

Principals' Use Of Token Economy And Discipline Among Academically Gifted Students In Public Secondary Schools In Machakos Town Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

The study investigated Principals' Use of Token Economy and Discipline among Academically Gifted Students in Public Secondary Schools in Machakos Town Sub-County, Kenya. It was guided by the following research objective: To assess the relationship between the principals' use of token economy and the discipline of the academically gifted students in Machakos town sub-county. It adopted a descriptive survey research design. It targeted all (45) public secondary schools in Machakos Town sub-county, all (45) school heads, 51 deputy heads and (629) teachers. The study included 15% of the target population which was 7 principals, 8 deputy principals and 94 teachers. Proportional allocation technique was employed to identify the number of teachers to be sampled per school. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the participating teachers in each school. In total, 109 respondents participated in the study. The data was collected using questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including frequencies, percentages, Pearson correlation, and Chi-square tests, using SPSS version 23. The findings revealed that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between token economy and discipline among academically gifted students, with correlation coefficients of $r(7) = 0.623$ for principals, $r(8) = 0.598$ for deputy principals, and $r(94) = 0.681$ for teachers ($p < 0.05$). The study concluded that token economy significantly influences the discipline of academically gifted students. The study recommends that school administrators strengthen the implementation of structured behaviour modification programmes, enhance teacher training, and adopt gender-sensitive approaches to discipline management. The findings are expected to assist education stakeholders, school administrators, and policymakers in improving discipline practices among academically gifted learners in secondary schools.

Keywords: *token economy, tokens, rewards*

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I. Background To The Study.

Token economy has been used to modify undesirable behaviour among different groups. In a study conducted by Samburgo (2017) in Miami-Dade public schools, its effectiveness in promoting appropriate behaviour among students with learning disabilities was examined. The study involved eleven participants (six sixth-grade and five eighth-grade students) and used three main data collection tools: direct classroom observation checklists, teacher behaviour rating scales, and behavioural frequency recording charts. Tokens were awarded for behaviours such as remaining seated, raising hands, and staying on task, leading to a reduction in off-task behaviour and excessive talking. Although the sample size was small, this study builds on Samburgo's findings by examining the use of token economy by principals as a behaviour modification strategy among academically gifted students in public secondary schools in Machakos Town Sub-County.

According to Akyina and Heeralal (2024), the token economy also known as token system is a system of reinforcement where indirect rewards are given or taken away as means of obtaining concrete rewards. In the token economy system, indirect systems like giving of points, stars and cards are used as means of getting tangible rewards. Therefore, when a desirable behaviour is exhibited by someone a point is given to them. If the points accumulate to an agreed upon number, the participant is given for example an exercise book as a reward.

If a child displays undesirable behaviour, a point is deducted from the accumulated point to discourage the exhibition of that behaviour. Aryanti (2020) inquired about the effect of the token economy on the motivation for mathematical learning and found that the token economy greatly increased the motivation of mathematical learning in an experimental study conducted with 7th grade pupils.

Marland report (1972) defines academically gifted students as those who perform well using general mental ability and have excellent special abilities in a certain academic field, creative and productive thinking, leadership ability, talent in visual performing arts, and/or psychomotor ability. Gifted and talented children are those who are capable of high performance and demonstrated achievement or potential ability in any of the following areas singly or combination, general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts and psychomotor ability (Marland 1971 as cited in Juniette, 2024). Woods (2016) defines gifted and talented children as those distinguished from their peers by their general and/or special abilities.

Academically gifted students possess unique intellectual abilities but require discipline to maximize their potential. According to Paz-Baruch and Hazema (2023) discipline for such learners can improve self-regulation and enhance their academic success. These students may exhibit behavioural issues if not placed in structured environments that can challenge their cognitive abilities and bandwidth. Discipline provides a frame work for these academically gifted students to develop crucial life skills and maximize their capabilities. Without it, they may underperform or become disengaged (Paz-Baruch et al., 2023).

Objective of the study

I. To assess if there is statistically significant relationship between the principals' use of token economy and the discipline of the academically gifted students in Machakos Town sub-county.

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between the principals' use of token economy and the discipline of the academically gifted students.

