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Original Article

Alumni Engagement and Ordinary-Level Students' Academic Performance in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in Sheema Municipality

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Keywords:

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The study aimed to assess Alumni Engagement in ordinary-level students' Academic Performance in Government-aided Secondary Schools in Sheema municipality. The study employed a descriptive research design. The target population was 6 headteachers from 6 secondary schools, 92 teachers, 6 Alumni, Municipal Education Officer (MEO) and Municipal Inspector of Schools (MIS). A sample of 106 respondents was considered for the study from 6 Secondary schools. The study employed interviews and questionnaires as data collection methods. The study considered both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. The study findings revealed that alumni engagement influences the postings and employment of teachers in specialised disciplines, organising training workshops and award ceremonies, developing mentoring avenues, organising inspirational talks, managing student discipline and conducting seminars with students. The study recommendations were the establishment of alumni-sponsored programmes aimed at collaboration with alumni networks to create mentorship programmes, diversification of alumni engagement activities beyond traditional events by leveraging technology, encouraging alumni participation in school improvement projects, such as infrastructure upgrades, and extracurricular activity support, to foster a sense of ownership and investment in the school's development.

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INTRODUCTION

World over, Alumni engagement started a long time ago with alumni forming associations in which they work to impact their alma maters, (Drezner, 2018). At St. John's College in Philadelphia, USA, alumni association was started in 1824 by Francis Scott Key, who sat with a few alumni of the College and they resolved to start their association. They set the day for reunion and invited all the alumni who gathered to form their association, (Kniggendorf, 2018). In Africa, Al-Azhar University in Egypt established its alumni association in 2006. The association offers scholarships in one of the Islamic science faculties at Al-Azhar University such as Usul, ad-Deen, Islamic Sharia, Arabic language, Arabic and Islamic studies, and Dawah. Scholarships are offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Lawson, 2017).

In East Africa, the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Kenya view its alumni as one of the major strengths of the university and views the growth of its alumni as an opportunity. Kenyatta University (KU) formulated an alumni policy highlighting the way the institution proposes to improve the capabilities of its alumni (Wesonga, 2014). The University of Rwanda has more than 50,000 alumni from former public institutions which merged to form the University of Rwanda. The association makes significant contributions to the country's finances (Muvunyi, 2017). In Uganda, the Uganda Management Institute Alumni Association (UMIAA) started in 2002 with an intention of bringing all the alumni in order to maintain their identity and harness their effort in fostering the interests of the institute, promoting strong collaboration between the alumni, and to promote the spirit of institutional ownership loyalty and lifelong commitment to the institute (UMI website).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sheema municipality which has been in existence for many years and has produced great people in the country still perform poorly academically. This shows that their alumni lack institutional

memory and understanding of institutional needs limiting their ability to organize events, provide scholarships, or support school programmes that has resulted in secondary schools' poor infrastructure, lack enough textbooks and other reading materials, and a combination of these factors cause lack of academic performance in the area (Report by Municipal Education Officer, 2021). Though some secondary school administrators have tried to embrace alumni relations efforts, by creating institutional memory and understanding of alumni needs like the resource mobilization, career guidance, and financial support to organize events, provide scholarships, or support school programmes, a notable gap still exists (UNEB, 2022). Therefore, this study explored way show Alumni Engagement can help to promote academic performance in secondary schools in Sheema municipality by engaging in financial support for their alma maters.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To examine the ways of Alumni engagement in secondary schools of Sheema Municipality.

Research Questions

- What is the impact of Alumni engagement in secondary schools of Sheema municipality?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The ways of Alumni Engagement in Secondary schools

A study conducted by Shakil and Faizi (2012) at Jinnah University for women in Karachi, Pakistan found out that Alumni help to promote school's reputation and progress through promotion of its academic performance, school environment, co-curricular activities, and investment. According to a study by Billings (2017) at Montana State University in the USA, on marginalized minorities, except for young Asian Alumni, found out that 41% had lower probability of giving than Caucasian Alumni. This study was done in the USA on the marginalized minorities while the current study is carried out in Uganda on secondary school students.

Campbell (2016) conducted a comparative qualitative study on the role of Alumni in Georgia, Moldova, and Ghana, they found that Alumni Engagement helps to strengthen strong communication systems, learning together in workshops and solving problems through regular communication. In the USA, alumni networks influence social and economic change and influence teachers' pay to affect school academic performance. The comparative findings pointed to the value of alumni networks in terms. This study was a comparative study among three countries on the role of alumni while the current study is carried out in one country, Uganda with no comparison to other countries.

