. Lastly, head teachers ought to provide feedback on goal attainment (Robinson, 2011). The author asserts that, feedback allows teachers to rate their teaching capability and to make the necessary changes required for improved performance.

### Empirical Review

Moeller, Theiler and Wu (2012) in a five- year longitudinal study, examined the effect of goal setting on student academic achievement in a high school Spanish language class. By using a hierarchical linear model, the researchers were able to investigate the relationship between goal setting and student achievement over time at both student and teacher level. The study findings revealed a significantly positive relationship between the goal setting process and language achievement. The study affirmed that goal setting was an important intervention for promoting pupil academic achievement.

Similarly, Cao and Nietfeld (2007) conducted a study that assessed the correlation between achievement goals, learning strategies and student academic performance in education psychology. Using a mixed research design, the study findings indicated that students who set goals had significantly superior student achievement compared to students that did not set goals. The study concluded that, for schools to attain higher academic performance, it is important that pupils are encouraged to set their own performance goals which they can regularly monitor in order to improve their academic performance.

Morisano *et al.* (2010) investigated the effect of an online written goal setting program for academically challenged students on their academic achievement. After a 4-month period, students who completed the goal-setting intervention displayed significant improvements in their performance compared to those in the control group. The study concluded that, goal setting program is not only effective but also an affordable strategy that can be used in schools to enhance students' academic performance.

Abu Bakar *et al.* (2014) in a clinical study that investigated the implementation of goal setting principle in the classroom, established that, goal setting principles if well understood by teachers could enhance the teaching and learning activities. The study concluded that, goal setting principles can be utilized by teachers as a tool to promote learning, which in turn could lead to higher academic achievement. Similarly, Yusuff (2018) carried out a study to determine whether goal setting and study planning significantly influenced learning engagement. The study which compared a study group that was exposed to goal setting and a control group that only had regular teaching and learning established a significant improvement in the goal setting group at the end of course evaluation. The study concluded that, personalized goal setting and study planning among students positively influenced their learning engagement leading to improved performance.

Similarly, Idowu, Chibuzoh and Madueke (2014) investigated the effectiveness of goal setting skills among secondary school students' academic performance in English language. The research adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design. The study findings revealed that performance in English language was enhanced among students that were exposed to goal-setting intervention compared to those in the control group. The study concluded that goal setting significantly improves students' academic performance especially in English language.

Correspondingly, Ng'ang'a and Mwaura (2018) conducted a study to determine the relationship between student achievement and goal orientation among high school students in Kiambu County. The study adopted a mixed method sequential explanatory design. The study findings revealed that, goal orientation significantly correlated with students' academic achievement. Thus, the study concluded that, teachers, parents and other education stakeholders need to collectively work together in developing performance goals that can positively enhance students' academic

achievement. In another study, Odindo *et al.* (2020) investigated the influence of goal setting on the performance of public secondary school teachers in Kisumu Central Sub-County. The study which adopted descriptive survey design established a positive correlation between goal setting and teacher performance. Therefore, the study concluded that there was a positive significant relationship between goal setting and performance of secondary school teachers in Kisumu Central Sub-County.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a concurrent embedded mixed method design. The study employed a combination of proportionate, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. There was a total of 147 city public primary schools of which 30 were selected. To determine reliability and validity of the research instruments, a pilot study was carried out in 3 public primary schools in Nairobi city. These 3 schools had the same characteristics as schools in the main study. The reliability of the study research instruments was tested using Cronbach's alpha and a reliability alpha of 0.904 was obtained against the benchmark of 0.70. The primary data for the study was collected through questionnaires for teachers and semi-structured interviews that were administered to head teachers, District Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (DQASOs) and District Education Officers (DEOs) respectively. The secondary data on the other hand was collected by analysing school documents that were relevant to the study objective such as: Schools' strategic plans, Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) tools and pupils' academic achievement in national examinations as exhibited through school mean scores. The purpose of analysing these documents was to gauge the head teacher's instructional leadership role in curriculum implementation, and the teachers' adherence to curriculum delivery guidelines and syllabus coverage. The other documents analysed by the researcher were: Minutes of meetings for School Management Committees (SMCs), Parents'

Associations and other stakeholders' meetings to evaluate their commitment and concern about pupils' academic achievements and overall school performance. The questionnaires were delivered to schools by the researcher and collected two weeks later. This allowed respondents ample time to respond to the questions.

