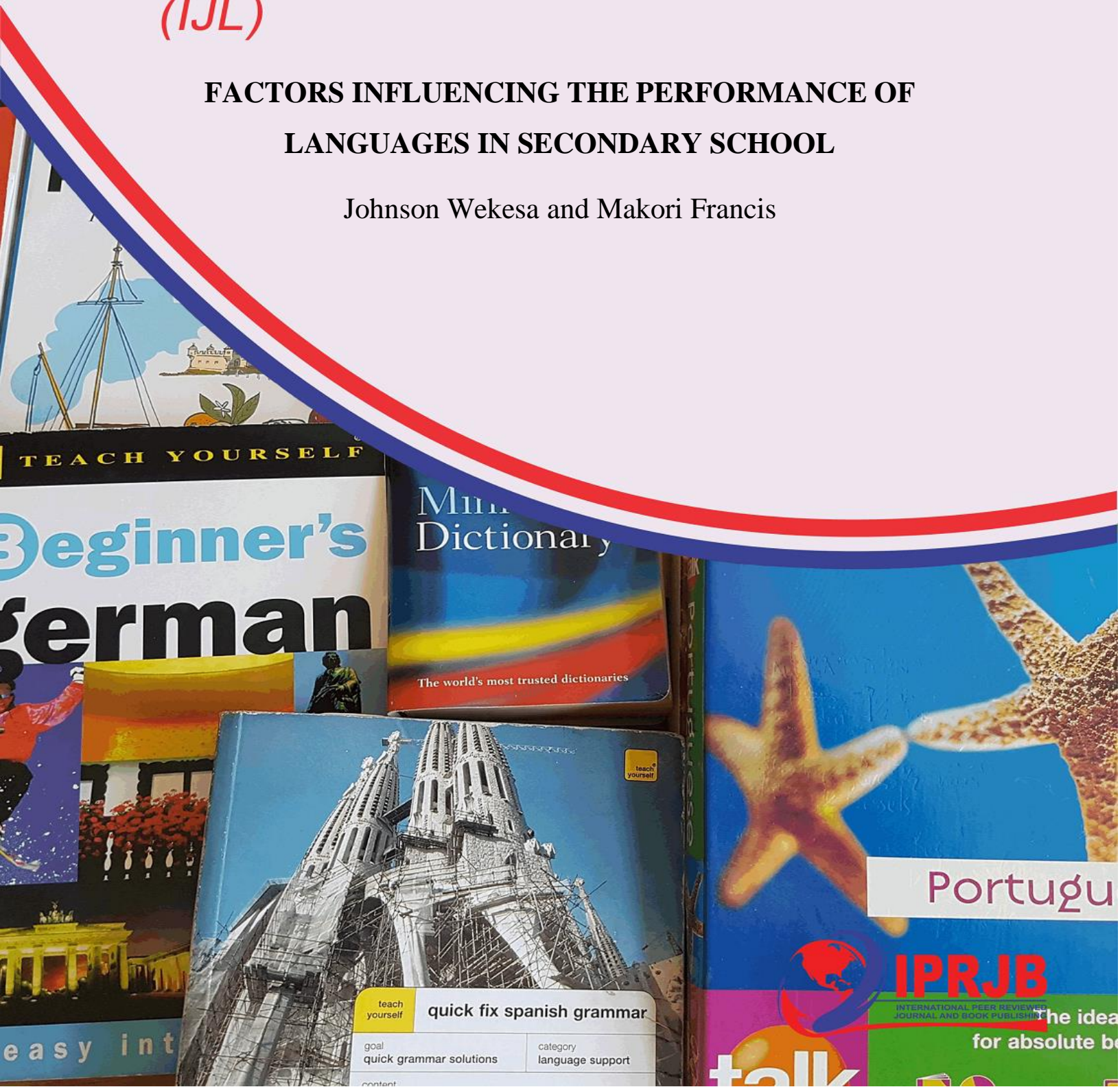


# International Journal of Linguistics (IJL)

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERFORMANCE OF LANGUAGES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence students' performance of languages in secondary school.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). The first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on students' performance of languages from various data bases. The first search was done generally by searching the articles in the Article title, abstract, keywords. The study took an approach of English literature since it is common globally; thus, the focus was on students' performance of languages in secondary schools. After the filtration was done, the third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to students' performance of languages which was split into top key words. Analysis was done using Excel where the study presented the findings in form of themes.

