



## The School Culture in Demystifying The “Failure Syndrome” In A Kenyan High School

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### Abstract

The issue that this study addresses is to find out why students in D classes (form one D; two D; three D and four D) historically perform poorly in class and eventually in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) compared to other classes in the school. To address this problem, the purpose of this study will be to discover why this particular stream historically performs dismally. To gather data, a questionnaire was administered to 52 students. The questionnaires were coded and analyzed. This data lead to the following five themes: school administrative support, self-efficacy, teachers, the other streams of students and parent involvement. These themes will be useful for understanding why this group of students performs poorly.

**Indexing terms/Keywords:** Culture; Demystify; Failure; School; Stream; Syndrome.

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### Introduction

In Kenya for the students to join secondary school they sit the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). In this study, the secondary school where the study was conducted is a high performing secondary school. The School is given priority in selecting the new students (form one) with very high pass mark to join the school. The criterion for selection to join a particular class once admitted to the school is not based on KCPE results. This school has seven classes in each form. The classes are named as A, B, T, D, P, G and K. The streams are four. This makes a total of twenty-eight classes. This letter is used to protect the identity of the school and participants. As the students join the school, they are selected at random and assigned into one class. Students have equal chance of performing well in any class assigned. However, this is not the case. Classes D from one to four continues to perform dismally. Thus, classes D in the four streams are underperformers.



## Statement of The Problem

The records available in the school indicate that over several years the performance in class and eventually at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education of classes D from from one to four has always been poor where they are either the last or second last. The historical records indicate that at one time a decision was arrived to reshuffle the stream D in form two. This was an attempt to improve the stream performance. However, nothing changed. This scenario has led to the coining of the term "D Syndrome" by the school community. The letter D is the name assigned to the class and stream.

This study therefore, set out to investigate the factors that have contributed to this class remaining in this Position and Proposing Possible Practical Solutions.

## Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development which stresses process-person-context time interrelatedness (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The interrelationships of variables within the school as an organization and range of variables within the micro systems and meso systems segments of the Bioecological Model was a premise upon which this study is examined. This study was however confined to the micro systems and meso systems segments that capture interrelationships and on-goings inside the school and the family set up. The novelty in this theory is the interactions among the influencing entities and their impact on the individual.

## Research Methodology

Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. The School administration become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then considers ways of working differently. Teachers and principals help each other by working collaboratively. Working with colleagues helps teachers and principals in their professional development (Watts, 1985, p. 118). 'Action Research is done by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analysing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be.' (Sagor, 1992, p. 4).

A simple questionnaire was administered where the students were to answer simple questions. To address the ethical issues the students were not required to write their names in the questionnaire.

## 1.5 The Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are discussed using the open and close ended questions.

### Table 1: Are you proud to be members of D class?

#### Item Finding

Are you proud of your D class?

Abstention – 1 (1.9)

Yes – 40 (76.9)

No – 11 (21.2)

The findings indicate that the majority 76.9% of the class members are comfortable with being members of D class. However, it is important to address the issues affecting the remaining 24.1% and bring them on board. Therefore, the name is not the problem.



**Table 2: Nicknames Assigned to D class by School Community**

**Item Responses**

Nicknames & Attitude of other students toward class D

- Failures
- Dumb
- D syndrome
- Worst class
- Have no genius
- Foolish
- Class ya Madanda (fools)
- Wale wamwisho (the last ones)
- rulers from behind
- Class of dummies
- Class of the black
- Class of losers
- The dwarfs
- The blacklisted
- The tail
- Ugly
- Under performers
- Lower class
- They are beyond help
- Dirty class

The nicknames assigned to this stream from Form One to Form four has affected their self-esteem and therefore, their attitude has affected their performance in class and in KCSE examinations. The stream has resigned to its fate. There is need to sensitize the members of the school community to avoid using derogatory language against their colleagues. The seed of failure is planted immediately the students are assigned this D class on day one. The process of dehumanizing the class continues systematically as they proceed to the next level. This has become a vicious cycle and this action research aims at solving.