The quantitative data for this study was analysed using the statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The study adopted descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse data. The qualitative data from the interviews was collected by audio recording on a digital voice recorder and

writing of notes by the researcher which served as backup. The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic framework to analyse the qualitative data.

### FINDINGS

A total of 330 questionnaires were issued to respondents out of which 294 questionnaires were filled and returned translating to a response rate of 89.09%. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) assert that a response rate of 50% is sufficient, 60% is good and above 70% is excellent. The questionnaires' response rate was presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Response Rate**

Sample size	Frequency	Percent (%)
Response	294	89.09
No response	36	10.91
Total	330	100

### Goal Setting and School Performance

Teachers were asked to indicate whether head teachers set performance goals that influenced performance of city public primary schools. A Likert

Scale of 1 to 5 was used with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=Neutral, 4= Agree and 5=strongly agree. The results were summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Teachers' Level of Agreement with Statements on Goal Setting**

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
The head teacher sets performance goals that are regularly monitored	1.4%	6.1%	7.8%	52.7%	32.0%	4.08	0.873
The head requests for staff inputs when setting school goals	2.7%	7.2%	11.9%	45.9%	32.3%	3.98	0.988
The head teacher discusses performance goals with teachers in staff meetings	1.3%	4.8%	8.2%	43.2%	42.5%	4.21	0.883
The head teacher effectively communicates performance goals to members of school community	3.4%	7.5%	15.3%	46.9%	26.9%	3.84	0.979
The head teacher frequently monitors performance goals and gives feedback to teachers	2.7%	8.8%	13.9%	50.3%	24.3%	3.89	0.998

The findings indicated that majority, (84.7%) of teachers, perceived that head teachers set performance goals to enhance performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. This was further supported by a mean of 4.08 with a standard deviation of 0.873. This finding was in line with

Idowu, Chibuzoh and Madueke (2014) who found that academic performance in successful schools increases partly due to the head teacher's ability to establish and set goals that determine how teachers conduct themselves in the classroom.

On whether head teachers involved teachers in setting performance goals, majority, (78.2%) of respondents were in agreement that head teachers indeed involved them in the goal setting process as was evidenced by a mean of 3.98 with standard deviation of 0.988. Whether head teachers discuss performance goals with teachers during staff meetings; again majority, (85.7%) were in agreement that head teachers discuss performance goals with teachers during staff meetings. This was further supported by a mean of 4.21 with a standard deviation of 0.883. This finding is in agreement with Lezotte (2010) who found that teachers who engage in open and honest dialogue and whose suggestions are appreciated and cherished are likely to follow the direction set by their leader.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether head teachers effectively communicated performance goals to the rest of the school community; majority, (73.8%) were in agreement that head teachers effectively shared school performance goals with members of the school community. This was further supported by a mean of 3.84 with standard deviation of 0.979. This finding is reinforced by Paine and McCann (2009) who argue that since stakeholders have a vested interest in the success

of their local schools, their perspective on the school's vision, mission and goals ought to be taken into consideration. On whether head teachers regularly monitored goal implementation and provided feedback to teachers, majority, of respondents (74.6%) were of the opinion that head teachers regularly monitored performance goals and provided feedback to teachers. This was also evidenced by a mean of 3.89 with standard deviation of 0.998. This finding is in line with Harkin *et al.* (2016) who noted that goal monitoring is a crucial exercise that motivates people towards, specific goal attainment. Cherasaro *et al.* (2016) assert that, individualized and actionable feedback from head teacher's observations enable teachers to implement the change needed in their instruction leading to improved pupil learning.

### Correlation of Goal Setting and School Performance

The study sought to establish the effect of goal setting on performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship that existed between goal setting and school performance. Table 3 showed the correlation between goal setting and school performance.

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis**

		Goal setting	School performance
Goal setting	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>.540**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	294	294
School performance	Pearson Correlation	<b>.540**</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>.000</b>	
	N	294	294

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 showed a positive and significant correlation between goal setting and school performance (0.540, p-value 0.000 < 0.05). This implied that school performance is influenced by goal setting. The influence of goal setting on school performance was confirmed by the fact that (p-value is significant 0.000 < 0.05). This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis: H<sub>0</sub> There is no

significant relationship between goal-setting and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya.

