Researchers agree that teachers are one of the most important school-based resources in determining students’ future academic success and lifetime outcomes, yet have simultaneously had difficulties in defining what teacher characteristics make for an effective teacher. This paper reviews the large body of literature on measures of teacher effectiveness, underscoring the diversity of methods by which the general construct of “teacher quality” has been explored, including experience, professional knowledge, and opportunity to learn. Each of these concepts comprises a number of different dimensions and methods of operationalizing. Despite a voluminous research literature on the question of teacher quality, evidence for the impact of teacher characteristics (experience and professional knowledge) on student outcomes remains quite limited. There is a smaller, but more robust set of findings for the effect of teacher support on opportunity to learn. There are measures which may be associated with higher student achievement: teacher experience, teacher professional knowledge, and teacher provision of opportunity to learn.

**Keywords:** Opportunity to learn • Teacher education • Teacher experience • Teacher quality
Introduction

Teacher factors and government policies are vital in achieving quality in the provision of elementary education. The achievement of universal participation in education is fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available. For example, how well pupils are taught and how much they learn, has crucial impact on how long they stay in school and how regularly they attend. The achievement of quality education requires the collective effort of various stakeholders. Effort needs to be made by students, teachers, school principals and the government in order to realize desirable quality standards in elementary education. This study examined the role played by teacher factors in providing quality elementary education as signified by student's academic performance.

According to Oniye and Alawaye (2008), the importance of examination or test taking for diagnostic placement, classification and quality control in Nigerian institutions have been greatly eroded and corrupted with increasing incidence of examination malpractice. They further assert that examination malpractice constituted one of the most debilitating problems facing the Nigerian education institutions and were constantly manifested and reported in their schools, colleges and other higher institutions. It is therefore important to prioritize and set quality teaching as a strategic objective for institutions to signal the institutions' commitment to fostering continuous improvement in teaching and learning (Henard & Roseveare, 2012).

The Basic Education Act (2013) provides for the right of every child to free basic education. It further provides for the right of every child in a public school to equal standards of education. This study therefore recognized the importance of the students in accessing education and also attaining quality standards comparable to their peers in other counties.

Newsberger (2003) established that 20 percent of high school students were in some kind of alienation from the educational system at any given time. This alienation created the kind of environment that easily prompted students to cheat to get admissions or scholarships to the next level. This study established the various reasons that contributed to students cheating in examinations. In a different study done in Nigeria, Udoh (2011) favourable results to their children. Watitwa (2010) on the other hand, concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between students' motivation and achievement in Biology practical work. What was known from these studies was that parents would not hesitate to aid their students in examinations and that students' motivation was likely to boost high scores in Biology practical. What was unknown however was teachers influence on students' academic performance in secondary education in Kakamega County. This is what the current study sought to unravel. A teacher is expected to make every effort to expand the knowledge of his own subject and to improve his teaching technique. He/she is also expected to impart relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to the learner. According to this study therefore the teacher was probably a major contributing factor to students' academic performance in secondary education in a school and by extension in the county.

Results and Discussions

Teacher leadership is a resource for changing schools, using the knowledge, skills and talents of every teacher as a leader provides unlimited resources for positive outcomes. Teacher leaders’ effectiveness depends not only on their own commitment to be leaders but also on the ability of their school’s principal to skillfully support them and encourage a culture that allows teacher leadership to exist (Ackerman, Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996). The delivery view of teaching measures quality of teaching from output. The quality of teaching is often defined in terms of what happens to students after a learning experience. Quality teaching should aim at quality learning. It is what learners are able to do after being taught that provides a valid measure of the quality of teaching.
Sichambo (2011) recommended that teachers’ workload be reduced by employing more personnel. He advised that secondary school teachers, apart from the classroom teaching, had other responsibilities and a number of remedial lessons, large classes to handle, a lot of paper work which were causing moderate burnout thus performance had moderately slowed down. He further recommended that secondary schools need to find ways of completing the syllabus to avoid remedial lessons which increase teachers’ workload. Ways to reduce burnout such as reducing the holidays and weekend remedial lessons, regular transfers and time for relaxation were recommended. This view agrees with that of Calvo et al (2000) who established that reducing class size and providing more opportunities for teachers’ professional development may improve students’ learning experience. A critical shortage of teaching staff can be a stumbling block towards the provision of quality education. This can be overcome by hiring expatriate personnel in education as seen in the case of Zimbabwe where skilled teachers have migrated to South Africa, Botswana and other Western countries seeking greener pastures. Mayeku (2009) on the other hand, established that inadequate staffing leads to heavy burdening of the staff and this has a great impact on the quality of the services they offer as a result affecting the quality of the programmes. Similarly, Watitwa (2010) advised that more teachers be employed to reduce the workload in order to allow teachers ample time to prepare practical lessons. In addition, teacher shortage was identified by Mobegi (2007) as one of the challenges experienced by head teachers in their attempt to provide quality education whereas Odumbe, Simatwa and Ayodo (2015) concluded that low teacher-pupil ratio was one of the factors that enhanced performance in day secondary schools. Rosner (1985) also established that the hard-to-teach child needs explicit, unambiguous instruction that is offered in limited portions and accompanied by more than the usual amount of drill and practice. The studies mentioned above established that reducing the workload of teachers can lead to better quality education provided for learners.