**Table 3: Reasons advanced by other students why D class under performs**

**Item Responses**

- Attitude of Other Students on performance of D class
- They don't read
- Have an attitude towards reading
- An inheritance
- Lazy
- Weak
- For as long as they can remember they have been there
- Not clever
- They always do what is wrong
- Noise makers
- They are rude
- They are notorious
- Slow learners
- Nobody want to be associated with the class
- Poor performers
- Prayers cannot even help



- They are idiots
- First suspects for anything wrong in the school
- Class of stupid people
- Nothing good comes out of them
- Negative things associated with the class
- No matter how hard they try, they are always last
- A class meant for the last
- Cursed class by satanic powers from the Free Masons
- Bewitched class
- They are not bright
- A class of no say
- They don't understand anything in class
- They will be forever being the last in everything
- The class is despised
- They know nothing
- "They are the greatest noisemakers and can't understand things taught as fast as others do"

In the academic life of a student, the other students play a great role in encouraging their colleagues to perform well. However, in this case the other students from the rest of the streams demoralize and despise them. This has contributed to their performance.

**Table 4: Attitude of teachers towards D class according to members of the class**

#### **Item Responses**

Attitude of School Teachers

- Talk of delta syndrome
- The trend of the class
- Have negative attitude
- Assume they will be last
- Do not mark papers fairly and justly
- They always blame the class
- They teach knowing that we are even last even before exams
- Some teachers are positive and encourage us putting more effort
- Others have already lost hope on us
- Some prefer other classes
- Some teachers victimize the class
- They teach as if they are not happy to be associated with the class
- Condemned for being failures
- Some teachers say things that lower the class self-esteem
- No teacher is happy to teach delta
- Cite a particular teacher who really demoralizes the class
- Some teachers have made us lose hope completely
- Others really humiliate us during lessons
- A particular language teacher really encourages us to overcome the syndrome
- Some teachers have even joined other students in discouraging them
- Teachers do not even ask questions
- Some teachers have surrendered already
- Associate the class with slow learners
- Others think the class can never make it no matter what they do
- Others teach because they have to cover syllabus
- The class teacher is doing her best



- Some teachers see them as noise makers
- Some teach for the sake of teaching
- Some teachers discriminate the class
- In any arrangement they appear last
- During group 4&5 lessons they are always called last
- Always criticized by teachers
- Most are not proud to teach the class
- Some teachers ridicule and judge them according to their performance
- They keep on reminding us of Delta Syndrome
- Teachers are too fast in teaching
- Should not dwell in the past
- Some teachers miss lessons & do not arrange make up

**Table 5: The role of Parents according to the members of the D class**

#### **Item Responses**

What role can parents play in academic progress of a student?

- Give them support
- Pray for us at all times
- Talk to teachers to change attitude
- Be close to our teachers and encourage them
- Pay keen attention to each of us
- Follow/monitor our progress
- Provide the basic necessities
- Encourage us to work harder
- Each parent to discuss with their daughter the dangers of negative attitude/importance of positive thinking
- Take keen interest in performance
- Speak to us over the holiday
- Take time to inquire on our performance
- Stop pressuring us and motivate us
- Buy revision books
- Give moral support
- Have a meeting with the Principal to sort out this issue once and for all
- Work hand in hand with teachers
- Parents to take charge during the holiday and ensure we study (too much TV & mobile phones)
- Be involved in our studies as much as they can
- At home let us have peace
- With slight improvement they should encourage us
- All parents to participate in class activities
- Should not give up on us
- Inspire us instead of shouting at us
- Support us mentally, emotionally & physically
- Parents should consider their stage in life (sensitive) & be keen on words they utter
- Talk to administration to help us
- Provide conducive environment for study while at home
- Come up with a motivation formula to reward those who achieve set targets
- Sue teachers who ridicule us
- Help us change the negative attitude
- Believe in us
- Should be strict with us



- Be involved in our studies, payment of fees is everything

From the responses parents play a critical role in the academic life of students. They need to be part and parcel of the academic life.

