

Original Paper

Management of Students' Report Cards for Improving Learning Quality in Selected Public Secondary Schools: A Case of Kisarawe District

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Received: August 13, 2022 Accepted: September 18, 2022 Online Published: September 22, 2022

doi:10.22158/wjer.v9n4p82

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v9n4p82>

Abstract

The student report card is the main form of communication among teachers, students, and parents; and its purpose is to convey information from the school to parents about a students' educational progress, usually at mid-year and the end of a school year. The study intended to assess the management of students' report cards for improving learning quality in selected public secondary schools in Kisarawe District, Tanzania. The specific objectives were to; examine the role played by teachers in the management of SRCs towards students' learning quality, evaluate parents' perception on the management of SRCs in improving students' learning quality and assess the usefulness of SRCs in influencing students' learning. The study was guided by the Self-Efficacy Theory and the Social Constructivism Theory. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Respondents were drawn from four public secondary schools in Kisarawe District, and 132 respondents including parents, teachers, students, and heads of schools were involved. The study employed simple random sampling and purposive sampling to select respondents. Questionnaires, interviews, and documentary reviews were used as methods for data collection. Quantitative data obtained through questionnaire from teachers and students were analysed using the descriptive statistics technique. Qualitative data from interview of Heads of Schools and parents and documentary review of existing reports were analysed through the thematic analysis presented via narrations. The findings indicated that teachers were inactive in filling the assessment/progress results in SRC. Some of the reasons behind it being the large population of students in the classes, insufficient time for marking the tests, and recording of grades. Also, the study found that parents were unaware of their role in supporting their children to learn, they did not bother to attend the school meetings to collect their child's report while others did not return feedback to the school management after receiving their children's report cards. Recommendations are hereby made

for the schools to establish a mechanism that will bring parents on board to participate in their children's academic progress.

Keyword

Report card, students, Management

1. Introduction

It is a widely held belief that providing information to citizens is a powerful tool for improving public services. This scrutiny option is particularly prevalent in the education sector where educational stakeholders have often claim that informing parents about school performance is necessary for improving school and student learning quality. To produce competent students for future generation, quality learning should be enhanced in schools. Teachers, students, and parents should collaborate to improve students' learning and performance (Mizala & Urquiola, 2013).

The students' report cards play a crucial factor in improving learning quality and in improving student accountability. The report cards could be described as a summary of learning or achievement and it is provided to parents or guardians who are important stakeholders in education. Students' report cards identify the level of progress of a particular student by looking at strengths and areas where improvement is needed. As part of the student's records, the report cards will not only inform parents but also serve as a source of information for teachers and administrators when students move between grades and schools. In most schools, report cards are filled in at the end of every school term and sent to parents, while a copy of it is kept in school for future reference (Andrabi & Khwaja, 2015).

The management of SRCs involve teachers, so they have a responsibility to ensure that the judgments reported are an accurate and current reflect student learning. Elements not related to the curriculum or not reflective of the student's learning must be factored out. The report card should be managed in such a way that it acknowledges actions that need to be taken by partners in learning such as student, parents, and teachers. Teachers are required to assign grades in a report card indicating students' academic learning in the subjects they teach. Therefore, grading should be as valid as possible not only is grading a major responsibility of classroom teachers, but it is also a practice with which teachers, parents and students work together in improving learning practices (Barnes, 1985).

In America, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is popularly referred to as the Nation Report Card. NAEP evaluates the education system since the 1960s by reporting what students know and can do across a variety of subjects, whereby the assessment was conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, history, geography, and another field (Jacobsen et al., 2013).

Maughan et al. (2009) showed that in Victoria, the student report card provided a broad range of measures to be reported to parents. These include traditional subject areas: English, mathematics, science, the humanities (economics, geography, and history), languages, and the arts as well as new areas: physical, personal, and social learning (health and physical education, interpersonal development, personal learning, civics, and citizenship) and interdisciplinary learning (communication, design,

creativity and technology, ICT and thinking processes). Therefore, assessment of achievement in each of the areas is based on performance on a range of tasks, as judged by the teacher.

In Tanzania, the education system is characterized by a formative and summative assessment during the entire process of teaching and learning to improve learning achievement. Formative assessment is an ongoing process that encourages self-learning and provides constructive feedback on student's performance, while summative assessment is done at the end of each instructional cycle of primary and secondary education levels; and then there is an external summative national examination, centrally administered by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) for certification and placement purposes (Baht, 2019). Formative assessments are recorded in the student's report card for future reference of the students, and to provide feedback to both students and parents about the academic progress. It is more helpful in improving and modifying teaching and learning strategies because it provides feedback and information during the learning process. It involves multiple tools such as written tests, portfolio assessments, projects, and student-teacher conferences (Sanga, 2016).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that, students' report cards can influence students' learning, there is little attention being put on improved management of the students' report card to both teachers and parents. Here several issues arise including: How is the report card prepared? What sort of information is on it? How is it collected, used and what potential exists for its abuse? Who sends it to parents? As well as how do parents and community members view its role in student appraisal? To the best of researcher knowledge, there is no study that has been conducted in Kisarawe District to assess the management of students' report cards for improving learning quality in public secondary schools. The focus on public secondary schools was because enrollment in these schools is large and teachers are more overworked in comparison to private schools.