The implication of the above results was that the dependent variable, school performance had been positively and significantly influenced by goal setting practice and was bound to improve when goal setting was intensified in schools. The

significant effect of goal setting on school performance could also be explained by the findings of Ng'ang'a and Mwaura (2018), Obura *et al.* (2019), Odindo *et al.* (2020) who observed that students who set performance goals improved in their academic performance.

### Regression Analysis

The influence of goal setting on school performance was tested by model fit equation showing the R and R<sup>2</sup>. Table 4 shows the effect of goal setting on school performance measured by R and R<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 4: Influence of Goal Setting on School Performance**

R	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.540 <sup>a</sup>	0.291	0.507	1.743

The R value indicates a positive and significant (0.540 > 0.500) correlation between goal setting and school performance. The R<sup>2</sup> indicates the influence of an increase in one unit of activities associated with goal setting on school performance. An increase of a unit of goal setting practice led to an improvement by 29% on school performance. This also implied that 71% of increase in school performance was attributed to other factors outside the model. The Durbin Waston statistics was 1.743 which was used to test the nature of the

variables. A figure which lies between 1.5 and 2.5 is considered reliable because it has no autocorrelation characteristics. In this case, the indicators used to test the relationship between goal setting and school performance did not have autocorrelation characteristics. The null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) expressed as; "There is no significant relationship between goal setting and school performance" was tested using a one-way analysis variance (ANOVA). Table 5 showed analysis of ANOVA used to test the hypothesis.

**Table 5: Analysis of ANOVA to Test Hypothesis**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	30.929	1	30.929	120.048	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	75.230	292	0.258		
Total	106.158	293			

Table 5 showed the value of F as 120.048 which is significant (p-value of 0.000 < 0.05). This means that the model used to test the relationship between goal setting and school performance is significant and can sufficiently predict the outcome variable which is school performance. The results from the analysis were therefore used to reject the null hypothesis H<sub>0</sub> stated as: 'There is no significant relationship between goal setting and school performance'. It is indeed confirmed that, there is a

significant relationship between goal setting and school performance. The indicators used to assess the relationship between goal setting and school performance were analysed using a bivariate model. The model is expressed as;  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$ . Where Y = is the School performance, X<sub>1</sub> is the goal setting and  $\epsilon =$  is the error term. Table 6 showed the coefficients for goal setting and school performance. The output from the model interprets the nature of relationship between the variables.

**Table 6: Regression Model of Goal Setting and School Performance**

Model	Correlation Coefficients		T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.050	.152	13.529	.000		
Goal setting performance	.408	.037	10.957	.000	1.000	1.000

Substituting the model,  $Y = 2.05 + 0.48X_1$  thus School performance = 2.05 + 0.48 (goal setting). The coefficient of goal setting practice is + 0.48 which shows that goal setting has a positive influence on the model. The higher the goal setting practice, the higher the school performance. Thus, goal setting is one of the factors influencing school performance.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze qualitative data in this study, the researcher utilized Braun and Clarke's (2002) six-step thematic framework. The researcher was

concerned with addressing specific research objectives and therefore analyzed the collected data with the study objectives in mind. Consequently, the researcher applied a theoretical thematic analysis rather than an inductive one. Basit (2003) states that, the coding process can be done either manually or with a software program. As no convenient computerized coding system was found for the present study, a manual coding approach was applied. Table 7 showed Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic framework.

**Table 7: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps thematic Analysis**

Stage	Description of the process
1: Data familiarization process	Listening repeatedly to recordings, transcribing, reading and re-reading the data
2: Generating Initial Codes	Coding fascinating features of the data in a orderly manner across the entire data set, organising data relevant to each code
3: Searching for Themes	Gathering codes into possible themes, collecting data appropriate to each possible theme
4: Review Themes	Checking in the themes in relation to the codes to the coded extracts (phase 1), and then for the overall data set (phase 2), generating a thematic 'map' for the analysis.
5: Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to define the specifics of each theme, generating clear definition and names of each theme
6: Reporting	Final analysis of the selected extracts, connecting the analysis to the study objective and literature, producing an academic report of the analysis