**Findings:** Language policies in schools were found to hold the key to success in language learning. The findings indicated that schools especially district day schools continued to engage untrained and inexperienced personalities as teachers with no pedagogical skills in language. The findings indicated that schools especially district day schools continued to engage untrained and inexperienced personalities as teachers with no pedagogical skills in language. There is a relationship between poverty and academic performance of students. Children from non-poor families can afford to buy the reading materials required for language, can be able to take breakfast before they go to school and are able to pay school fees in time. Most children from rural schools speak in their mother tongues and hence do not get any interest in studying languages even if they find it in school. The teachers also pointed out that children from rural areas do not get much encouragement in their education their parents as those from urban areas and hence end up performing poorly.

**Unique contribution to theory, policy, and practice:** On teaching quality, there is an urgent need by the government to employ more professional teachers of English as schools are unable to hire them due to the strain on finances. There is also a need to provide more textbooks, class readers, revision books and set books.

**Keywords:** *performance, languages, learning, education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of education is a priority task for many countries in the world. Education and training are an investment for national development. It has been used to equip and prepare the youth with knowledge, skills and expertise necessary to enable them to play an effective role in society and to serve the needs of national development. Education also develops the individual talents, personality, attitudes towards work and prepares them for further formal education, training and employment. The report further states that there will be need to lay greater emphasis on quality and relevant education and training. It will also be necessary to intensify research as well as to develop science and technology, creative and performing arts and languages. The Koech Report (1999) postulates that providing quality education to increasing numbers of students, as expected and using the available resources, is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge because of the inadequacy of the available Government resources in providing quality education. It is an opportunity because of the possibility of viewing education as both a service and an industry, which is marketed in order to widen the resource mobilization base.

Language is a means of communication among human beings. This implies that without language communication will be a problem. Languages are indeed very important not only to those people for whom it is the mother tongue but also those for whom it is an official language. The ministry of education in Kenya has expressed concern over the apparent decline in the performance of learners in languages at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) National Examinations. (KNEC Report, 2016). It has also classified languages learning among the core subjects in the curriculum. This means that for one to obtain a better grade in national examinations and therefore gain admission to a public University, he/she must pass in compulsory languages such as English. Acquiring university education is critical for individual career development because it is at the university that one acquires higher education. Specialized skills acquired at this level are vital in securing gainful employment and improve one's living standards. This enables individuals to effectively contribute to the national economic development. This has led to a public outcry from parents, teachers, educational planners and other education stakeholders.

Recent research also shows that of those variables which are potentially open to influence in educational settings, factors to do with teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning (Alton-Lee, 2003; Hattie 2009). For example, research suggests that teachers at the top of the quality distribution can get up to a year's worth of additional learning from students, compared to those who are at the bottom of the quality distribution (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2006). Chetty et al (2011) find that students assigned to high quality teachers (determined by test score-based value-add measures) are more likely to attend college and earn higher salaries, and are less likely to have children as teenagers, suggesting policies to raise the quality of teaching are likely to have substantial economic and social benefits in the long run.

In Nigeria, Adenuga (2002) attributed the decline in education quality (students' achievement) to low and declining level of key inputs such as infrastructural materials, laboratories, libraries and teaching facilities and manpower (classroom teachers) among others. Studies on teachers' effect at the classroom level have found that differential teacher effectiveness is a strong determinant of differences in student learning, far outweighing the effects of differences in class size and heterogeneity.