II. Review Of The Related Literature

Token economy has been used to modify undesirable behaviour among different groups. In a study conducted by Samburgo (2017) in Miami-Dade public schools, its effectiveness in promoting appropriate behaviour among students with learning disabilities was examined. The study involved eleven participants (six sixth-grade and five eighth-grade students) and used three main data collection tools: direct classroom observation checklists, teacher behaviour rating scales, and behavioural frequency recording charts. Tokens were awarded for behaviours such as remaining seated, raising hands, and staying on task, leading to a reduction in off-task behaviour and excessive talking. Although the sample size was small, this study builds on Samburgo's findings by examining the use of token economy by principals as a behaviour modification strategy among academically gifted students in public secondary schools in Machakos Town Sub-County

Token economies are widely used in educational settings as a behaviour management strategy to encourage positive student behaviours and academic engagement. Gomez et al., (2020) conducted a research study in Delaware state to assess student's perception of the token economy in a flipped science classroom, specifically as it related to student motivation to complete in and out of class activities. Tokens were earned by arriving to class on time, bringing completed work, bringing the book on, answering questions and completing in class task. A little over half of the students indicated that they would have completed their homework without receiving tickets (Gomez et al., 2020). Almost all the students reported that the tickets did motivate them to complete their homework assignments and the rewards were an incentive to earn tickets. Nearly all students would recommend a token economy in other classes (Gomez et al.,2020). While this study examined the undergraduate students in the university, the current study examined how principals from selected secondary schools in Machakos town subcounty used token economy to modify behaviour among academically gifted students.

Aziz and Yasin (2018) conducted a study in Malaysia to examine whether a token economy could enhance student behaviour. The research was carried out over six weeks using an A-B-A design. Specifically, the first two weeks were designated for the baseline phase (A), followed by two weeks of intervention (B), and concluding with two weeks without the intervention (A). During the intervention phase, students received a token whenever they exhibited no disruptive behaviours, and these tokens were then placed on a token economy chart. The results indicated that in the first week of implementing the token economy, both task errors and disruptive behaviours decreased. However, by the sixth week, when the intervention was withdrawn, the frequency of errors and disruptive behaviours increased. These findings suggest that the token economy played a significant role in behaviour modification. While this study utilized an A-B-A single-subject design, the

current study instead adopted a descriptive survey design as it aims to gather data from a larger population rather than focusing on behavioural changes of a single individual over time.

In Cameroon, Nasako (2016) investigated the effects of a token economy on the mathematics achievement of children with ADHD in Buea using a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design. A sample of 20 pupils (11 males and 9 females) from a government primary school was used. Data were collected using an interview guide, an ADHD behaviour checklist adapted from the DSM, and teacher-made achievement tests in mathematics, reading and spelling. Over an eight-week period, the experimental group received tokens for completing academic tasks, which were later exchanged for reinforcers, while the control group did not. Findings showed that token economy significantly improved academic performance. While Nasako's study focused on children with ADHD, this study examines the use of token economy by principals in reducing disciplinary issues among academically gifted students in public secondary schools in Machakos Town Sub-County.

In Nigeria, Suleiman and Uhuegbu (2020) conducted a study on the impact of cognitive restructuring and token economy techniques on truancy among secondary school students in Lagos state, Nigeria. The study adopted a pre-test post control group design, with a multistage sampling technique was used to select two from six Educational Districts in Lagos state, simple random sampling technique was adopted to select six schools; three schools from each Education District and 170 truants out of the 216 randomly selected based on the class attendance register completed the study. The findings showed that token economy technique was effective for reduction of truancy. While this study examined the impact of token economy in reduction of truancy, the proposed study examined the impact of token economy on academically gifted students.

Ooko and Aloka (2021) investigated the use of behaviour modification practices to enhance reading abilities among dyslexic learners in Changamwe Sub-County, Kenya. The study found that token economy was effective, as shown by a significant improvement in the experimental group's post-test scores compared to the pre-test scores. Behaviour modification practices used included token economy, prompting, shaping, coaching and modelling, where a tick was awarded for each correctly read word and tokens were given as reinforcement. While this study focused on dyslexic learners, this study examined the use of token economy by principals in managing discipline among academically gifted students in public secondary schools in Machakos Town Sub-County.

