ISSN: 2054-7412

SERVICES FOR SCIENCE AND EDUCATION UNITED KINGDOM

EJAS European Journal of Applied Sciences

VOLUME 8, NO 2

Improving the Academic Performance of Lower Academic Achievers' of Alelitu Sagure Primary School Learners' Using Tutorial and Guidance and Counseling Service

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this action research project was to improve the academic achievement of lower academic achievers students of Alelitu Sagure primary school. Hence, students whose academic achievements were found to be lower than others selected on the base of the first semester academic records (on the bases of academic rank). In this regard 25 students from each grade level (Grade 2, 3, 5 and 6) were selected. In general, 2 grade levels from the first cycle (grade 1-4) and 2 grade levels from the second cycle (grade 5-8) were selected as the research participants. Among the school 12 teachers were selected and given orientation and trainings on how to implement the action research project. Besides, the student participants and their parent/guardians were oriented too. The tutorial classes were provided for the project students three hours per week, one hour for each of the three selected subjects (English, mathematics and science) as well guidance and counseling service were provided according to the condition. Generally, the findings of this action research project proven that the improvements of the academic performance of lower academic achiever students in general, and better improvement in the upper grade levels in particular. Furthermore, with the focus group and interviews made with the action research teacher participant their view and believes about lower academic achiever students were changed by which if lower academic achiever students assisted and given appropriate support as they could improve their academic performance.

Keywords: action research, improving academic achievement, primary school and tutorial

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Justifications

Education has the potential to empower people by increasing their self-confidence, capacity to improve their livelihoods and participating in wider processes of social and economic changes (Acker & Gasperin, 2009). Since education is one of the most decisive means of adjustment of children's future life, it is very important to invest and work on improving the academic performance of children (Daniel and Bamlaku, 2017). Accordingly, students who have higher levels of academic achievement and motivation of schooling earn more than those with lower levels of learners, because, schooling makes people more productive (Jacob & Ludwig, 2009). This implies that striving for better academic performance of students in the school need to necessitate to provide the necessary resources, methods, and other necessary educational inputs and processes. Likewise, quality education involves teachers that have better and sound knowledge of the subject matter, content and pedagogical strategies; have adequate understanding of what the learners know and need to learn; create a

DOI: 10.14738/aivp.82.8424
Publication Date: 11th June, 2020
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/aivp.82.8424

challenging and supportive classroom learning environment; interact with students and colleagues; have opportunities for ongoing professional learning; and regular reflection on their teaching and students' learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Likewise, many researchers and educators pointed out as there are many different factors affecting the academic performance of learners. For instance, lower academic achievement could be attributed to a variety of reasons related to the student and to family, social and academic environment by which results in frequent repetition or failure of learners, despite of their abilities (Al-Zoubi & Bani Younse, 2015). Likewise, inadequate facilities, insufficient training of teachers, overcrowded classes, shortage of books and other teaching materials, all are the indicators of the low quality of education provision in Ethiopia (Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, 1994).

Understanding why children's outcomes vary so dramatically along schools in Ethiopia is central arguments to formulating effective education policy interventions (MoE, 2007; FDRE, 2010). Likewise, disagreements about how to improve school outcomes for lower academic achievement of elementary school children stem in part from different beliefs about the problems that underlie the unsatisfactory outcomes in many of nation's schools (Busar, 2014). Broadly speaking, the reasons given for why children in elementary schools are not performing as it is intended (Prosse & Trigwell, 1999; Rockoff, 2004) are the following;

- not serving lower academic achiever students to perform better and to make compete;
- lack of substantial capacity of schools to improve student learning, by looking for potential solutions to students' psychological and academic problem;
- instructional capacity of staff in schools in terms of professional development;
- lack of provision of sufficient incentives in the school

The above-mentioned problems could be also common problems of elementary schools of Ethiopia for why elementary schools' students are not performing better (Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, 1994; MoE, 2007; FDRE, 2010). Similarly, if the lower academic achiever students are not served for better performance and if there is no incentive in one way or another these could affect the learning as well as the performance of the learners. In short, the factors that affect the academic achievements of students can be categorized into teachers, students and school related factors and the like (Birhan, 2018: Zewde and Getahun, 2018).

Consequently, this action research project was initiated to assist the lower academic achiever students of Alelitu Sagure Primary school through tutorial and guidance and counseling services. Alelitu Sagure Primary School (Grade1-8) is one of the public schools found in Arsi Administrative Zone of Oromiya National Regional State of Ethiopia. Specifically, the town is far about 200 kilometers south east of Addis Ababa–the capital city of Ethiopia. The town has two public primary schools, one secondary and one preparatory school as well as one technical and vocational educational and training institute (TVET).

