Journal of Popular Education in Africa: **ISSN 2523-2800 (online)**
October, November & December 2025, Volume 9, Number 10, 11 & 12
Citation: Mutiso, K. A; Mwania, J. M & Wafula, J. A. (2025). Influence of Regular Peer Mentor-Mentee Meetings on Students' Academic Performance in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County, Kenya. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa,* 9(10), 248 - 258.

Influence of Regular Peer Mentor-Mentee Meetings on Students' Academic Performance in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County, Kenya

By

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Abstract
The global pursuit of academic excellence in secondary education faces significant hurdles in resource-constrained environments. In Kenya, high student-to-teacher ratios limit individualized support, necessitating scalable, cost-effective interventions. Peer mentorship has emerged as a high-impact strategy, yet its effectiveness is highly contingent on implementation quality, particularly the consistency of mentor-mentee engagement. This study aimed to quantitatively determine the influence of the regularity of peer mentor-mentee meetings on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach. A stratified sample of 338 students and 165 teachers from public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County participated. Data were collected using structured questionnaires with 5-point Likert scales to measure perceptions of meeting regularity and its impact on academic performance. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis to test the formulated hypothesis. The findings revealed a powerful, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the regularity of mentor-mentee meetings and academic performance. The correlation was exceptionally strong from the perspective of both teachers ($r = .701$, $p < .001$) and students ($r = .723$, $p < .001$). However, the study uncovered a critical implementation gap: while over 75% of respondents acknowledged the benefits of consistency, a vast majority of students (over 75%) reported that meetings were irregular and the time allocated was inadequate. The study concludes that the consistency of mentor-mentee interaction is a foundational determinant of a peer mentorship program's success. Ad hoc or sporadic meetings yield limited impact. The findings provide a clear, evidence-based mandate for educational administrators to institutionalize mentorship by embedding regular, protected time for meetings into the school timetable. This transforms mentorship from a peripheral activity into a core component of the academic support system, offering a viable pathway to enhance student achievement in challenging educational contexts.

Keywords: Peer Mentorship, Academic Performance, Mentor-Mentee Meetings, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Kenyan Education, Secondary Schools, Machakos County

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1. Introduction

The pursuit of academic excellence within secondary education is a global imperative, yet it is fraught with challenges, particularly in the developing nations of Sub-Saharan Africa. Educational systems across the region are frequently characterized by high student-to-teacher ratios, limited learning resources, and significant socio-economic disparities, all of which converge to impede student learning and constrain academic achievement (Pillay, 2017). In Kenya, despite progressive policies such as Free Day Secondary Education, these challenges persist. Many public secondary schools, especially in semi-urban and rural areas like Machakos County, operate with overcrowded classrooms that severely limit a teacher's capacity to provide the individualized attention students need to thrive (TSC, 2022). This systemic constraint necessitates the exploration of innovative, cost-effective, and scalable interventions that can supplement traditional classroom instruction.

Peer mentorship, a structured support system where more experienced or academically proficient students guide their peers, has emerged as a particularly promising strategy in this context. Grounded in robust educational theory, the practice leverages the unique power of peer relationships to foster a supportive learning environment, enhance motivation, and improve academic outcomes (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Terrion & Leonard, 2017). However, the mere existence of a mentorship program does not guarantee its success. The literature consistently demonstrates that the effectiveness of such programs is highly dependent on the quality of their design and implementation (Gershenfeld, 2014).

Among the various design elements, the frequency and regularity of mentor-mentee interactions have been identified as a critical, yet often overlooked, determinant of program impact. Sporadic meetings fail to build the trust, rapport, and continuity necessary for meaningful mentorship. In contrast, regular, scheduled meetings create a predictable rhythm of support, fostering accountability and allowing for the sustained, incremental process of learning and skill development that underpins academic growth (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Herrera et al., 2011).