Despite the ban on corporal punishment in Kenyan schools (Government of Kenya, 2001), many teachers still rely on punishment to manage student behaviour. For instance, Ong'ayo (2018) showed that teachers in Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County mainly used punishment to handle issues like bullying and fighting during games. This shows that there hasn't been enough focus on using positive methods like token economy, where students earn rewards for good behaviour. This study looked at how principals use token economy to help improve discipline among academically gifted students in public secondary schools in Machakos Town sub-county

III. Methodology

The target population for this study was all the principals, deputy principals and teachers in public schools in Machakos town sub-county. The study adopted both descriptive survey design and a correlational design. In this study, the researcher used simple random sampling to select the respondents where by 7 principals, 8 deputy principals and 94 teachers participated in the study. Questionnaires were admitted to principals , deputy principals and teachers.

Findings of the study.

The study findings were represented by use of descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results on Scoring of Questionnaires on use of token economy.

This study sought to assess the relationship between the principals' use of token economy and the discipline of the academically gifted students in Machakos Town sub-county. The respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements in Table 4.2 using a 5-point Likert scale with; strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) or strongly disagree (1).

Table 1.6.1 Principals' View on the Use of Token Economy and the Discipline of the Academically Gifted Students

Statement	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Neutral F (%)	Agree F (%)	Strongly Agree F (%)
I use reward systems (points, tokens, certificates) to manage discipline among the academically gifted students.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (42.9)	4 (57.1)

Token economy improves self-discipline among academically gifted learners.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (28.6)	1 (14.3)	4 (57.1)
Gifted students respond positively to structured reward system.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (28.6)	5 (71.4)
I am familiar with the use of token economy as a behaviour modification strategy in schools.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	3 (42.9)	3 (42.9)
Teachers in my school use token rewards (such as points, stars, or privileges) to encourage positive behaviour among students.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	4 (57.1)	2 (28.6)
Token rewards motivate academically gifted students to follow school rules.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	6 (85.7)
Male and female students exhibit different types of behavioural challenges in the classroom.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (42.9)	4 (57.1)
Gender influences how students respond to token economy.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (28.6)	5 (71.4)

The findings in Table 1.6.1 show that majority; (57.1%) of the principals strongly agreed while 42.9% agreed that they use reward systems such as points, tokens, and certificates to manage discipline among academically gifted students. Regarding whether token economy improves self-discipline among academically gifted learners, 57.1% strongly agreed, 14.3% agreed, and 28.6% were neutral. These findings imply that most teachers believe token rewards help students regulate their behaviour and develop self-control. The findings further revealed that majority (71.4%) of principals strongly agreed while only 28.6% agreed that gifted students respond positively to structured reward systems.

On familiarity with token economy, 42.9% of principals strongly agreed, 42.9% agreed, and 14.3% were neutral that they were familiar with the use of token economy as a behaviour modification strategy in schools. The study also established that 57.1% of principals agreed while 28.6% strongly agreed that teachers in their schools use token rewards such as points, stars, and privileges to encourage positive behaviour among students. Only 14.3% remained neutral.

Concerning the statement that token rewards motivate academically gifted students to follow school rules, the majority of principals (85.7%) strongly agreed while 14.3% agreed. This statement recorded the highest level of agreement among all items. The findings further showed that 57.1% strongly agreed and 42.9% agreed that male and female students exhibit different types of behavioural challenges in the classroom. Finally, 71.4% of principals strongly agreed while 28.6% agreed that gender influences how students respond to token economy interventions.

Table 1.6.2 Deputy Principals' View on the Use of Token Economy and the Discipline of the Academically Gifted Students

Statement	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Neutral F (%)	Agree F (%)	Strongly Agree F (%)
I supervise the implementation of behaviour modification strategies such as token economy in this school.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (50.0)	4 (50.0)
Token rewards are used to reinforce positive behaviour among academically gifted students in this school	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	5 (62.5)
Teachers regularly report the progress of students who are under token reward systems	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	2 (25.0)	5 (62.5)
The use of token economy has reduced cases of indiscipline among academically gifted students	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	4 (50.0)	2 (25.0)
Students value the tokens they receive as rewards for positive behavior.	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (25.0)	5 (62.5)
Token rewards encourage students to follow school rules and regulations.	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	5 (62.5)	1 (12.5)
Girls improve their behavior after token economy	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (25.0)	1 (12.5)	4 (50.0)
Boys improve their behavior after token economy	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	5 (62.5)	2 (25.0)

