

# An Assessment of the Attitudes of Students towards History and Government in Selected Secondary Schools in Bomet County in Kenya

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## Abstract

History and Government is a subject that is an integral part of the Kenyan secondary school curriculum. Over the years, many students have been developing little or no interest in the subject because it is perceived as being marginal as compared to sciences. Several studies in Kenya have discovered that performance in secondary schools is hugely determined by students' capacity and motivation to learn. Thus, this study thus set out to establish the cause of this decline in interest of students towards History and Government in secondary schools. The study sought to determine the attitudes of form two and three students towards History and Government in Selected Secondary Schools in Bomet County. The target population comprised of all public secondary schools, all the fifty two principals, all the History and Government teachers teaching History and Government in form two and form three and all the students taking History and Government in the study area. From the target population, the researcher used stratified random sampling to select 18 secondary schools, 18 school principals, 24 History and Government teachers and 410 forms 2 and 4 students taking History and Government. The researcher used both closed questionnaire to obtain information from History and Government teachers and students. Semi-structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from school principals. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data using SPSS software. Out of the four hundred and ten students who responded to the questionnaire 71% of them expressed that they enjoy learning History and Government. 87.3% of the students considered the subject useful for their future careers. Only 12.7% responded that they do not enjoy learning History and Government the main reason being that it is not enjoyable since it lacked room for creativity and challenging content and its lessons are hence boring. 88.9% of principals agreed that students in their schools like History and Government. The reason given by the principals was that history leads one to pursue arts related courses. , 66.7% of the principals responded that it should continue being an optional subject in secondary schools. The research concluded that majority of the students had positive attitude towards History and Government. The research recommended that principals and teachers should endeavor to cultivate positive attitude in students for all the subjects since most teachers encourage the students to take sciences more seriously than humanities. More research should be carried out to determine the major reason why the failure and low interest of students in the subject in the study area is still persistent.

**Keywords:** Student's Attitude, History and Government, Secondary Schools

## INTRODUCTION

History and government is a subject that is an integral part of the Kenyan secondary school curriculum (Kiio, 2012; Woolman, 2001). It belongs to the humanities group of subjects, which are examinable at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KSCE) examination. Since 1992 History and Government has been an elective subject (Wosyanju, 2009). This means that students can choose not to study it after Form 2.

The importance of studying History and Government as a subject lies in the fact that it puts into perspective humanity's past events, accounts and how they impact on peoples' lives today. It looks at the process of humanity's development of civilization from the early times to the present (Tosh, 2006). It peruses inventions and discoveries, wars and revolutions, ideals on citizenship as well as democratic that the teacher is most comfortable with (Nasibi & Kiio, 2005). Nasibi (2015) points out that through the learning of history and Government we develop reasonable judgment and intelligent action by learning from past experiences.

According to Kiio (2012) History and Government is no longer a popular subject amongst learners. Although its potency was emphasized by Ominde's commission, learners don't seem to see it's value. Noting the value of History and Government in the school curriculum and in nation building, the Kenya Education Commission of (1964 and 1999) through the Ominde commission (1964) and Koech commission (1999) observed that history is not just an object of human curiosity but a source of that emotional security that gives maturity and self-confidence (Commonwealth Education Fund, & Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2013). Right from independence till recent, educational commissions saw this subject as a very reliable tool of national reconstruction and unity and therefore recommended the teaching of African History in schools.

For the purpose of making this success, the Ministry of Education through KIE (2006) released a teachers' handbook which was based on History and Government syllabus. The book provided the essentials of teaching History and Government. The study of History and Government as stated in the syllabus is to promote national unity and citizenship among others, underscore the importance of this subject in the secondary curriculum.

The society today tends to place high priority on sciences and technology. Secondary school students are therefore looking for 'marketable' subjects that can open doors for them in the current job market locally as well as abroad once they leave school. Amukowa (2013) state that there was objection to the emphasis on technical training by those students who preferred to pursue white collar or clerical jobs. This element of marketability of subjects in relation to the job market may relegate History and Government to the rank of lower importance subject.

Several studies in Kenya have discovered that performance in secondary schools is hugely determined by students' capacity and motivation to learn, quality teachers, core textbooks, libraries, instructional time and school physical facilities (Abidin *et al.*, 2012; Wachanga & Mwangi, 2004; Kiio, 2012; Woolman, 2001). Attitudes are learnt predisposition to respond positively or negatively to certain objects, situations or persons. Attitudes are said to be positive when they are favorably directed towards a target. When they unfavorably directed towards a target, they are said to be negative. The attitude of teachers and learners towards a subject affect the teaching and learning process.