There are many factors that influence on the academic achievement of students as indicated by different authors. In this regard the so-called factors associated with lack of substantial capacity of schools to improve student learning, not serving lower academic achiever students to perform better and to make competent as well lack of provision of sufficient incentives in the school (Prosse & Trigwell, 1999; Rockoff, 2004) could be minimized through this action research project. Hence, the outcomes would be evaluated, whether there would be improvement or not in the academic performance of the learners in comparison with other students of the school who were considered as the representative sample of the school population. Specifically, tutorial by teachers was considered as one of the best strategy for improving the academic achievement of learner for this action research.

This is because tutorial had shown by many of researches as it helps to improve learning and helps to fulfill the needs of a student (Kanna, 2014).

1.2 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this action research were:

- To improve the academic achievement of lower academic achiever students of the school
- To improve the school and community relationship
- Promote the use of instructional media for effective and efficiency of instruction.
- To advance the knowledge, the skill and the attitude of teachers to familiarize with the pedagogical skills for the growth of both the teachers and the pedagogical resource center of the school.

1.3 Significance/beneficiary of the action research

The significance/beneficiary of this action research is the following:

- To show and assure the concerned bodies as there are capabilities of success/competency of lower academic achiever students if properly and consistent supported and assisted with collaborative efforts of all stakeholders (the students, the teachers, the community, the management of the school, Woreda educational offices)
- To encouraging parents to visit school regularly to monitor and to talk with school teachers about the challenges and problems of their child learning and subsequently found ways of dealing with child how to solve problems and challenges. In turn, to strength school and parent relationships.
- To inspire and provoke school teachers in helping consistently their students and contribute their professional supports to their lower academic students

2 Methodology

2.1 Population and Sampling

The purpose of this project was to improving the academic performance of lower academic achiever students' of Alelitu Sagure Primary School of which one the two of the public school found in the Town. Accordingly, the teachers who were participate in the action research project expected to select, produce and use appropriate types of instructional media and suitable teaching methods thereby contribute to the improvement of teaching learning process and effectiveness of the quality of instruction at Alelit Sagure primary school.

To accomplish this action research project different methods and procedure were used. The targeted participants of study and the potential tutors scrutinized and selected based on the experiences and appropriates to the aim of this action research. Students from primary school of first cycle (Grade 1-4) 2 section as wells as form second cycle (Grade 5- 8) 2 sections were nominated randomly (Grade 2, 3, 5 and 6). Therefore, 25 students from each grade level were selected based on their academic rank-students who were with lower academic ranks had been targeted for this action research. Accordingly, from the said grades levels from each section the 5 lower ranked students were selected as the action research project participants.

Therefore, based on the above criteria 100 students (4 sections x 25 students) and 12 school teachers and 2 directors of the school were considered as beneficiary from this action research project by directly and actively involved in the action research project. Besides, the parents of those students

were made to engage in the action research project in a certain degree since they were involved to work with the teachers so as to improve the successfulness of the action research project. Besides, those 12 better/competent and committed teachers from different field of studies (English, mathematics and science) were selected based on the information obtained from directors, department heads of the school as part of research project participant/tutorial provider for those selected students.

Furthermore, to evaluate the effectiveness of the action research project the first semester (pre-test) and the second semester (post-test) marks of the students were collected from the record office of the school for analyses. This was done because quantitative analysis of the academic performance of the learners was the selected method of data analysis. Since this action research project was a type of experimental research the impact of the strategies executed to improve the academic achievement of lower academic achievers data analysis were well fitted with quantitative analyses of the pre-test and post-test results of the learners. Besides, to comprehend the changes or the effectiveness of this action research projects against those who were not participated in the action research their first semester (pre-test) as well as the second semester (post-test) marks were collected and investigated. This was done through the systematic sampling methods. In doing so, from each respective grade levels and sections of the research participant groups, every 5^{th} interval of the learners was selected to be considered as the representative sample of the population. Consequently, from every sections of grade 2, 3, 5 and 6 in general 48, 47, 53 and 42 students were selected with systematic sampling techniques. Therefore, those students were considered as the representative sample of the population of the students of the school. In general, these groups of students' academic results were considered as a baseline to compare the improvements of the academic achievement of this action research project participant.

2.2 Procedures and activities of the action research

The main procedures and activities consider in accomplishing this action research project were shortly as indicated below.

1 ***Providing training for the school teachers: -*** the purpose of the training was to improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the teachers to select, produce and use different types of instructional media and to implement different styles and techniques of teaching in their day to day teaching and learning activities.

2 ***Selecting action research participant students': -*** this was done through documentary analyses of students with lower academic achievement/ranks.

3 ***Providing tutorial programs***: - tutorial were provided by the selected and trained school teachers, 3 hours per week or an hour for each of the three selected subjects (English, mathematics and science) during the second semester from the mid of April to the mid of June. Students were encouraged to learn by themselves and their tutors were played roles in facilitating, coordinating and creating conducive for learning environment.