2. Method

2.1 Research Approach

The study employed a mixed research approach and descriptive survey design to collect data from four public secondary schools in Kisarawe District.

2.2 Study Population

The sample of the study consisted 132 respondents, including 98 form four students, 24 teachers, 6 parents and 4 heads of schools. Form 4 students were involved because the researcher needed to know the improvement made after receiving different report cards from Form 1 to Form 4. Teachers were selected because they are responsible for the timely preparation of the student's report cards. The researcher involved parents because they support their children's learning and development at school as well as at home. The heads of schools participated because they are responsible for the management and for ensuring the provision of students' report cards to concerned parents.

2.3 Tools of Collecting Data

Data were collected by using: questionnaire, interview and documentary review. Questionnaire was used to form four students and teachers while interview was applied to parents and heads of schools. In documentary review the researcher used the checklist to review the existing report and checked on structure and content measured. Quantitative data were analysed using the descriptive statistics technique with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) while qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis presented via narrations. Finally the research ethics were observed in conducting this current study. Before commencing the study, the researcher acquired a letter of permission from all concerned authorities including the St Augustine University of Tanzania, Regional Education Office, District, and targeted school authorities.

3. Findings and Discussion

The role played by teachers in management of students' report cards towards students learning quality.

The study examine the role played by the teachers in management of students' report cards towards students learning quality in selected public secondary schools in Kisarawe District. The results of the respondents were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher's Views on the Management of SRCs in Their School

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
It is my responsibility to prepare report card on time	0	0	0	0	2	8	6	25	16	67
If report card prepared and managed, it will improve learning quality	0	0	1	4	0	0	12	50	11	46
I use marks on tests to show evidence of learning or improvement	0	0	0	0	1	4	11	46	12	50
Students' grades are recorded as they are in the examination	1	4	1	4	0	0	16	67	6	25

The results from the field indicated 92% (67% agree and 25% strongly agree) that they are responsible to prepare students' report cards on time; which means that teachers know their responsibilities and they were aware that report cards should be prepared on time to create opportunities for learning and improvement. During the interview with one head of school, it was found that some of the teachers in his school were inactive in preparation for SRCs. One of the head of school lamented, "My teachers

need close supervision during the preparation of SRC because some of them were inactive and lazy in preparing the report which sometimes causes delays of some report cards” (August 2021). Therefore to accomplish the exercise on time some of the teachers involve the students to fill in some of the information in the report cards something which is immoral. The report card is confidential only teachers have responsibility to fill in the student’s information and progress.

The results indicated that 96% agreed the quality of learning would be attained well when the report cards were managed well; therefore, proper management of students’ report cards helped to improve and influence the learning of students. The study found that, the selected secondary schools had no proper management of students’ report cards because no measures were taken against the parents who did not attend the meetings to make them accountable for the academic progress of their children. Also, results indicated that the teachers in four visited secondary schools did not used feedback to support students learning, through interview it was revealed that after preparation there were no meetings with students to discuss what could be done to improve their learning and performance in the next assessment report. To improve learning quality, after filling in the report cards, the teachers should hold meetings with students first, undertake discussions and plan how to do better in upcoming terms. Teacher-student meetings encourage and motivate students to open on issues that disturb them and hence work harder and improve their performance.

Moreover, teachers were asked to provide their views on how student report cards can be presented from school to parents. Teachers from four public secondary schools provided different views as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers’ Opinion on the Best Ways to Present SRCs to Parents

Responses	F	%
Parent-teacher meeting	10	42%
Parents take it from school	7	29%
Presented through Email/WhatsApp	7	29%

The results indicated that 10 out of 24 teachers (42%) suggested that the best way to present students’ report cards was through parent-teacher meetings; 29% suggested that parents should collect the reports from school; 29% suggested that due to the development of science and technology students’ reports should be presented to parents through WhatsApp or Email. In an interview with the Heads of school’s results, it was stated that SRCs presented to parents through parent-teacher meetings and that those who did not attend the meetings had to collect it personally from the class teacher, and sometimes students were given the reports.

The researcher found that, in all the 4 visited secondary schools, the SRCs were distributed in two major ways; through parents’ meetings before closing the school at the end of each term, and by

handing them to their children (Students). None of the two methods seemed to be effective because when parents were invited to meetings at school their response was not good as most of them did not attend the meetings.

For the second option where teachers distributed the SRC through students to their parents it was revealed that some of the students did not submit the reports to their parents; and, through the interview, one of the teachers said,

Not all students send these SRCs to their parents; sometimes you may find that a student opened the report before handing it over to his/her parent and if the results were not satisfactory, the report card was not submitted to the parent. This happened several times as parents came and complained to teachers that they did not get the SRCs while their children had already taken them (August 2021).

