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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY BACKGROUND ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN VIHIGA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Despite the Government of Kenya providing free secondary education, there has been poor academic performance as noted in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (K.C.S.E) results. Therefore, the study endeavored to investigate the relationship between family background and students' academic performance. The study was based on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which considers learning as an interaction between environment, behaviour, and one's psychological processes. This was a correlational study carried out in Sabatia District of Vihiga County in twenty-one public secondary schools. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique. Questionnaires were used to collect data, which were analyzed by multiple regressions. The study revealed that family background was the most potent predictor of students' academic performance. For a student to attain high academic performance in the district public day secondary schools, home environment must be conducive. Learning does not only take place in school, but at home where they the students take private studies and revision. Consequently, the person(s) whom the student stays with at home and their level of education have far reaching relationship with the student's academic performance. The findings of the study are useful to teachers, principals and parents as it will enhance their understanding of the relationship between the student's psychosocial factors and their academic performance and how to improve their academic performance.

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Introduction

The environment at home is a primary socialization agent and influences a child's interests and the future aspirations while in school. The family lays the psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations in the overall development of the child. It includes factors such as parental practices, family size, divorce and socio-economic status (Barry, 2005). The socio-economic status (SES) of a child is most commonly determined by combining parents' educational level, occupational status, and income level (Jeyens, 2002). According to Kirk (2000), many researchers have noted that educational attainment of a child's parents is a good predictor of the academic performance of the learner. Parents who have a college education could be better equipped to help children with the homework and the understanding of the concepts than a high school educated, other things being equal. Presence of books, magazines and newspapers at home is often seen as a dedication to learning in the household.

Grissmer (2003) adds that parent's level of education is the most important factor affecting student's academic performance. Musgrave (2000) adds that a child who comes from an educated family would like to follow the footsteps of his/her family and by this, work actively in his/her studies. Students who have a low SES earn lower test scores and are more likely to drop out of school (Eamon, 2005; Hochschild, 2003). SES has also been shown to override other educational influences such as parental involvement (McNeal, 2001). It is believed that low SES prevents access to vital resources and creates additional stress at home (Eamon, 2005; Jeynes, 2002). The economic

hardships that are caused by low SES lead to disruptions in parenting, an increasing amount of family conflicts, an increased likelihood of depression in parents and single-parent households (Eamon, 2005). For these reasons, SES is closely tied to home environment and one could argue that S.E.S dictates the quality of home life for children. Similar results have been found by Teese (2004), who, in his analysis of the students' academic performance found clear and consistent trends for children from lower socio-economic background.

Barry (2005) study shows that children from single-parent households do not perform as well in school as children from two-parent households. There are several different explanations for this disparity in achievement. Single-parent households have a variety of challenges; they have less income, there is a lack of support for the single parents, which increases stress and conflicts. Single parents often struggle with time-management issues due to balancing many different areas of life on their own. Single parents are less involved with their children's academic affairs and therefore give less encouragement and have lower expectations of their children than the two-parent households. Furthermore, Jeynes (2002) examined relationships between changing family structures and students' school-related outcomes, and shows that in relation to two-parent families, children in single-parent families have lower academic performance because they are more susceptible to peer pressure, to engage in deviant behaviour, have higher dropout rates from high school, and have greater social and psychological problems. Single-parent families can be stressful for both the child and the parent. Such families are faced with the challenges of diminished financial resources, assumptions of new roles and responsibilities, establishment of new patterns in intra-familial interaction and reorganization of routines and schedules. These conditions are not conducive for effective parenting. This is because when the single parent is overburdened by responsibilities and by their own emotional reaction to their situation, they often become irritable, impatient and insensitive to their children's needs.

Although the differences are generally small, a number of theories have been proposed to explain the variations. The no-impact perspective theory claims, for example, that the association between changing family structures and children's academic outcomes can be attributed to a combination of family background factors such as parents' education and incomes and the ethnicity/race of the family (Majoribanks, 2005). Further, some researchers propose that much family structure research is inconclusive because it has failed to differentiate among various types of single-parent families such as whether they result from marital disruption (divorce or separation), parental death, or a never-married parent. In addition, it is suggested that many studies fail to take into account the timing in a child's life of a family disruption, the duration of the effects of that disruption, and whether the lone parent is the father, mother, or a guardian. An economic deprivation theory suggests that economic hardship in single-parent families is likely to require adolescents to work long hours and to take greater responsibility for younger brothers and/or sisters. As a result, these time-consuming activities are likely to be related to lower school achievement (Eamon, 2005). In a family socialization perspective, it is proposed that the absence of a parent is probably associated with a decrease in total parental involvement, which in turn is related to poorer school outcomes. It is often claimed that the absence of fathers has negative socialization influences, which may be especially detrimental for boys. While the mother's significant role in this cannot be over-emphasized. Studies on father-child relationship suggest that the presence of a father in the home influences significantly the development of a child (Eamon, 2005). Thus, parenthood is a responsibility requiring the full cooperation of both parents who must ensure the total development of their offspring(s).