4 ***Provision of Guidance and counseling services: -*** guidance and counseling services for the students were provide continuously. In this regard, some sort of psychological problems and maladjustment problems of learners had been identified and made to be corrected with frequent supervisions and consultation.

5 ***Parental communication and involvement in the processes:*** since it was believed that the roles of parental involvement and acknowledgement were very curial for the implementation of this action research project parents/guardians of the students were consulted as how to work for the betterment of the learning of their children. Accordingly, the parents/guardians

were made to discuss with the school tutor as well as the two directors of the school, besides, the action research providers.

6 ***Assessment of the progress and the effectiveness of the program:*** - it would have been required frequently to evaluate the effectiveness, the challenges and the progressive change of the student. Finally, comparative analyses of data were made to investigate the academic performance of the action project students with other group of students/the school representative students.

3 Data analysis and interpretation

3.1 Data presentation and analysis

The aim of this action research was to improve the academic achievement of lower academic achiever students of Alelitu Sagrue Primary school. The project was conducted for two months (the mid of April to the mid of June) as it was indicted previously. To understand the effectiveness of the project some data analysis was made. Accordingly, through systematic random sampling method students (who were non-project beneficiary) were selected to be considered as the representative sample of the school student population. That means with every 5th interval from every sections and grade levels of the targeted groups' students were selected. Accordingly, the first semester and the second semester marks of the three subjects (English, mathematics and science) of those students were collected from the school record office. Likewise, the research participate students marks were also collected too. The collected data then analyzed using average/mean marks of the three subjects within the group as well as intra groups- that was between first and second semester- were done. For more accuracy the SPSS 24 program package was used. In general, the data analysis is indicated clearly in the table 1indicated below.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the first and the second semester average marks of the research participant and representative sample of the population

Types of population	Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 5			Grade 6		
	1st	2nd	2nd - 1st	1st	2nd	2nd - 1st	1st	2nd	2nd - 1st	1st	2nd	2nd - 1st
Research participant	59.1	60.2	*1.14*	60.3	61.5	*1.2*	37.1	36.7	*-0.33*	41.6	47.6	*6.30*
Sample population	70.4	70.0	*-0.04*	72.7	71.8	*-0.9*	53.2	49.6	*-3.50*	58.0	60.8	*2.88*
The improvement of project against sample population			*1.18*			*2.1*			*3.17*			*3.42*

Remark: 1st and 2nd refers to the first and the second semester mean mark of students respectively, and 2nd – 1st refer to the second average mark of students minus the first semester average marks.

Table 1 reveals that the average marks of the second and the first semester of grade 2 representative sample of the population were 70 and 70.4 respectively, while the difference between the two semesters was found to be insignificant (-0.04). Correspondingly, the average marks of the second and the first semester of the project beneficiary of grade 2 students were 60.2 and 59.1 respectively; while the difference between the two semesters was found to be lower (1.14). Nevertheless, the improvement of the action research participant in comparison to the population representative

sample had been found as positive value that could be serve as a type of an indicative of improvement (1.18 average marks).

Further, the average marks of the second and the first semester of grade 3 representative sample of the population were 71.8 and 72.7 respectively, while the difference between the two semesters found to be slight decline (-0.9). Correspondingly, the average marks of the second and the first semester of the action research participant of grade 3 students were 61.5 and 60.3 respectively; while the difference between the two semesters was found to be lower (1.2). Though, slight better improvement of the action research participants' academic performance had been noticed in comparison to the population representative sample (2.1 average marks) and particularly with grade 2 students.

In addition, the average marks of the second and the first semester of grade 5 representative sample of the population were 49.6 and 53.2 respectively, while the difference between the two semesters showed significant decrease (-3.5 average marks). Correspondingly, the average marks of the second and the first semester of the project beneficiary of grade 5 students were 36.7 and 37.1 respectively, while the difference between the two semesters was found to be low (0.33). Nevertheless, a significant improvement of the action research project participant was demonstrated in comparison to the population representative sample (3.17 average marks).

Moreover, the average marks of the second and the first semester of grade 6 representative sample of the population were 60.8 and 59.96 respectively, while the difference between the two semesters was increased (2.88). Correspondingly, the average marks of the second and the first semester of the action research project participant of grade 6 students were 47.6 and 41.56 respectively, while the difference between the two semesters was found to be significantly higher (6.03). Likewise, a significant progress was noticed by the action research participant in comparison to the population representative sample of the school (3.15 average marks).