3.1 Parent's Perception on SRC Management

The study sought to evaluate parent's perception on the management of SRCs in improving learning quality. The results from the study revealed that, three out of six parents seemed to have a clear understanding of the report card and perceived it as useful, and helpful for academic progress. One parent explained that "Student report cards gave me feedback on how my daughter was doing in school." Another said "report card gave me information concerning academic performance of my child's (August, 2021). Therefore, parents perceived report cards as helpful for students' academic progress because it provides feedback on students learning in each subject. The current study complements Frederickson (2017) who revealed that parents perceived SCR as helpful for understanding their children's academic achievements as well as enabling them to reflect accurately the child's knowledge and skills, as well as understanding how to assist them to improve their performance.

Even though parents perceived report cards as useful and helpful, the results from the field explained that some of the parents failed to interpret the information on a report card and some parents complained that the letters like A, B, C, D, and F which were used with remarks to indicate the performance of students did not offer any specifications on the skills mastered by the students. During the study, the parents complained that the grading system was too general for someone to understand the capacity of their children in different subjects. In the interview, one of the parents said,

I understand the report because the language used is Swahili which is our national language. The biggest challenge here is the way teachers present the performance rate by using letters and descriptions that are not self-sufficient. For example, a teacher writes in a particular subject that the student attained a C, and then in the description, he writes "Average;" which does not suffice to explain how much the student has achieved and whether it is satisfactory or not. The word 'average' does not suffice to describe the student's capacity in a particular subject (August 2021).

Therefore A-F do not indicate skills learned, they only give an overall grade average. For report cards to be effective and to be understood by both parents and students, teachers needed to provide more clarification on grades.

3.2 Usefulness of Student Report Cards in Influencing Students' Learning

The study also sought to examine the usefulness of student report card in influencing students' learning. The summary of the findings from participants was recorded and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Views on How SCRs Can Encourage and Motivate to Learn

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The student report card is useful for my academic progress	1	1	1	1	3	3	77	86	8	9
The letter grade in a report card helps me to learn	2	2	3	3	15	17	51	57	19	21
The student report card explains what is needed to do to improve	1	1	33	37	21	23	24	27	11	12

The results indicates that 95% of the students thought that reports cards were useful for academic progress and development. From the interview, one parent said; A report card is a valuable tool in changing and improving the academic performance of my child; when teachers provide in the report, feedback that was not pleasant my child started to study hard and improve his performance (August 2021).

The results continue to show, after receiving student report cards, some of the students made some improvement by deciding to work harder and improve their performance while others did not make any improvement. The study also revealed that the parents of the students who had not made any changes, never attended the school meetings and they did not bother to collect the report cards from school.

Moreover, results indicated that 78% of the students agreed that letter grade in a report card helped them to learn, 5% disagreed with statement while 17% undecided. Therefore, majority of the students in the study felt that letter grade in a report card supported and encourage them to learn. From open ended questionnaire one student explained that, "letter grade motivated and inspired me to study hard especially when I received low grade." Another said, "If I get an A or B I will be really proud, I'm going to try really hard in order to maintain my grades next time." From an interview one parent of student who achieved good grades said that, "My child looked forward to receive better grades and if he did not receive good grades, he would be motivated to try hard in the next term" (August 2021).

The results continue to show that, some of the students were not self-motivated to learn and some of the reasons; they did not want to learn as much as other students, they did not care about school and other they received little support from their parents/guardians. From open ended questionnaire students

explained that; “report card did not motivate and encourage to learn, they made me feel like giving up because, I tried harder but I kept receiving low grade” (August, 2021). Therefore, the study revealed that report card motivated and encourage higher achieving students to work hard however the report card tended to be discouraging low achieving students because no matter how hard they tried report card grades were reminders of their weakness as learners.

The results from the field indicated that 39% of the respondents agreed that the report cards explained what needed to be improved; while 38% disagreed saying that the report cards did not explain clearly. From the questionnaires, the students explained that SCR explained what needed to be improved by advising them to study hard to obtain better grades, while most of them said that the report cards did not explain what they had to do to improve their learning and performance. From the reviewed report card, it was found that the teachers did not explain what students were supposed to do to improve; they just got general comments from class teacher, for example, “work hard.” For a report card to be effective, teachers’ comments should be elaborative, indicating the areas in which students need to put more effort to perform better in their learning journey and provide suggestions for the future so that next time they perform better.

Acknowledgement

May thanks to my supervisor, Prof. Kalafunja Osaki [co-author] who has worked, mentored and advised me over the writing process. He has been an inspiration to my hard work and always responded whenever I consulted him. His expertise and passion have instigated me in my academic journey.

In addition, my special appreciation goes to Dr. Crispin Mbogo for his priceless time and contribution he took to assess my work as I progressed. His challenging feedback contributed to improve my research report. I sincerely thank my mother Melania Kamugisha, my aunt Anna Meekisho, my siblings Jovitha Kamugisha and Jovin Kamugisha for their encouragement and support during the entire time of my academic drive. Their help is with no doubt the reason for my success.

I would also like to thank the head of school (Nkokashu Secondary School) all respondents in interviews and questionnaires, and the district executive director of Hai for permission allowing me to further my studies in those schools.

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