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**Psychological Disengagement As A Correlate Of Academic Achievement Among Form Three Students In Kiambu County, Kenya**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated reasons that learners provide for their outcomes and whether psychological disengagement correlate with academic achievement in Lari Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. The research was guided by self-worth motivation theory. A correlational research design was employed in the study. The participants were 360 (220 males and 140 females). The Intellectual Engagement Inventory scale was used. There was a significant negative correlation between psychological disengagement and academic achievement. A significant correlation between psychological disengagement and academic achievement imply that measures should be put in place to support learners become more actively engaged in the learning process. Therefore, the researcher recommended that all stakeholders in education should implement interventions and measures that support learners in adopting a healthy behavior needed for them to achieve success in their academics.

**Keywords:** Kenya, Kiambu, Psychological disengagement, correlational research design, academic achievement

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**1. Introduction**

The academic success of students serves as a gauge for evaluating the effectiveness of an education system within a nation. This success is closely associated with favorable societal outcomes. Those who excel academically are more inclined to pursue further education and tend to experience greater stability in employment, higher incomes, and overall better life prospects. Academic accomplishments significantly contribute to an individual's sense of self-esteem. Education plays a central role in producing individuals qualified to accelerate global economic growth and solve the real worlds facing different countries across the world (Tadese et al., 2022). Students dedicate numerous years to schooling with the aspiration of attaining favorable outcomes. Nevertheless, statistics indicate a disparity between the initial enrollment figures and the number of students who successfully complete their education. This discrepancy has prompted researchers to delve into factors influencing both student retention rates and academic achievement.

One of the important predictors of whether students achieve success academically is their psychological engagement in the domain (Douglas, 2018). According to Wara et al. (2018), psychological disengagement from the academic domain has the prospective of affecting achievement negatively. Psychological disengagement entails detaching self-worth from academic outcomes in that a student's academic success or lack thereof does not affect their self-worth. The student thus maintains their self-worth by devaluing grades or the academic domain itself. Thus, their worth is unaffected even when they do not perform well academically. Psychological disengagement is manifested in two main psychological mechanisms. The first mechanism entails discounting when a student does not find academic feedback to be valid (Douglas, 2018). Learners may discount feedback by reducing the significance of scores (Wara et al., 2018). To cope with low academic achievement, a valued domain, some students may devalue academic achievement to maintain their self-worth. Devaluation is a mechanism that allows students to protect their self-worth despite declining grades (Wara et al., 2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

Students in Kiambu county have persistently performed poorly in the KCSE exam despite various government interventions to address the same (Ng'ang'a et al., 2018). KCSE results in the last three years have shown that students have persistently performed poorly. Low academic achievement may lead to high drop-out rates and poor educational attainment, and students may generally become dissatisfied with education. Government efforts to reduce the trend of poor performance have not borne much fruit.

Researchers have established a link between academic achievement, personal and emotional competencies such as psychological disengagement and causal attributions. Studies

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conducted in Kiambu county attribute low academic achievement to social-cultural factors, and not much has been done to establish the effect that psychological factors may have on academic achievement among learners (Ng'ang'a et al., 2018). There is a dearth of research in Kenya on the psychological factors that influence academic success, most of which have been conducted in counties other than Kiambu County. This study looked at the relationship between form three students' academic achievement and psychological disengagement in Kiambu County, Kenya.

### **Objective or Research Question**

To identify the correlation between psychological disengagement and academic achievement among form three students in Kiambu County.

### **Literature Review**

This section includes a thorough analysis of the body of research on psychological disengagement and academic achievement as well as empirical studies. It highlights how important this factor is to students' academic success.

### **Psychological Disengagement as a correlate of academic achievement**

A student's academic worth is considerably affected by negative feedback received in the academic domain and this could lead to disengagement and, consequently, low performance (Kim & Lee, 2019). The study revealed that higher grades predicted a rise in academic self-esteem and a consequent decrease in discounting. The second defense mechanism under psychological disengagement is academic devaluing. Students become motivated to achieve academic success until they attach value to it. Otanga (2019) used a sample of 447 students with an age range of 15-19 years in Mombasa County in a study. The findings revealed that devaluing is a measure to protect the self against negative feedback in domains where one attaches value. Students tend to devalue academic feedback if it affects their self-esteem. Devaluing the academic domain implies that feedback provided on grades does not affect student motivation. The quantitative research methodology was employed in the study. The sample was selected using random sampling technique from a population of students within County schools in Mombasa County. However, since the sample was collected from only County schools, it limits the generalization of the results since Kenyan secondary school students are represented in national, extra-county, and sub-county schools. A representative sample should contain students from each of these schools as used in the current study.