In Uganda, a baseline study showed that there was a correlation between examination results at the end of secondary schooling to instructional materials. In fact, a test of writing ability positively correlated with instructional materials. This means that in the case of literacy and numeracy it was likely that instructional materials had a significant part to play (Carasco et al. 1996). In the same country a study conducted in a poor region where the population had been visited by many adverse elements such as drought, civil strife and continued insecurity. Oluka and Opolot-Okulut (2008) found that performance of students was adversely affected compared to other regions mainly attributed to teacher factors, large classes, poor school facilities, lack of homework, lack of a reading culture among teachers and pupils, lack of sound leadership in the school administration and inadequate amount of time allocated to teaching and learning.

According to Sanders & Rivers (1996), the influence of teachers is the single most important factor in determining student achievement. The one factor that can make the most difference in improving a student's achievement is a "knowledgeable, skillful teacher" in front of the classroom. Parker (1971) notes that a teacher must function as a knowledgeable, caring adult, providing needed information, making evaluations when called for, aiding in negotiations and decision making when appropriate, adding to the richness of the environment by bringing new things into it and so forth. At times he will, quite usefully, be taken as a language model.

Studies done by Purves (2003) demonstrate that teachers' experience and training have a significant bearing on students' performance in languages. Teaching upgrades by service training do not seem to improve the academic results of students. In contrast, the knowledge that teachers have of their subject, their experience in the use of didactic material and their expectations in terms of students are variables associated with improved student performance. With regard to the characteristics of each teacher, pedagogical practices including availability of time and homework are positively associated with students' performance.

Bitamazire (2005) notes that apart from provision of teaching - learning materials, they should be coordinated and used properly for effective teaching /learning to take place. These materials include audio - visual materials (diagrams, flipcharts, computer monitors, transparencies projected through overhead projectors, slides, pictures etc. and printed materials (handouts, textbooks, study guides etc). He also reported that availability of textbooks and other instructional materials have a positive correlation on student's performance because they facilitate understanding of abstract concepts & directing attention, guide thinking, provide feedback and help in class control. However in his research, he discovered that 68 types of different teaching aids supplied by Nigerian government were never utilized. The researcher concurs with the role of instructional materials but would like to know whether they are being used in language classes.

School climate is associated with safety, healthy relationships, engaged learning and teaching and school improvement efforts. The National School Climate Council (2007) defines school climate and a positive, sustained school climate as based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that

emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment.

Research on safety in schools shows that apart from feeling safe - socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically- being a fundamental human need, it also promotes student learning and healthy development (Devine & Cohen, 2007). However, a great deal of research shows that many students do not physically and emotionally feel safe in schools. For example, a study found evidence that high school students are fearful about going to school because of the violence and personal victimization some of them experience during the school day.

The involvement of parents or other significant adults has a major impact on student achievement (Reeves, 2004). The impact of parental involvement on student achievement is known by teachers, school leaders, educational policymakers and parents; nevertheless, educational accountability systems fail to effectively acknowledge this fact (Reeves, 2004). What holds the school community together and conveys the sense that all the individuals involved with the school are members of a family is the knowledge that everyone is committed to achieving the same outcomes (Sagor, 2004). Comer (2005) reviewed the importance of parent participation in the schools their children attend. He found that if parents could be involved in ways that threatened neither the parents nor the teachers, parental involvement would reach a critical mass that could transform even the most dysfunctional school. Parents, school staff, and students all wanted to succeed (Comer, 2001). A strong linkage between the school and community is invaluable as the education of students must be a team effort.