The findings in Table 1.6.2 indicate generally positive perceptions among deputy principals regarding the use of token economy as a behaviour modification strategy for academically gifted students. On supervision of behaviour modification strategies, the results show that 50.0% of deputy principals agreed and 50.0% strongly agreed that they supervise the implementation of token economy in their schools. Regarding whether token rewards are used to reinforce positive behaviour, 62.5% strongly agreed, 12.5% agreed, while 12.5% disagreed and 12.5% strongly disagreed, with 12.5% remaining neutral. These mixed responses suggest that although token economy is widely used, its application may not be fully consistent across all schools. On teacher reporting of student progress, 62.5% strongly agreed and 25.0% agreed that teachers regularly report on students under token systems, while 12.5% were neutral.

Concerning the reduction of indiscipline cases, 50.0% agreed and 25.0% strongly agreed that token economy has reduced indiscipline among academically gifted students, while 12.5% disagreed and 12.5% were neutral. These findings suggest that while most deputy principals perceive token economy as effective, there is still some uncertainty or limited impact in certain contexts. On whether students value tokens received, 62.5% strongly agreed and 25.0% agreed, with only 12.5% strongly disagreeing.

Regarding whether token rewards encourage adherence to school rules, 62.5% agreed, 12.5% strongly agreed, 12.5% disagreed, and 12.5% strongly disagreed. This reflects moderate agreement, suggesting that while token systems promote rule-following, their effectiveness may vary among students. On gender differences in behavioural improvement, 50.0% strongly agreed, 12.5% agreed, and 25.0% were neutral that girls improve behaviour after token economy, while 12.5% strongly disagreed. Finally, regarding boys' improvement, 62.5% agreed and 25.0% strongly agreed that boys improve their behaviour after token economy, while 12.5% disagreed. This indicates that deputy principals perceive token economy as slightly more effective or more consistently observable among boys compared to girls.

Table 1.6.3 Teachers' View on the Use of Token Economy and the Discipline of the Academically Gifted Students

Statement	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Neutral F (%)	Agree F (%)	Strongly Agree F (%)
I often use tokens, stars, rewards in my institution.	3 (3.2)	6 (6.4)	4 (4.3)	46 (48.9)	35 (37.2)
I often see tokens, stars, rewards used in my institution to address behaviour issues.	2 (2.1)	5 (5.3)	5 (5.3)	44 (46.8)	38 (40.4)
The use of tokens is effective in reducing indiscipline among academically gifted students.	4 (4.3)	7 (7.4)	3 (3.2)	42 (44.7)	38 (40.4)
I would recommend the use of tokens, stars, rewards in other classes.	2 (2.1)	4 (4.3)	2 (2.1)	45 (47.9)	41 (43.6)
Girls improve their behaviours after tokens, rewards, stars.	3 (3.2)	5 (5.3)	4 (4.3)	44 (46.8)	38 (40.4)
Boys improve their behaviours after tokens, rewards, stars.	2 (2.1)	6 (6.4)	5 (5.3)	45 (47.9)	36 (38.3)

The findings in Table 1.6.3 present teachers' responses on the use and effectiveness of token economy in managing discipline among academically gifted students. Overall, the results indicate a strong positive perception of token-based reward systems, with most responses concentrated in the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories. Regarding the use of tokens, stars, and rewards in institutions, 48.9% of teachers agreed and 37.2% strongly agreed that they often use such systems. Only a small proportion disagreed (9.6%) or strongly disagreed (3.2%), while a minimal 4.3% remained neutral. Similarly, 46.8% agreed and 40.4% strongly agreed that they often observe tokens and rewards being used to address behavioural issues in their institutions. Only a small minority disagreed, showing that the practice is not only personally applied but also institutionally embedded.