3.2 Discussion

In general, the data analysis result implies that there was some sort of improvement in the academic performance of the action research participants' in contrast to the first semester (pre-test) performance as well as in comparison to sample of their corresponding grade levels. Of course, it was not observed much change at lower grade levels (grade 2 and 3). We didn't observe more improvement in the lower grade levels in the analysis of the raw score in comparison to the upper grade levels (5 and 6 grade). Though, this issue may be attributed to the assessment methods practices and utilized in the school. That was in lower grade levels marking system/assessment methods were largely depend on the so-called continuous assessment and free promotion policy by which the evaluation of students was fundamentally lay on the informal assessment of the classroom teachers (Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, 1994). Therefore, since there were no clear examining criteria (more of subjectivity of the teacher were common phenomena) might be the causal attribute. In other way, it was more of informal assessment methods/alternative form of assessment were practiced in the case of the country as a whole in the first cycle of primary school/early child education basically grade 1-3. In connection to this it had been said that children of lower grade levels (before 8 years) formal assessment is not well fit to utilize the measurement for high-stakes decisions about each child (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998). Therefore, high-stakes assessments intended for accountability purposes should be delayed until the end of third grade (or preferably fourth grade). Besides, informal or alternative forms of assessment are more suitable for teachers to assess processes, skills, and knowledge in early child education (Gullo, 2005). Of course the Ethiopian

education and training policy (1994) also stated in the primary cycle (grade 1- 4) informal assessment and free promotion policy to be employed.

In addition, the expectations and over identification of the classroom teachers for those students seemed to be influence the objectivity of the assessment of the academic performance of those students who were considered as lower achiever. Correspondingly, this increase hello effect/bias rather than properly/objectively tried to assess the performance of those students. This is because; those students were identified and perceived by their teacher from the very beginning of the academic year as low achiever. On other hand, in grade 5 and grade 6 more of formal classroom assessments methods had been practiced. As a result, more variations had been observed. The subjectivity or biased of the classroom teachers had been minimized since formal assessment methods were typically used at these grade levels in contrary to the lower grade levels or primary first cycle (grade 1- 4).

To sum up, it was observed that if students with lower academic achievement were properly supported and assisted, they can improve their academic performances. In general, these changes were obtained with the assistance and support of students for only two months (24 hours). If lower academic achiever students were helped and assisted throughout the school academic period their academic improvement by far estimated more promising. Not only the performance of the students would have been changed but their motivation to learn also increases too. Besides, the motivation as well as the attitudes of teachers had found to be improved regarding how supports and assistance bring about better educational achievement for lower academic achiever students. Similarly, the school and parents' relationships had been increased since the parents of the students had got to contact with the school better than other pervious time as it was reported from the directors' of the school involved in this min action research project.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

This mini research project result had shown that if lower academic achiever students would have been assisted properly and engaged in such kind of projects directly or indirectly, there could be promising improvement attained. In turn, this could have paramount contribution in maintaining and working towards the realizations of quality of education in a certain aspect. Since the "Quality of education is assessed on the basis of learners' achievement." (Waseka & Simatwa, 2016:072). Besides, the academic achievement of learners would be improved. Likewise, it may be helpful to strengthen the link between the community and the school relationships as well. Hence, stockholders needs to work in collaboration with the school in assisting on students with low academic achiever from the very beginning of the academic year and for relatively longer of period of time. Hopefully the academic achievement of the so called lower academic achievement students as well as their learning would be improved if the stated action is practiced. This min action research project was a good indicator for such kind of changes and improvement. Therefore, as much as possible mobilizing all stakeholders to assist and to collaborate with the school would be brings about great impacts in this regards.

4.2 Recommendations

As it is indicated by different authors such as Habibullah and Ashraf (2013) the academic performance of public elementary school children was poor because of socio-economic, psychosocial, school and home environment and student's own factors. Therefore, from the findings of this mini action research project, it is possible to suggest that if lower academic achiever students are helped, they

can improve their academic performance, in turn improve the quality of education as stated above. Therefore, providing the necessary assistance according to the needs of the learner is important requirements in the school to improve the academic achievement of the needy learners. Besides, the engagement of different stakeholders is very essential to work with the school to improve the academic achievement of learners. Therefore, parents, family and community involvement in education in collaboration with the school to support learning of the student will enable students tend to perform better, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer (NEA, 2008). Besides, the data analysis as indicated in table 1 implies that generally the academic performances of the students were lower. This is because there are many factors that affect the academic achievements of learners as indicated many research flings conducted in Ethiopia such as Zewde (2018), Daniel and Bamlaku (2017) and Birhan (2018).

5 Limitation

This action research had some limitations in terms of its scope as well as its intensity. On the one hand, this action research was conducted around the end of the fiscal academic year. Though, if it was conducted from the very beginning of the academic year or the semester probably the contribution of this action research would have been more impact on the learning as well as the academic performance of the learners.

6 Future action research recommendation

In the future it will be recommended to conduct such kind of action research for a semester or for two consecutive semesters from the very beginning of the academic year intensively, besides involving all grade levels students. In turn, based on the result some essential amendments or other best alternatives will be sought to meet for the improvement of the situation.

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