Further, in a study on a sample of 638 Dutch adolescents aged 12-18, Lee et al. (2019) found that temporal discounting directly impacts academic achievement. Temporal discounting affects the achievement of long-term goals among students. While discounting tends to decrease with age, adolescents who engage in academic discounting tend to underperform in the long term. The study looked at end-of-year results for participants in only three subjects, Dutch, English, and Math. Results from only these three subjects were combined to create a single measure of academic achievement. However, considering only three subjects may not be an accurate measure of academic achievement as the emphasis is placed on languages, yet some students may perform better in sciences than languages and vice versa. The current study used all subjects taken by a student and consider the average score as a single measure of achievement.

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That way, a more accurate analysis of students' performance was used. Further, the current study employed a correlational design, different from what was used by Lee et al. (2019), as the researchers used experimental design.

Loose et al. (2019) carried out a study in France on a sample of 369 seventh and eighth graders in five secondary schools located within the same region. The researchers discovered that discounting is negatively connected with academic performance and that it is positively correlated with self-esteem. Students who discount their poor grades eventually conclude that their efforts will never get recognition. There is a high probability that they will devalue academics and underperform consistently. During the study, a sample of stigmatized secondary-school French learners was used. Devaluing in the study thus appeared as a maladaptive process, while discounting was found to be an effective self-protective strategy. The current study selected a random sample, and stigma was not used as a criterion to select respondents. The sample comprised of French students, and the current study used a sample of Kenyan students, a completely different student population. The researchers used a short-term longitudinal design. The current study used a purely correlational research design which was necessary to allow the researcher determine the relationships among the variables.

A study conducted by Shamosh and Gray (2018) associated discounting with lower Grade point average (GPAs) and lower intelligence quotient (IQ). In this study, a comprehensive literature search was conducted from two electronic databases. The researchers found twenty-four studies eligible for the meta-analysis. The studies revealed that higher intelligence was associated with delay discounting. Since people's level of intelligence varies, their discounting tendencies will also differ. The scholars studied discounting and its relationship with intelligence and how the two-affect academic achievement. The current study studied discounting as one of the mechanisms of psychological disengagement and sought to find out how it relates to academic achievement.

Ng'ang'a et al. (2019) conducted an analysis of academic performance in Kiambu County and reported that underachievement in the county was attributed to personal factors such as perceived competence and achievement goal orientation. Questionnaires were then used in data collection. They used a qualitative research methodology, and the data was analyzed thematically. The results indicated that approach goals led to high performance, while avoidance goals were associated with underperformance. The reviewed study used qualitative methodology which only managed to get the views from few individuals, thereby reducing generalizability. The current study used correlational design which enabled the researcher to reach a larger sample and enhance generalizability. The findings in different studies revealed variations in the relationship between psychological disengagement and academic achievement and this prompted the researcher to conduct the current study. The study may help learners understand how their engagement to school-related activities relates to their academic achievement.

The current study was guided by the following hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: There is a significant relationship between devaluing and academic achievement.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is a significant relationship between discounting and academic achievement.

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### **3. Methodology**

A correlational research design facilitates the investigation of the links between variables under investigation, hence the reason it was used for this study. Participants were 360 (220 boys and 140 girls) form three students. They were drawn from ten secondary schools in Lari sub-county, Kiambu county, Kenya and the schools were divided into three categories: coeducational day schools, boarding schools for females exclusively, and boarding schools for boys alone. The researcher employed purposive, simple random, stratified, and random sampling were the methods of sampling. Authorization was sought from relevant authorities before conducting the study. Ethical considerations and the American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical code was adhered to in all interactions with the participants.

### **Instruments**

To gauge psychological disengagement, the Intellectual Engagement Inventory scale was employed (Major & Schmader, 1998). This yielded quantitative data which were analyzed using inferential statistics.

### **4. Presentation of Results**

#### **4.1 Hypothesis Testing 1**

A null hypothesis was formulated to test the first research hypothesis:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between devaluing and academic achievement.

To test this hypothesis, a descriptive analysis was first performed and the results shown below in table 1;

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Devaluing**

Subscales	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Dev	Sk.	Kur
Devaluing	352	10	6	16	11.54	.10	1.83	-.67	.71

*Note.* N=352. Min=minimum; Max=maximum; M=mean; SD=standard deviation; Sk=skewness; Kur=kurtosis.

Source: Field data 2023

Table 1 revealed that devaluing had a mean of 11.54 (*SD*=1.83) while the coefficient of skewness was (-.67). The kurtosis for devaluing was .71. The scores appeared to be centered around the mean, as indicated by the leptokurtic nature of the discounting and devaluation distributions. The researcher then conducted a bivariate analysis and the findings are showed in table 2 below;

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**Table 2: Hypothesis Testing of Devaluing and Academic Achievement**

		Academic Achievement
Devaluing	Pearson Correlation	-.08*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00

Note. N=352

\*\* . Correlation is significant at  $P < .01$  level (2-tailed).