In a study conducted by Muvunyi (2017) in, Embu County in Kenya, the strategies employed by Alumni associations to enhance academic performance in schools under free day secondary education were analysed. The study employed the Capital School Effectiveness and Improvement Theory, focusing on variables such as outcomes, leverage, intellectual capital, and social capital. Using a descriptive survey research design, a sample size of 135 subjects consisting of members of the Board of Management, heads of departments, and Parents Teachers Association was selected through purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires from teachers, while qualitative data was gathered through interviews with heads of departments and PTA members. The findings revealed that school managers utilized various strategies, including inconsistent monitoring of instructional processes and student assessment, supplementing government funding with income-generating activities from free day secondary education, and implementing uncoordinated guidance and counselling programs. Despite these efforts, the desired improvement in academic performance was not achieved, primarily due to the lack of management skill training among most school managers. Therefore, it was recommended that school managers undergo comprehensive leadership training in all aspects of school management to effectively utilize the funds

provided by Alumni Engagement and contribute to enhanced students' academic performance (Meer et al., 2012), addressing the existing study gap. This study was done in Kenya and it consisted of members of the board of governors and PTA whereas the current study was carried out in Uganda and school committee members were not included.

According to a study by Kanady (2015), secondary school students undergo rapid physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth, leading to changes in behaviour and behavioural problems that can impact their academic performance. These students require information, understanding, and guidance from alumni to help them adapt to these transformations. The study employed a descriptive survey research design and was conducted in Gulu County, encompassing 15 secondary schools. The sample size consisted of 130 participants, including 50 boys, 50 girls, 15 Deputy Headteachers, and 15 Heads of the Guidance and Counselling Department. Simple random sampling was utilized, and data were collected through questionnaires and observation checklists. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, mean, and percentages were employed to analyse the quantitative data. The study's findings revealed that alumni have a positive impact on students' behaviour management and ultimately lead to improved academic performance (Omeje & Abugu, 2015). The study intended to explore how alumni can help to change the behaviour of secondary school students, while this study aims to explore the impact of alumni on academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design since it aims at systematically obtaining information that describe a phenomenon, situation or population. The target population was 6 headteachers, 92 teachers, 6 Alumni, Municipal Education Officer (MEO) and Municipal Inspector of Schools (MIS). A sample of 106 respondents was considered for the study from 6 Secondary schools. The study used purposive sampling to select MEO, MIS, Headteachers, and

alumni representatives. The researcher employed a simple random sampling technique to select teachers. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with the MEO, MIS, Alumni and Headteachers during data collection and questionnaires to the teachers during data collection.

Qualitative data from interview guides was analysed using content analysis while quantitative data for questionnaires was analysed.

PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Table 1: The ways of Alumni engagement in secondary schools of Sheema Municipality

Comments		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Alumni employ teachers in special disciplines	F	68	17	31
	%	58.6	14.7	26.7
Alumni ensure that staff welfare is made a priority.	F	34	23	59
	%	29.3	19.8	50.9
The alumni support the school by constructing a building.	F	77	4	35
	%	66.4	3.4	30.2
Alumni organize inspirational talks with students	F	87	6	23
	%	75	5.2	19.8
Alumni have aided the management of discipline among students.	F	78	14	24
	%	67.3	12.1	20.7
Alumni develop a calculated avenue for mentoring students.	F	43	20	53
	%	37.1	17.2	45.7
Alumni organize seminars with students.	F	80	-	36
	%	69	-	31
Average mean		3.28		

The table presents data on the various ways alumni engage with secondary schools in Sheema Municipality. A significant portion of respondents (58.6%) agreed that alumni employ teachers in special disciplines, while 14.7% were neutral, and 26.7% disagreed. This indicates a strong recognition of alumni involvement in enhancing the teaching staff in specific subject areas, although a notable minority do not perceive this engagement.

Only 29.3% of respondents agreed that alumni ensure staff welfare is prioritized, with 19.8% neutral and a majority of 50.9% disagreeing. This suggests that alumni efforts in staff welfare might be inadequate or insufficiently communicated, leading to a perception of inadequate support in this area.