### Emergent Themes

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006), frame work, the researcher used theoretical thematic analysis in which one main theme and four sub-themes were

generated in relation to the study objective. The main theme and sub-themes are as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8: Emergent theme and sub-themes**

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Influence of goal setting on teacher performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Motivation</li> <li>▪ Direction</li> <li>▪ Time management</li> <li>▪ Monitoring</li> </ul>

**Table 9: Main Theme: Influence of goal setting on Teacher performance**

Sub-Theme	Head teachers	DQASOs & DEOs	Total
Motivation	11	4	15(37.5%)
Direction	8	3	11(27.5%)
Time management	6	2	8 ((20%)
Monitoring	5	1	7(17.5%)
Total	30	10	40(100%)

The results in Table 9 indicated that majority (37.5%) of the respondents were in agreement that goals inspired teachers to work harder, leading to enhanced school performance. In regard to the sub-theme direction, (27.5%) of the respondents indicated that, goals gave teachers direction by providing them with a road map towards which they could plan their activities. As for the sub-theme time management, (20%) of the respondents reported that goals enabled teachers to effectively plan their time, which contributed to adequate syllabus coverage. In relation to the sub-theme monitoring, (17.5%) of the respondents indicated that goals assisted teachers to effectively monitor the learning process and to make the necessary modifications needed for improved pupil learning. This implies that on average, respondents were in agreement that goal setting practice positively influenced teacher performance which in turn enhanced pupil academic achievement. These findings were in conformity with the findings of other studies conducted by scholars such as: Moeller, Theiler and Wu (2012); Cao and Nietfeld (2007); Rowe, Mazzotti, Ingram, and Lee (2017), that found a strong relationship between goal setting practice and pupil achievement. These scholars further established that academic performance in high performing schools increases significantly as result of the head teacher's ability to establish and set goals that change the way teachers perform in the classroom. Lezotte (2010) also observed that, the process of setting, committing to and accomplishing school goals builds credibility, trust, and a spirit of community and corporation within the school.

### Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between goal setting and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. To achieve this objective, analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data was done. Results from quantitative data analysis confirmed that, goal setting practice influences school performance. Equally, the qualitative data analysis also confirmed

that goal setting affects school performance. Consequently, both qualitative and quantitative analyses acknowledged goal setting as a vital practice for enhancing school performance. The aspects of goal setting practice that were analysed in the study comprised of: school strategic plans, head teachers' records on goal setting practice, teachers' targets, minutes of staff meetings, stakeholders' meetings, and documented head teachers' feedback on goal attainment.

The findings from the study confirmed that goal setting practice positively affected the performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. The results indicate that by setting clear goals, the head teacher is able to direct the attention and effort of teachers towards activities that are relevant to the goals and away from those activities that are goal-irrelevant. Goal setting as evidenced in this study can serve as an effective tool for promoting self-regulation among teachers. The head teacher's role in goal setting include; goal identification, goal sharing, goal implementation, goal monitoring, evaluation and feedback. Similar studies that have found a strong relationship between goal setting practice and pupil achievement include: Morisano *et al.* (2010); Idowu *et al.* (2014); Rowe, Mazzotti, Ingram, and Lee (2017) and Odindo *et al.* (2020).

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study considered the relationship between goal setting and performance of city public primary schools in Kenya. The study findings revealed that majority of head teachers in city public primary schools set performance goals to improve school performance. In addition, it was established that, head teachers involved teachers in developing the performance goals, regularly monitored the implementation process and gave feedback to teachers which enabled them to make the necessary adjustments for improvement. It was further established that there was a positive and significant relationship between goal setting and school performance as affirmed by a correlation coefficient of 0.540 and a p value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ . This led to the conclusion that performance in city

public primary schools had been significantly influenced by goal setting and was bound to improve if head teachers placed more emphasis on this leadership practice.

The study recommended that School Management Committees (SMCs), Parents Associations and the school community ought to be encouraged to work together in establishing goals that provide a clear direction and keep teachers and pupils focused on activities that promote school performance. It was

further recommended that, head teachers in all public primary schools need to be trained on effective goal setting skills that influence school performance.

Given that this study mainly focused on city public primary schools in Kenya, there is need for further investigations in order to determine whether goal setting practice has the same influence in other public primary schools in other parts of the country.

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