Source: Field data 2023

Table 2 displays the results, which indicate a significant negative correlation ( $r(352) = -0.8, p < .01$ ) between devaluing and academic achievement. Consequently, it was decided to reject the first null hypothesis.

#### 4.2 Hypothesis Testing 2

A null hypothesis was formulated to address the second research hypothesis:

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between discounting and academic achievement.

To test this hypothesis, a descriptive analysis was first performed and the results shown below in table 3 below;

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Discounting**

Subscales	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Dev	Sk.	Kur
Discounting	352	12	8	20	13.04	.10	1.84	.36	.56

Note. N=352. Min=minimum; Max=maximum; M=mean; SD=standard deviation; Sk=skewness; Kur=kurtosis.

Source: Field data 2023.

Table 3 revealed that discounting had a mean of 13.04 ( $SD=1.84$ ). The coefficient of skewness for discounting was .36. The kurtosis for discounting was .56. The scores appeared to be centered around the mean, as indicated by the leptokurtic nature of the discounting distributions. The researcher then conducted a bivariate analysis and the findings are showed in table 4 below;

**Table 4: Hypothesis Testing of Discounting and Academic Achievement**

		Academic Achievement
Devaluing	Pearson Correlation	-.13*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00

Note. N=352

\*\* . Correlation is significant at  $P < .01$  level (2-tailed).

Source: Field data 2023.

Table 4 displays the results, which indicate a significant negative correlation was observed between discounting and academic achievement ( $r(352) = -.13, p < .01$ ). The inference was that low academic achievement resulted from devaluing and discounting. Low grades are the result of students not putting in the effort when they do not value academic success.



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## **5. Discussion and Presentation of Findings**

The analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between psychological disengagement (devaluing and discounting) and academic achievement. The inference was that low academic achievement resulted from devaluing and discounting. Low grades are the result of students not putting in the effort when they do not value academic success. The results of Loose et al. (2019), who found that discounting is inversely connected with academic success, are in line with the findings regarding the association between psychological disengagement and academic achievement. The researcher found that students who discount academic feedback tend to underperform consistently. This is usually the case because students do not attach any importance to academic feedback. It does not affect them. The findings are consistent with Covington's self-worth motivation theory which holds that discounting tends to lead low academic achievement.

A different study conducted by Wang et al. (2017) did not reveal that discounting is negatively correlated with academic achievement. However, the scholars found that discounting tends to play a causal role and by this it predicts academic achievement.

Consistent results reported by Martinot et al. (2020) showed that devaluing is a predictor of academic achievement. However, evidence from the study refutes the claim that devaluing is a self-protective strategy. It shows that devaluing is a reactive strategy that a learner may employ when the feedback received does not favor them. Learners stop holding academic feedback in high regard and thus fail to act upon it thus hindering academic success. Additionally, a study done by Schütte et al. (2017) exhibited that devaluation is a psychological process that impairs the learning behavior. When a learner attaches little value to the academic domain, they tend to disengage from school. While this may be a self-protective strategy if the school environment is not safe and the learner feels stigmatized, the same is reflected in low grades. The findings confirm that the mechanism predicts academic performance and leads to a vicious circle of behavioral disengagement from school.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study found a significant negative relationship between academic achievement and psychological disengagement. It follows that a key factor influencing academic success is students' psychological disengagement. Thus, academic achievement will rise in response to a decrease in psychological disengagement. Psychological disengagement significantly predicted academic achievement. This suggests that in order to solve low academic performance, educators and other relevant parties should take this into account, speak with students, and assist them in becoming more psychologically invested in their studies. Given that psychological disengagement is an important element, it is critical that school-based programs that support children in increasing their level of participation in academic pursuits involve all relevant parties. Moreover, school-wide initiatives would support students in changing their perspectives, appreciating criticism, and ultimately becoming more psychologically involved.

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### **Recommendations**

The discovery was that there is a strong association between academic achievement and psychological disengagement. Given that psychological disengagement is an important element, it is critical that school-based programs that support children in increasing their level of participation in academic pursuits involve all relevant parties. Moreover, school-wide initiatives would support students in changing their perspectives, appreciating criticism, and ultimately becoming more psychologically involved.

Academic achievement was found to be significantly predicted by students' psychological disengagement. The study exclusively examined quantitative data and used a correlational research approach. The investigation did not examine qualitative data. As a result, future studies might examine both quantitative and qualitative data and use an alternative design, such longitudinal, to enable the researcher to monitor participants over an extended period of time.



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