This study focuses on this crucial dimension within the specific context of Machakos Sub-County. While informal peer support systems exist in many schools in the region, there is a significant lack of empirical data on the structure, consistency, and, most importantly, the academic impact of these interactions. This research moves beyond the general question of *whether* mentorship works to the more practical and pressing question of *how* it works best.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County, like many across Kenya, grapple with structural challenges that directly undermine academic performance. Overburdened teachers in large classrooms cannot provide the consistent, individualized feedback and guidance that are crucial for student development. In response, many schools have initiated peer mentorship programs as a low-cost solution. However, these programs often exist in an unstructured, ad

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hoc manner, with meetings occurring irregularly and often relegated to the periphery of the school calendar. This creates a significant problem: schools are investing time and social capital in interventions that may be structurally designed to fail.

The core issue is a lack of empirical understanding regarding the specific mechanisms that make mentorship effective. While the benefits of mentorship are widely assumed, there is little local data that quantifies the importance of its structural components, such as the regularity of meetings. Without clear, evidence-based insights, school administrators risk supporting mentorship programs that are inconsistent, unreliable, and ultimately ineffective, leading to wasted effort and disillusioned students. This implementation gap the difference between the potential of mentorship and its on-the-ground reality represents a missed opportunity to significantly and sustainably improve student outcomes. This study seeks to close that gap by providing a rigorous, quantitative assessment of the relationship between the regularity of mentor-mentee meetings and academic performance.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of regular peer mentor-mentee meetings on students' academic performance in the public secondary schools of Machakos Sub-County.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant relationship between regular mentor-mentee meetings and students' academic performance.

2. Literature Review

This section synthesizes the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence that frame the relationship between the regularity of mentor-mentee meetings and academic performance. It begins by exploring the core theories that explain *why* consistency is critical, followed by a review of empirical studies that have validated this principle in diverse contexts.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The investigation is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Designed Intentional Relational Theory (DIRT).

2.1.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory posits that learning is an inherently social process. Its central concept, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), is directly applicable to peer mentorship. The ZPD is the cognitive space between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable other, such as a peer mentor. The mentor's role is to provide scaffolding temporary support like hints, feedback, and modeling that enables the mentee to master tasks within their ZPD.

The regularity of mentor-mentee meetings is fundamental to this scaffolding process. Learning is not a single event but an incremental journey. Consistent, predictable interactions allow the mentor to provide ongoing, adaptive scaffolding that responds to the mentee's evolving needs. A weekly meeting, for example, creates a continuous learning loop of instruction, practice, and feedback. Sporadic meetings break this loop, leaving the scaffolding incomplete and hindering the internalization of knowledge. From a Vygotskian perspective,

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therefore, regular meetings are the essential structure through which sustained learning within the ZPD is made possible.

2.1.2 Designed Intentional Relational Theory (DIRT)

Complementing Vygotsky's cognitive focus, the Designed Intentional Relational Theory (DIRT) emphasizes that the most effective learning relationships are purposefully designed, not accidental (Siegel & Hartzell, 2023). DIRT posits that for a relationship to be developmentally beneficial, it must be structured to foster trust, emotional safety, and mutual engagement. Regular, scheduled meetings are a primary manifestation of this intentional design. They signal to both mentor and mentee that the relationship is valued and that their work is important. This predictability builds the trust and safety necessary for a mentee to be vulnerable, ask questions, and admit a lack of understanding all essential for genuine learning. An irregular meeting schedule, conversely, signals a lack of commitment and undermines the development of an effective mentoring relationship. DIRT thus provides the relational rationale for why consistency matters: it is the tangible structure demonstrating the intentionality upon which effective educational relationships are built.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature provides strong and consistent evidence that the frequency and regularity of mentor-mentee interactions are powerful predictors of positive academic outcomes.

2.2.1 Global and Regional Evidence

Research from high-income countries has firmly established this principle. A landmark evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in the United States found a direct "dose-response" relationship: mentees who met their mentors more frequently demonstrated significantly greater improvements in grades and school engagement (Herrera et al., 2011). Similarly, research in the United Kingdom on Peer Assisted Learning Schemes concluded that the predictability of a weekly schedule created a reliable academic support system that was highly effective in building student confidence and preparedness (Ginty & Harding, 2014).