Nasibi (2015), in the study on attitudes of Kenya secondary school student towards History in Nairobi schools revealed that sex was not a determinant factor in shaping students attitudes. It also revealed that a good number of students like the subject even if the performance was poor, but the study was conducted over two decades ago when 7-4-2-3 system of Education had not been phased out. At this time also a lot of European History had dominated the syllabus.

It is in view of the above that the study sought to find out the constraints affecting History and Government instruction in Secondary school Curriculum. This study thus set out to establish the cause of this decline in interest of students towards History and Government in secondary schools. The study sought to determine the attitudes of form two and three students towards History and Government in Selected Secondary Schools in Bomet County.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Bomet County, which is situated in old Rift-Valley Province, Kenya. The total area of the County is 1050km<sup>2</sup>. There were 54 secondary schools in the county. The study area was selected for the study because there was no evidence of any research on constraints on effective instruction in History and Government that has been done in the area. The study adopted descriptive survey design to investigate constraints on effective History and Government instruction.

The target population comprised of all the fifty four (54) public secondary schools in the study area, all the fifty two principals of the schools, all the eighty three (83) History and Government teachers teaching history and Government in form two and form three and one thousand three hundred and sixty four (1364) students taking History and Government in the study area.

From the target population, the researcher used stratified random sampling to select 18 secondary schools, 18 school principals, 24 History and Government teachers and 410 forms 2 and 4 students taking History and Government.

The researcher used both closed questionnaire to obtain information from History and Government teachers and students. Semi-structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from school principals. It was used to supplement information, which was obtained through the questionnaire.

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology of Kenya. The researcher then reported to the District Education office to inform about the study. The researcher then carried out reconnaissance trip to selected schools to seek consent from the head teachers and to familiarize himself with what was going on in the selected schools. The researcher visited the sampled schools to administer the questionnaire and to explain the purpose of the study. The researcher gave the respondents ample time to fill in the questionnaire and collected them. He also conducted the interviews as he administered the questionnaires.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics enabled the researcher to code the information and analyze it in a systematic way in order to come to useful conclusion and recommendations. It was also used in organizing, summarizing, interpreting and to communicate qualitative information. Descriptive statistics such as frequency generated using tally sheets were used; percentage calculated and presented using tables and pie charts. To facilitate this, the program contained in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results revealed that 78% of the sampled principals were male while 22% were female. It is evident that most of the schools are dominated by male head teachers. The analysis also indicated that 83.3% of the principals are between the ages of 40-49 years old, while 16.7% in the 30-39 age bracket. The findings also revealed that 55.6% of the principals had teaching experience of over 16 years and above and 29% of the History and Government teachers have experience of over 20 years. Only 8% of the sampled teachers had experience of under 6 years. This study deduced that the majority of the school principals and teachers have enough experience in terms of the years to provide the necessary skills in terms of management of the school and offer quality education and teaching.

The findings reveals that 66.7% of the teachers were degree holders, 20.8% are diploma holders while 8.3% are certificate holders. This study shows majority of the teachers are qualified and therefore able to handle History and Government curriculum.

The findings showed that in the total number of sampled students, 51% of the respondents were male and 49% were female. It was found out that there was no significant difference in the order of the sampled students.

The main objective of the study was to determine the attitudes of students towards History and Government. The study used a sample of student taking History and Government in Form Two and Form three. This was done to check their responses. In order to establish the students attitudes on the importance and liking of History and Government, students were requested to rank secondary schools subjects in order of preference. The subjects selected for this question included the four core subjects of English, Kiswahili, Mathematics and Chemistry.

The three main humanities History and Government, Geography and Religious Education were listed as well as the optional sciences Biology and Physics. The technical subjects included Business Studies and Agriculture. The subjects totaled eleven and were listed randomly. The results are shown in figure 1 below:

Subject	Number sampled	Percentage of those who ranked position one
History and Government	110	26.8
Mathematics	75	18.3
English	49	12.0
B/Studies	29	7.1
Biology	29	7.1
Kiswahili	25	6.1
Religious Education	25	6.1
Chemistry	17	4.1
Physics	16	3.9
Geography	9	2.2
Agriculture	4	1.0

Out of the four hundred and ten students who responded to the questionnaire 71% of them expressed that they enjoy learning History and Government because their teachers are always ready to teach the subject and are motivating. Another reason as to why they responded positively is that they found learning history and government interesting and easy to understand. In their view, they stated that history and government plays a part in their future career goals and that it helps students learn about other countries, their government, culture and societies. Students also enjoy learning about Kenya and its colonizer.