In general, research suggests that differences in the academic achievement of children from single- and two-parent families can be related to changes in the economic circumstances of families and to variations in the quality of parent-child interactions in the different family structures. In a research on the parental involvement aspect of school social climate, Hochschild (2003) identifies parent involvement as one of four factors in effective schools that was expected to improve student academic performance. He discusses the various methods a principal could employ in establishing and monitoring effective parent involvement programmes. Divorce has also been found to negatively affect students' academic achievement (Jeynes, 2002). Jeynes (ibid.) reports that students whose parents have divorced are among those who score lowest on standardized tests. Consequently, Chepng'eno (2010) observes that the larger the family the less attention and devotion of each child by the parents and the more the difficulties encountered by the parents in meeting the needs of the children, both physically and emotionally. Nabuka (1999) observes that most of the Indian students' academic responsibilities are well distributed among their nuclear family members, an indication that they attach a high value to the education of their children. Education becomes a joint family venture, and siblings reside with older brothers and sisters, who are often better educated than the parents, in order to be more successful at school. The influence of the family in the socialization process, family interest and support and the psychological stimulation of the child's academic development by parents and other significant

persons in the home environment, are important in influencing student's academic ability, achievement and motivation.

Investigations that have adopted refined measures of family influences have tended to show that they are related more strongly to academic outcomes than to more global measures of family background. Domina (2005) concludes, for example, that family social status or cultural background need not determine a child's achievement at school. Domina proposes that for academic success, it is what parents do at home, and not children's family background, that is significant. Similarly, Eamon (2005) indicates that in relation to academic outcomes, parents who provide stimulating, supportive, and language-rich experiences for their children can overcome the potential limitations associated with poor economic circumstances.

It is important, however, to recognize the nature of the interrelationships between family background characteristics and more refined family influences. In the development of a model of human development, the efficacy of a family influence for academic success is determined to a large degree by a child's family background. Eamon (2005) observe that parent-child interactions are the forces that lead to academic performance. In addition, Eamon (ibid) claims that academic success is achieved only if family background resources can be accessed to maximize the association between family influences and outcomes. The relationships between family influences and academic achievement need to take into account the potentially constraining or expanding opportunities provided by children's family backgrounds. Analysis of the relations between families and academic achievement also need to consider children's family structures, for example whether a mother does homework with her children (Eamon, 2005).

Review of literature indicates that there should be an awareness of the importance of the home environment or family on student's academic performance. The home has a great influence on the students' psychological, emotional, social and economic state. In the view of Ajila and Olutola (2007), the state of the home affects the individual since the parents are the first socializing institution. This is because the family background and context of a child affect his reaction to life situations and his level of performance. Although the school is responsible for the experiences that make up the individual's life during school periods, parents and the individual's experiences at home play tremendous roles in building the personality of the child and making the child what he is. Although the home environment or family has been recognized as having a lot of influence on the academic performance of student, previous studies have been concentrated on the area of socio-economic status of parents. Other aspects of parental environment such as the structure of the family have been grossly neglected.

Limitations of the Study

The findings and generalization of the study only apply to public secondary schools. It cannot be applied to private schools because there are differences in the infrastructure and learning and teaching resources between the private and public schools. Consequently, the findings are appropriate to rural schools because Sabatia District is found in rural part of the country. Its generalization to urban schools should be done with precaution. The author recommends a replication study using the same methods to be conducted in other parts of the country so that generalization can be applied to similar population in other districts.

Materials and Methods

The study was done in public secondary schools in Sabatia District. It is one of the districts in Vihiga County, Western Province of the Republic of Kenya. It neighbours Hamisi to the East, Vihiga to the South and Emuhaya to the North. The research used a correlation research design. Gay (1996) points out that correlation research attempts to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. Waters (2009) adds that correlation research is a quantitative method of research in which you have two or more variables from the same group of subjects to determine the relationship between the stated variables. In correlation research, each variable must be expressed in numerical form, that is, must be quantifiable.

Sabatia District has 28 public secondary schools. Twenty-one of them are district day schools while seven are provincial boarding (District Education Office [DEO] Report, 2011). The target population was Form Four students in selected Sabatia District public day secondary schools. Since it is practically impossible to access all the schools in the District, only manageable populations of seven district public secondary school students were used.