This principle is even more pronounced in the resource-constrained contexts of Sub-Saharan Africa. An evaluation of the highly successful Nine Tenths Mentoring Programme in South Africa attributed a significant portion of its success an average 28% improvement in student scores to the consistency of its weekly contact model (Mwedzi, 2024). In Nigeria, an experimental study found that students attending weekly mentorship meetings scored, on average, 15% higher on standardized math tests than a control group (Adeyemi & Ojo, 2024). The frequent contact allowed for immediate clarification of difficult concepts and timely feedback, which was crucial for building mastery.

2.2.2 Evidence from the Kenyan Context

Within Kenya, available research corroborates these findings. A study in Nairobi County found that students who met with their mentors at least twice a month recorded significantly higher mean scores in their final secondary school exams (Mwangi & Wanjiku, 2022). Their work emphasized that regular interactions were crucial for developing effective study habits. Research on the Macheo program in Kibera also identified its structure of regular weekly

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sessions as a key factor in its success, as it allowed mentors to provide timely interventions when a student was struggling (Ochola, 2020).

However, the literature also reveals that achieving this regularity is a major challenge. Studies in the Machakos region have noted that many existing mentorship initiatives are informal and irregular, often consisting of occasional discussions before exams (Ndunda, 2021; Wambua, 2023). They observed that such sporadic interventions failed to produce significant academic improvements, highlighting a critical implementation gap.

2.3 Summary of Literature and Identified Research Gap

The reviewed literature provides a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for the premise that regular mentor-mentee meetings positively impact academic performance. However, a critical gap remains, particularly in the Kenyan context outside of major urban centers. While studies have suggested the importance of consistency, there is a lack of rigorous quantitative research that isolates and measures the specific strength of the relationship between meeting regularity and academic outcomes in a typical semi-urban/rural setting like Machakos Sub-County. Furthermore, few studies have juxtaposed the proven effectiveness of regular meetings with the on-the-ground reality of their implementation as perceived by both students and teachers. This study addresses this gap by providing a focused, quantitative investigation into the specific impact of meeting regularity and the current state of its implementation.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to describe the characteristics of the population and explore the relationship between variables as they naturally occur. A mixed-methods approach was integrated to provide both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 12,500 students and 399 teachers from the 28 public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, resulting in a target sample of 373 students and 196 teachers. A simple random sampling method was used to select participating schools and individual respondents, ensuring the sample was representative and unbiased. The final response rate yielded a sample of 338 students and 165 teachers.

3.2 Data Collection and Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, with separate versions for students and teachers. The questionnaires were designed to gather quantitative data on the research objectives, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale to measure perceptions and attitudes. The validity of the instruments was established through expert review by university supervisors. Their reliability was confirmed through a pilot study, which yielded a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, ensuring the internal consistency of the scales.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. The analysis proceeded in two stages:

1. Descriptive Analysis: Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize the demographic data and the responses regarding the regularity of mentor-mentee meetings.

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2. Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation analysis was employed to test the hypothesis and determine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the regularity of meetings and academic performance. The statistical significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

4. Quantitative Analysis and Results

This section presents the results of the quantitative data analysis, focusing on descriptive findings regarding meeting regularity and the inferential analysis testing the research hypothesis.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Meeting Regularity

Descriptive statistics revealed a significant gap in the implementation of regular meetings, particularly from the students' perspective. As summarized in Table 4.1, there is a stark disconnect between teacher and student perceptions. While nearly half of the teachers (46.9%) agreed that meetings were held regularly, only 21.0% of students shared this view. The disparity was even more pronounced regarding the adequacy of time: 47.8% of teachers felt the time was adequate, compared to a mere 6.3% of students. This suggests that what administrators and teachers may consider a "regular" schedule is experienced by students as sporadic and insufficient.