The findings contradicted that of Kiio (2012) that history and government is not a popular subject amongst learners today in secondary schools. He revealed that there was mass exodus of learners from History and Government to other subjects which was not the case in this study.

When asked about the relevance of learning history and government to their future careers, 87.3% of the students considered the subject useful. Students who responded pointed out that they have ambitions to become government administrators, lawyers, political scientists, archaeologists and teachers of history among others. All of these careers require the skills and knowledge learnt from the study of History and Government.

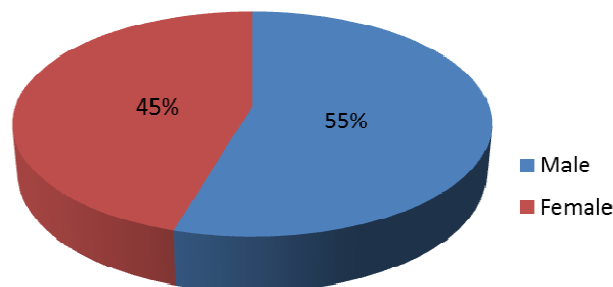
3.7% of the student respondents stated that History and Government would help to boost their mean grade at K.C.S.E., therefore helping them gain access to further education and consequently into good employment. 12.7% responded that they do not enjoy learning History and Government the main reason being that it is not enjoyable since it lacked room for creativity and challenging content and its lessons are hence boring. These students felt that History and Government was not useful for their future career goals. They also found that they did not do well in History and Government because they found it difficult to remember all the details of dates and events found in the subject.

81.3% stated that they enjoyed learning History and Government, and they found it useful for their future career goals, a small number raised some issues as the reasons why the subject might not be liked. These issues were the lack of motivation from the teachers, subject being not interesting, learning activities not

motivating and that the subject could not lead them to useful future careers.

Going by the subject ranking majority of students (26.8%) felt that History and Government was the most preferred subject. This indicates that majority of the students had a favourable attitudes towards the subject. Those who responded that they enjoy learning History and Government attributed this to their teachers, who always attend the lessons promptly, teach well and motivate them. They also expressed that they find learning History and Government Interesting as a subject.

The study also attempted to establish whether sex of students influence their attitude towards History and Government. The results are indicated in the pie chart below:



**Figure 1: Gender of the students who have positive attitude towards History and Government**

The figure shows that 55% of the males compared to 45% of the females like History and Government. This shows that more males than females like studying the subject. These findings concur with that of Wosyanju (2009) who carried out a similar research in Nairobi and stated that sex is not a determinant factor in shaping a student's attitudes towards History and Government.

The study further sought the school principals' comments on the attitudes of students about the subject. The results show that a majority 88.9% of principals agreed that students in their schools like History and Government. The reason given by the principals was that history leads one to pursue arts related courses. 91.7% of the school principals also felt that students were interested in learning History and Government.

When asked whether History and Government should continue being an optional subject in secondary schools, 66.7% of the principals responded that it should continue being an optional subject in secondary schools. The reasons they gave were that there was lack of history teachers to teach the subject. Others suggested that the subject does not lead students to choose marketable courses after secondary school.

## Conclusion

Attitude is central to the education process. It either promotes or inhibits students' behavior or influences choices to attend, respond, value, participate or make commitment to educational activities. Negative attitude of secondary school students towards certain subjects has been a very big problem. The research concluded that majority of the students had positive attitude towards History and Government. This shows that the reason for the failure and low interest of students in the subject cannot be attributed to negative attitude. The study reveals that high positive attitudes towards the subject do not necessarily lead to high performance.

## Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusions the following recommendations were drawn:

- The school principals and teachers should endeavor to prioritize all the subjects equally.
- The ministry of education together with the Kenya institute of education (KIE) should organize for regular in-servicing of teachers and History and Government. There should also be seminars and workshops at county level in order to broaden teachers' competences, knowledge and their content delivery tactics.
- Secondary schools should provide for a variety of learning resources such as adequate textbooks, reference books for all the subjects.
- More research should be carried out to determine the attitudes of students and its effect on performance.

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