The expectations of teachers regarding students' capabilities for learning have an influence on classroom practices and the performance of students. Researchers have found that students are aware of differential treatment by teachers and that teacher's low expectation and differential treatment are associated with lower student achievement (Williams, 2003). Students, when asked, can describe the qualities of good teachers. Students share that the good 20 teachers maintain order, have a willingness to help in ways that accommodate different students' learning styles, explain content until everyone gets it regardless of varying classroom activities (whole class, small groups and individual), and make an effort to understand the students by believing in them and letting students know they do (Waxman & Huang, 1997). Good teachers are effective teachers. Effective teachers set high expectations for students and use a variety of strategies to actively engage students. These strategies may include using hands-on experiences, technology, and worthwhile tasks. Teachers must also be able to orchestrate classroom discourse in ways that challenge and engage students, causing them to question and revise their understanding (Corbett & Wilson, 2002). Effective teachers understand the cultures of students in their classrooms and adapt curriculum and instruction accordingly (Comer, 2005). Students report greater satisfaction when their differences are embraced as "a resource that enriches learning" (Schaps, 2003).

Downey (1995) after a lengthy research concluded that most differences in performance in English stem from the parents' background characteristics. He found that children living in households with a stepparent present had fewer parental resources available, which can directly affect educational outcomes. These parental resources included talking about school with children, attending school functions, and knowing some of the children's friends. Brown (2004) found out that adolescents living in families other than married two-parent biological situations were less engaged in school, though the differences between married and cohabiting biological parents was

not significant. Family size also appears to affect achievement .A smaller family generally indicates that there are more resources, both personal and economic, available to each member. Therefore, it is possible for parents to spend more time with their child with regard to school, as well as have money to spend on educational materials, better schools, and the like. Downey (1995) as well.' found that family size affects educational achievement. This research found that the majority of measured parental resources available to any one child are related to family size. The more children .the more thinly spread the interpersonal(time) and economic(money) resources were.

## **Theoretical review**

### **'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT) theory**

Communicative Language Teaching has its origins in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s and more generally in the developments of both Europe and North America. It was postulated in 1972 by linguists D.Flymes (1972) and Wilkins (1972). This approach varies from traditional approaches because it is learner-centred. Communicative language teaching refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The identification of learners' communicative needs provides a basis for curriculum design (Van Ek 1975).Also, linguists state that there is a need to focus on communicative proficiency in language teaching and that Communicative Language Teaching can fulfill this need. Proponents of this approach state that the goal of language teaching is communicative competence. Another aim is the development of procedures for the teaching of the four language skills (writing, reading, speaking, listening). Moreover, the four skills build the basis of the interdependence of language and communication (Richards, Rodgers 1986). Language is viewed as a vehicle of conveying meaning, and knowledge is transmitted through communication involving two parts, for example, speakers and listeners, and writers and readers. Since knowledge and learning are viewed as socially constructed through negotiation according to socio-cognitive perspectives, another dimension of CLT is learner-centred and experience based. In other words, in CLT context, learners are seen as active participants.

The language teachers do not take a dominant role but share different roles such as communication facilitator, independent participant, needs analyst, counsellor, and group process manager -CLT procedures often require teachers to acquire less teacher-centered classroom management skills. It is the teacher's responsibility to organize the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) to create more fascinating experiences for the learners. The teacher has a very important main role: to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The weakness of CLT is that some people contend it has not given an adequate account of EFL teaching despite its initial growth in foreign language teaching in Europe. Stem (1992) argued that one of the most difficult problems is making classroom learning communicative is the absence of native speakers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to students' performance of languages in secondary school. Three sorting

stages were implemented on the subject under study that is students' performance of languages in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. The first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles were based on students' performance of languages from various data bases. The first search was done generally by searching the articles in the Article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject of students' performance of languages. A total of studies that were studied totaled to 30 articles. The filtration process was done basing on the currency of the articles (between the year 2014 and 2019). This section indicates the process that the study followed in analysis of the literature. The researcher reviewed the articles to eliminate duplicates; this ensured only unique studies for unique review. The study took an approach of English literature since it is common globally; thus, the focus was on students' performance of languages in secondary schools. After the filtration was done, the third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to students' performance of languages which was split into top key words. After an in-depth search into the top key words (students' performance of languages), the researcher arrived at 10 articles that were suitable for analysis. Analysis was done using Excel where the study presented the findings in form of themes.