Table 4.1: Perceptions of Meeting Regularity

Statement	Teacher Agreement (%) (Agree/Strongly Agree)	Student Agreement (%) (Agree/Strongly Agree)
The mentorship meetings are held regularly.	46.9%	21.0%
The time allocated for meetings is adequate.	47.8%	6.3%

Source: Field Data 2025

4.2 Correlation Analysis

To test the hypothesis, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted between composite scores for the regularity of meetings and academic performance. The results, presented in Table 4.2, provide powerful and consistent evidence from both respondent groups.

Table 4.2: Correlation between Regular Meetings and Academic Performance

Respondent Group	Pearson's r	p-value	Interpretation
Teachers (n=165)	.701**	<.001	Strong Positive
Students (n=338)	.723**	<.001	Very Strong Positive

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.
Source: Field Data 2025

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The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation from the teachers' perspective ($r = .701$, $p < .001$) and a very strong positive correlation from the students' perspective ($r = .723$, $p < .001$). Since both correlations are positive, strong, and highly statistically significant, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) that There is no statistically significant relationship between regular mentor-mentee meetings and students' academic performance is unequivocally rejected. The data confirms that there is a significant and powerful positive relationship between the regularity of mentor-mentee meetings and student academic achievement.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling empirical evidence that the consistency of mentor-mentee interaction is a critical determinant of academic performance in Kenyan public secondary schools. The powerful, positive correlations ($r = .701$ and $r = .723$) offer robust, localized support for the foundational theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Siegel & Hartzell (2023). Regular meetings provide the necessary structure for the sustained scaffolding required for learning within the ZPD. They also embody the intentionality and predictability that build the trust essential for an effective mentoring relationship, as posited by DIRT.

These results align perfectly with the broader empirical literature. The strength of the correlation echoes the findings of Herrera et al. (2011) in the US and Mwedzi (2024) in South Africa, both of whom identified consistency of contact as a key factor in program success. The findings also corroborate Kenyan research by Mwangi and Wanjiku (2022), confirming that this principle holds true within the national context.

However, the most critical contribution of this study is the juxtaposition of this proven effectiveness with the profound implementation gap revealed in the descriptive data. The vast disconnect between teacher and student perceptions on the regularity and adequacy of meetings is a crucial finding. It suggests that the problem is not a lack of belief in mentorship, but a systemic failure to institutionalize it properly. The ad hoc nature of many programs, noted in previous studies (Ndunda, 2021; Wambua, 2023), is hereby quantitatively confirmed as a major source of student dissatisfaction and program inefficacy. This highlights a critical disconnect between a program's potential and its actual practice.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the influence of regular peer mentor-mentee meetings on student academic performance. Based on a quantitative analysis of data from 503 students and teachers in Machakos Sub-County, the study concludes that there is a strong, positive, and highly statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The consistency of interaction is not merely a contributing factor but a foundational element upon which the academic benefits of mentorship are built. The current implementation of these programs, however, is largely perceived by students as irregular and inadequate, severely limiting their potential impact.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. For School Administrators:
    (i) Institutionalize Mentorship through Timetabling: Move mentorship from a peripheral, co-curricular activity to a core part of the academic support system.

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Allocate a dedicated, protected time slot (e.g., a weekly "Mentorship Hour") within the official school timetable. This will ensure regularity, signal institutional commitment, and resolve the issue of inadequate time.

2. For Policymakers (Ministry of Education & TSC):
   (i) Develop and Disseminate Clear Program Guidelines: Create simple, standardized guidelines for structuring peer mentorship programs in public schools. These guidelines should explicitly emphasize the critical importance of regular meetings and provide a template for scheduling, monitoring, and accountability.
3. For Future Research:
   (i) Conduct Experimental Studies: Future research should employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs to establish a clearer causal link between meeting frequency and specific academic gains (e.g., exam scores in particular subjects).
   (ii) Investigate Logistical Best Practices: Research is needed to identify the optimal frequency and duration of meetings (e.g., weekly vs. bi-weekly, 30 minutes vs. 60 minutes) for different school contexts and student populations.

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