A majority of respondents (66.4%) agreed that alumni support the school by constructing buildings, while 3.4% were neutral and 30.2% disagreed. This reflects a strong acknowledgement of alumni contributions to

school infrastructure, although a substantial minority still do not recognize this support.

A high percentage of respondents (75%) agreed that alumni organise inspirational talks with students, with only 5.2% being neutral and 19.8% disagreeing. This indicates a well-recognized and appreciated effort by alumni to inspire and motivate students.

A significant majority (67.3%) agreed that alumni have aided in the management of discipline among students, while 12.1% were neutral and 20.7% disagreed. This shows a strong positive impact of alumni on student discipline, although some respondents do not perceive this involvement.

Only 37.1% of respondents agreed that alumni develop avenues for mentoring students, with 17.2% neutral and 45.7% disagreeing. This suggests that mentoring by alumni might be less prevalent or effective, indicating a potential area for improvement.

A considerable 69% of respondents agreed that alumni organise seminars with students, with no neutral responses and 31% disagreeing. This reflects a strong involvement of alumni in organising educational seminars, although a third of respondents still do not recognise this effort.

DISCUSSION

Contrary to the positive impacts often associated with alumni engagement, Billings (2017) suggests that there may be disparities in alumni giving behaviours, particularly concerning marginalized minorities. Although the study doesn't directly correlate with academic performance in secondary schools, it implies that various factors, including race, can influence alumni contributions. This highlights the importance of context-specific analysis in understanding alumni involvement.

In a different vein, Jay LeRoux Dillon (2017) emphasizes the financial support that alumni provide to schools and universities, highlighting their critical role in funding major activities. While this underscores potential benefits, the focus remains on financial aspects rather than directly addressing academic performance. Additionally, Siller (2016) underscores alumni support through active participation and networking, recognizing the challenges in fundraising, especially in regions with lower economic status like Uganda.

Campbell's study (2016) delves into the broader impact of alumni networks, accentuating their role in communication systems and social and economic change. Although offering valuable perspectives, the study does not specifically tackle academic performance in secondary schools, and comparisons with other countries may not directly apply to the Ugandan educational landscape.

Moreover, field observations reveal tangible contributions of alumni engagement, including influencing staff postings, organizing training workshops, constructing buildings, and facilitating disciplinary management among students. These grassroots efforts underscore the practical impact of alumni involvement on various

aspects of school functioning, potentially indirectly influencing academic performance.

However, a gap persists between scholarly research and practical field findings. While scholarly literature offers theoretical frameworks and insights, field observations provide firsthand accounts of alumni involvement and its tangible outcomes in secondary schools. Bridging these perspectives could enhance understanding of how alumni engagement translates into academic performance in diverse educational settings like those in Uganda.

CONCLUSION

The field findings reveal a spectrum of perceptions among respondents regarding the extent and effectiveness of alumni engagement in secondary schools. While a majority of respondents recognize alumni involvement in influencing staff postings, employing teachers in specialized disciplines, organizing training workshops, and award ceremonies, there is less consensus on alumni prioritizing staff welfare and developing mentoring avenues. However, there is substantial support for alumni engagement in constructing school buildings, organizing inspirational talks, managing student discipline, and conducting seminars with students.

These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of alumni engagement initiatives and the varying levels of acceptance and perceived efficacy by stakeholders within secondary school communities. They underscore the nuanced understanding of the role that alumni play in contributing to the development and enhancement of secondary education institutions.

Overall, the data suggest a complex landscape where different aspects of alumni engagement are viewed with varying levels of approval and effectiveness within secondary schools. This nuanced perspective sheds light on the diverse impacts that alumni initiatives can have on these educational institutions, emphasizing the importance of considering these varied perceptions when evaluating the role of alumni in secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish alumni-sponsored programs focused on enhancing staff welfare, including initiatives like health insurance schemes, professional development opportunities, and recognition awards for exceptional educators. Collaborate with alumni networks to develop mentorship programs that connect former students with current teachers, fostering community and professional growth. Expand alumni engagement initiatives beyond traditional events by utilizing technology, such as virtual mentorship programs, online forums, and alumni networking platforms. Encourage alumni involvement in school improvement projects, such as curriculum development committees, infrastructure enhancements, and support for extracurricular activities, to cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment to the school's progress.

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