High teacher experience was cited by Odumbe, Simatwa and Ayodo (2015) as one of the factors that enhance performance in day secondary schools. Ong’ele (2007) also established that teachers with more teaching experience performed better in actual classroom teaching than those with less teaching experience. This can be explained by the fact that experienced teachers have a mastery of subject areas and its scope are well versed in examination techniques, take keen interest in revision and examination techniques (Omariba, 2003). Rosner (1985) observed that teacher experience varied among teachers and had an effect on what happens in the classroom when a teacher interacts with her students. It is therefore one characteristic to consider when teaching assignments are determined. Bruce, Hersh and Mckibbin (1983) however are of different opinion, stating that however experienced the teachers, without a high quality of effort, other factors alone make little difference.

Teacher professional development has high influence on student motivation, teaching methodologies, communication skills, organization of content and planning of lessons and very high influence on students’ participation during lessons, teacher confidence and knowledge of subject matter (Maende, 2012). Mwebi (2012) recommended that most teaching staff who have less than a Doctor of Philosophy degree should upgrade their qualifications. He established that most of the teaching staff in private universities had Masters qualification. Quality of education therefore was bound to suffer a great set back due to the lecturers’ inability to deliver the good substance. Apart from Bruce, Hersh and Mckibbin (1983), the studies above indicated the contribution of teacher experience to provision of quality education. However, there is still a need to establish the influence of teachers’ experience
on students’ academic performance in secondary education in Kakamega County, hence the need for the present study.

The most important factor affecting the quality of education is the quality of the individual teacher in the classroom. There is clear evidence that a teacher’s ability and effectiveness are the most influential determinants of student achievement. Regardless of the resources that are provided, rules that are adopted and curriculum that is revised, the primary source of learning for students remains the classroom teacher. More critically, the importance of good teaching to the academic success of students is intuitively obvious to any parent (Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement, 2003). Staff development plays a critical role in higher education. Calvo et al (2000) established that supportive teachers and their ability to explain clearly were the most influential factors that impacted students’ satisfaction. Furthermore, whether parents send their children to school at all is likely to depend on judgments they make about the quality of teaching and learning provided upon whether attending school is worth the time and cost for their children and themselves (Education for All, 2005). However, Fatai (2005) counters that only the teachers who are qualified, certificated, competent and of a good moral standing need to be employed to teach the students. They should be dedicated teachers who would serve as role models in matters of punctuality, selfdiscipline, accountability, integrity and sound leadership styles. Effective schools have teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy. A sense of efficacy combined with high expectations for one’s students communicates powerfully to students that they can learn and that they will learn (Bruce et al 1983). The knowledgeable teacher is one who knows what to teach and has some idea about how to do it. She knows that once a child learns a basic fact, this can be incorporated into a future lesson for teaching some subsequent fact. The knowledgeable teacher is constantly looking for better, more

effective methods. She uses the new procedure and assesses its effects (Rosner, 1985). Teachers’ subject-matter knowledge, teaching skills, dedication to teaching and openness to new ideas, all can play a significant role in determining the success of a new curriculum (Posner, 1992). The above studies have shown that a teacher’s qualification impacts directly on the quality of education imparted upon the learners.

Absenteeism among teachers contributes immensely to the learners’ poor performance, a phenomenon that makes teachers not to cover the syllabus adequately (Nyabuto, 2007). Anyiin (1998) on the other hand, submitted that non-coverage of prescribed syllabuses due to their extensiveness and the general nonchalant attitudes of teachers towards teaching were among the fundamental causes of examination irregularities in Nigeria’s educational system. The argument here is that if the syllabus is not covered adequately, pupils are likely to be examined in content they did not fully cover and comprehend, which is likely to lead to poor performance. Teacher absenteeism was further established by Nakhanu (2009) as one of the factors that affect syllabus coverage. These findings further showed the relationship between syllabus coverage and students performance.

Conclusions
This paper conclude that teacher factors were significant predictors of students’ academic performance. Teachers should attend seminars and workshops on impact of teacher experience on performance so that they use their robust experience to enhance the performance of students in academics. The government should ensure that all schools are adequately staffed so that teachers have manageable loads that would enable them provide quality education to learners.

References


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