On effectiveness, 44.7% agreed and 40.4% strongly agreed that token economy reduces indiscipline among academically gifted students. A small proportion remained neutral (3.2%), while 11.7% disagreed. Regarding recommendation of token systems to other classes, 47.9% agreed and 43.6% strongly agreed, indicating a very strong endorsement of the approach. Only a very small proportion expressed neutrality or disagreement, suggesting high acceptance and perceived transferability of the strategy across learning environments.

On gender differences in behavioural improvement, 46.8% agreed and 40.4% strongly agreed that girls improve behaviour after receiving tokens, while 4.3% were neutral. For boys, 47.9% agreed and 38.3% strongly agreed, with 5.3% neutral responses.

Table 1.6.4 Correlation between Principals' View on the Use of Token Economy and the Discipline of the Academically Gifted Students

	Token Economy Use (Principals)	Learners' Discipline/Academic Performance
Token Economy Use Pearson Correlation	1	.623(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		0
N	7	7
Learners' Discipline/Academic Performance Pearson Correlation	.623(**)	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
N	7	7

The findings in Table 1.6.4 show that there is a significant strong positive relationship between principals' perceptions of token economy use and learners' discipline/academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r(7) = 0.623$, $p < 0.05$. This suggests that where principals report higher implementation and supervision of token-based reward systems, there is a corresponding improvement in student discipline and academic behavioural outcomes.

Table1.6.5 Correlation between Deputy Principals' View on the Use of Token Economy and the Discipline of the Academically Gifted Students

	Token Economy Use (Principals)	Learners' Discipline/Academic Performance
Token Economy Use Pearson Correlation	1	.598(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		0
N	8	8
Learners' Discipline/Academic Performance Pearson Correlation	.598(**)	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
N	8	8

The results in Table 1.6.5 indicate that there is a moderate positive relationship between deputy principals' views on the use of token economy and learners' discipline/academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r(8) = 0.598$, $p < 0.05$. This implies that increased supervision, monitoring, and implementation of token-based reward systems is associated with improved student discipline outcomes. The relationship is statistically significant, although slightly weaker compared to teachers and principals, suggesting variation in perception based on administrative role.

Table1.6.6 Correlation between Teachers' View on the Use of Token Economy and the Discipline of the Academically Gifted Students

	Token Economy Use (Principals)	Learners' Discipline/Academic Performance
Token Economy Use Pearson Correlation	1	.681(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		0
N	94	94
Learners' Discipline/Academic Performance Pearson Correlation	.681(**)	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
N	94	94

The results in Table 1.6.6 reveal that there is a strong positive relationship between teachers' use of token economy strategies and learners' discipline/academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of $r(94) = 0.681$, $p < 0.05$. This implies that increased use of tokens, stars, and reward systems is associated with improved learner discipline and better academic-related behavioural outcomes among academically gifted students. The relationship is statistically significant, indicating that the observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Based on these results, the hypothesis; H_{01} : there is no statistically significant relationship between the principals' use of token economy and the discipline of the academically gifted students is rejected and a conclusion is made that; There is a statistically significant relationship between the principals' use of token economy and the discipline of the academically gifted students

IV. Conclusion

The study concluded that token economy is widely used in secondary schools in Machakos Town Sub-County as a behaviour modification strategy for academically gifted students. The findings from principals, deputy principals, and teachers consistently indicated that reward-based systems such as tokens, stars, and certificates play a significant role in promoting positive behaviour and improving discipline. Statistical analysis further confirmed a significant positive relationship between token economy and student discipline outcomes. The study therefore concludes that when token economy strategies are consistently implemented and reinforced, academically gifted students are more likely to develop self-discipline, comply with school rules, and demonstrate improved classroom behaviour. However, variation in implementation across schools suggests that effectiveness depends on the level of consistency and administrative support.

V. Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations in line with the study objectives: School principals should consistently implement token economy strategies such as points, stars, certificates, and privileges to reinforce positive behaviour among academically gifted students. Teachers should be encouraged to apply token-based rewards more frequently in classroom settings to sustain student motivation and improve discipline outcomes. The Ministry of Education (MOE) should support schools by providing resources and guidelines to ensure effective and standardized implementation of token economy programmes. School administrations should establish clear reward structures so that learners understand the criteria for earning tokens, thereby promoting fairness and consistency.

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