ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of school culture on performance of Kenya certificate of Secondary Education examinations in schools in Maara District by establishing the extent to which element of school culture influence students KCSE performance; analyzing decision making on students’ academic performance examining the effects or reward systems on students performance, determining the extent to which principal’s leadership skills influence students performance as well as establishing the extent to which students perception of culture influence their academic achievements. Culture includes deep patterns of values, beliefs and traditions that have been formed over the course of history. In the study, the school culture is defined as the element of school environment that is developed over time. The study was based on the assumption that the respondents would be honest in their responses, the records would be available in selected schools in the district to confirm students’ performance and the headteachers would allow the researcher to access students academic records on Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). The study was guided by Victor Vroom’s expectance theory of motivation which shows motivation as a product of valence, expectancy and instrumentality. The study used descriptive study design to collect data from a large population in order to determine the correlation between variables. The population consisted of 600 teachers and 42 headteachers in Maara District. Thirty secondary schools were selected from the 42 across categories and type which includes: day, boarding, single sex and mixed schools. The researcher applied stratified sampling to select a total of 229 respondents. The analysis of data was aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. Processed data was represented in the form of percentages and tables upon which data could be interpreted easily. According to the study, majority of the teachers indicated that principals leadership skills highly influence students’ performance. In addition most of headteachers used leadership style that involved teachers and students in decision making. The study findings indicated that the three selected elements of culture had a positive influence on students’ performance in KCSE. For example schools where parents are involved in decision making, students’ performance was improved. Likewise when both teachers and students are motivated, a culture of hardwork and team spirit is enhanced which in turn affect performance positively. The study established that a number of schools in the district have embraced respect, team work and hardwork as their cultural aspects and this has influenced students' academic performance positively. The researcher suggests that other studies on the same should be carried out in other districts, to investigate whether schools in these districts are experiencing the same cultural challenges. The researcher recommends that headteachers should create a culture that acts as standard or a rule book for teachers and students and should also adopt a leadership style that includes major stakeholders in decision making and teachers should be motivated to enhance a good culture within their schools.