### **FINDINGS AND PRESENTATION**

School physical resources, many schools still lack the necessary teaching and learning resources especially Kiswahili course books, thus impeding academic performance. From the study findings, many schools did not have enough classrooms forcing some to have swelled class sizes which were a burden to teachers. Conspicuously absent in schools were the libraries meaning that students lacked the necessary reference materials thus depending on a teachers' words. According to Stanley et al (2000) Students' capability and notification to learn are determined by the quality of home and school environment and the students' health and nutrition status and the previous learning experiences, including the degree of parental stimulation. The principle source of children's capacity and motivation to learn is the family through domestic endowment and the direct provision of nutrients health care and stimulus.

Language policies in schools were found to hold the key to success in language learning. From the findings, it emerged that all schools had language policies, but what lacked was the will and vigor to enforce them within the school environment. The findings indicated that schools especially district day schools continued to engage untrained and inexperienced personalities as teachers with no pedagogical skills in language. It become also clear from the findings that even the trained teachers lacked the exposure as some school principals failed to sponsor them to symposiums, seminars and in - service training to polish up their prowess in language teaching and learning.

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There is a relationship between poverty and academic performance of students. Children from non-poor families can afford to buy the reading materials required for language, can be able to take

breakfast before they go to school and are able to pay school fees in time. All these according to the teachers contribute to the performance of a child in languages. The teachers added that children from the rural areas are the most disadvantaged because due to poverty children are required to work at home that is unpaid domestic labor. This labor results in frequent absenteeism, chronic fatigue and hence poor performance.

According to the teachers most children from rural schools speak in their mother tongues and hence do not get any interest in studying languages even if they find it in school. The teachers also pointed out that children from rural areas do not get much encouragement in their education their parents as those from urban areas and hence end up performing poorly. It was further found that most parents from rural schools were illiterate and therefore even if they were in support of their children's education they would not be able to help them in with their homework.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions were drawn. Although majority of the teachers of English are professionally trained and experienced they have high teaching load and very large classes to teach hence they are unable to effectively guide students in writing compositions, supervising the reading of set books, guiding them in class discussions and debates and marking and returning their assignments. On the availability of teaching and learning materials, it can be concluded that English textbooks, revision books, class readers, oral literature books and set books are grossly inadequate especially at times like now where schools are admitting many students as a result of free primary school and free day secondary programmes. On the school climate, it can be concluded that schools have very few traditions that support effective scholarship. Structures lack to supervise teachers hence majority are never punctual in class, teachers hardly show respect to students, they never show sensitivity to individual differences, do not update themselves on current practices in the field and ashamed weak students. Teachers are also overburdened since there are no structures to reduce their workload and because of this, they may not be willing to help students at their own time. Students are also bullied and victimized by their colleagues and do not respect others who get good grades. Students also absented themselves without good excuses. Principals too hardly complimented teachers in public and were generally not good role models of hard work. Schools also hardly reward excellence, do not have well-equipped libraries and have inadequate security. On home factors, majority of the families were found to be large, majority of the students resided with both parents, majority of the parents had only basic education and therefore hardly talked to their children about the importance of English and were also hardly involved in the academic life of the students. Majority of the parents hardly attended PTA meetings or advised their children on course selection or provided their children with adequate books.

## **Recommendations**

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested: On teaching quality, there is an urgent need by the government to employ more professional teachers of English as schools are unable to hire them due to the strain on finances. The few PTA teachers may be unqualified, underpaid and therefore under ambitious. There is also a need to provide more textbooks, class readers, revision books and set books. Schools can come up with income-



generating activities like selling seedlings, poultry keeping e.t.c in order to supplement the fees collection.

On home background, it is recommended that parents be aware of family planning methods, be encouraged to register for adult education and be encouraged to advise their children on the value of academic excellence. They should also be encouraged to attend PTA regularly in order to motivate their children and track their progress.

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