#### **Table 6: Change of Class Name**

##### **Item Finding**

Those who believe name can be changed

18 = 34.6%

Retain D

25 = 48.1%

Abstentions

9 = 17.3%

Majority 48.1% of the students support the retention of the name, while 34.6% were of the opinion that the name should be changed. Combing them with non-committal will be 51.9%, consequently, there is need for sensitizing students on this issue with a sober mind. This is an indication that they associate their poor performance to the assigned name.

#### **Table 7: Suggested Solutions by The Members of D Class to Improve Performance**

##### **Item Findings**

Suggestions on improving performance

- Do a lot of practice
- Help us get rid of negative attitude
- Encourage us to feel confident that we can make it
- Bring awareness to other students that we are same
- Close our ears to those discourage us
- Teamwork in class
- Teachers to teach with passion
- Work hard to prove them wrong
- The fast learners to assist slow learners
- Time management
- Cooperation between parents, students and parents
- Possibility of name change
- Mix the students afresh
- Change some teachers
- Listen to student's ideas & contributions
- Attitude change by teachers
- Form one should be told good things about Delta
- Have more time with motivational speakers
- To be treated equally by teachers as students
- Create a healthy competitive environment
- Administration to take stern action on those perpetuating D syndrome
- Teachers to be keen on assignments
- Teachers to change their teaching approach



- Avoid sleeping in class
- Stop changing teachers every time
- Students to be active in class
- Be allowed to ask questions
- “D Syndrome” should be banned in school
- Students to stop being self-centered and unconcerned

The majority of the students understand what it takes to perform well in their examinations. This is a clear indication that solutions to problems are with the students. With guidance and counseling this problem can be overcome.

**Table 8: Other Issues Raised in The Discussion Forum by The Members of D Class**

#### **Item Discussion Forum**

Issues raised by students

- I have no self-confidence
- I have negative attitude
- How can I improve my memory?
- I feel discouraged when I do not do well
- Teachers discourage
- I lose interest in studies
- Sleeps in class
- Friends & teachers discriminate me
- My friends affect my studies
- I doubt myself
- I need a study partner

#### **Conclusion**

The study found a significant relationship between the school culture and the performance of D class. It was thus concluded that the D class members, other students in the school, the teachers, parents and school administration determine the performance of students.

#### **Research Recommendations**

Several aspects were noticed in the study which elicited recommendations which should be adopted by the D students, other students, teachers, parents, and school administration. If all the stakeholders combine efforts, then this dragon of the “D syndrome” will be overcome once and for all.

The stakeholders should immediately take this new gospel with zeal so that students are rescued from this captive mentality.

The recommendations for specific categories are subdivided as shown in table 9.

**Table 9: Recommendations for Individual Stakeholder’s Categories**

#### **Category Action**

D class members

- Remove fear of failing in exams from their mind
- Good preparation is key to success
- Stay focused on their set goals and not giving up on whatever they set to accomplish
- Positive thinking can change a problem



- Self-discipline
- Believe in themselves
- Have an attitude that all is possible
- Free the mind from captivity and negative thinking
- Cultivate a winning spirit within themselves
- Keep the company of successful achievers
- Dream big
- Allow God to touch your life through prayer and meditation
- Other Students
- Avoid using nicknames
- Encourage their colleagues to overcome the syndrome
- They should be part of the solution
- Teachers
- Shape the minds and satisfy the learners thirst for knowledge
- Propel learners to their goals in life
- They motivate and encourage
- Should be the best friend of learners
- Parents
- Parents are both the foundation and pillars on which success can begin
- Give advice and support
- Provide the basic needs & pay fees
- Provide a home environment conducive to study
- Be responsible, caring and keen parent
- Too much pressure is counterproductive
- Parents inspire, listen and offer moral support
- Parents should not study through their daughter
- School Administration
- Team leader in slaying the dragon of failure

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