The research employed both simple random and systematic sampling techniques to select the respondents from the selected schools. Purposive sampling was used to select twenty-one district public day secondary schools. This group was most suitable for the research because students from such schools have direct contact with their parents/guardian or home factors everyday compared to those from boarding schools. The other seven were Provincial public boarding secondary schools. Simple random sampling technique was used to select seven district public day secondary schools out of the twenty-one. These represent thirty per cent of the twenty-one district public day secondary schools. Kombo and Delno (2006) say that a sample of 30% is a representative of a population to be studied. Simple random sampling was used because it yields research data that can be generalized to a larger population. In particular, a table of random numbers was used to select schools that were used in the study. In order to get the required sample size, the names of the schools were listed and a number assigned to each name. Using a table of random numbers, the authors then picked every 3rd number until he got the sample required. In doing this, the ratio of 1:3 was applied. This implied that in every three schools, one was picked for the study. By the end of the exercise, seven schools were used, representing 30% of the total number of public district day secondary schools in Sabatia District.

Purposive sampling was also used to select the Form Four students from the sampled schools. The Form Four students were selected because they are directly involved in preparation for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) and their concern about academic performance is very important. They are also the final consumers of the learning process at the secondary level in Kenya (Muleyi, 2008). Furthermore, it is because of their maturity level and the experience they have both at school and home. Simple random sampling was used to select thirty respondents per school. Therefore, the study used 210 respondents in the study. The study used questionnaire to collection data. The questionnaire was used since the study was mainly concerned with variables that could not be directly observed or manipulated. A questionnaire was also preferred because it takes care of confidentiality. It was a Likert-type questionnaire. Family background variable focused on parents/guardian level of education (university, college, secondary, primary or illiterate) and whether or not their parents/guardian and brothers/sisters encourages the students to work hard in their studies. On the type of family, the research explored with whom the students are staying at home: grandparents, their parents, or whether their parents are divorced. It also enquired on whether or not the students have environment conducive to study at home, if the parents/guardian pays school fees on time and whether parents/guardian consults teachers to know how the students perform in school. The study also investigated on whether or not students are helped by their parents/guardian to do their homework and on the presence of reference/revision books at home (textbooks, set books, newspapers and magazines). It was predicted that students with good family backgrounds perform better than those from unstable families.

The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.0 was used to analyze data. The data was subjected to regressions to explore the magnitude and direction of relationship between independent and dependent variables. Descriptive statistics like percentages and means were also used. Results were presented in tables and in words.

Results and Discussion

Thirty per cent of the students strongly disagreed and twenty-nine per cent disagreed that they had enough time to study and do assignments at home as witnessed in Table 1. Another sixty-three per cent of the students showed that their parents/guardians do not help them to do their homework. This comprised forty-two per cent who strongly disagreed and twenty-one per cent who disagreed on the item that their parents/guardians do not help them to do their homework. Thirty-eight per cent of the parents/guardians did not provide conducive environment and time for their children to study at home. This constituted twenty-two per cent who agreed and sixteen per cent who strongly agreed. Twenty per cent strongly disagreed and seventeen per cent disagreed that they were encouraged by their siblings to work hard in their academics. Twenty-two per cent indicated that they did not receive advice from their parents/guardians on their future career as shown by sixteen per cent who disagreed with six per cent who strongly disagreed. This could be due to the parents'/guardians' low level of education, thereby affecting the students' academic performance. Thirty-eight per cent of the parents/guardians were not role models to their children in their prospective career. This was shown by twenty-four per cent of the students who strongly disagreed and fourteen per cent who disagreed. The study also found that most parents/guardians were not directly involved in their students' academic work because of low educational level.

To find out the exact relationship between family background factors and students' academic performance, the data was subjected to regression analysis. Table 2 shows that the relationship between family background factors and students' academic performance is -.062 significant at .463. This is considerably more significant than student role performance which was at -.034. This implies that family background factors have a greater relationship with students' academic performance than student role performance factors. However, the coefficient is negative, meaning that family background factors had a negative effect on students' academic performance in the study.

	SA(5)	A(4)	U(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	Total
I have enough time to study at home.	58(28%)	27(12%)	2(1%)	60(29%)	63(30%)	210(100%)
My parents/guardian helps me to do my homework	21(10%)	51(24%)	5(2%)	44(21%)	88(42%)	210(100%)
My parents/guardian encourages me to work hard in my studies	79(38%)	86(41%)	7(3%)	21(10%)	16(8%)	210(100%)
I have a conducive environment to study at home	59(28%)	66(31%)	5(2%)	46(22%)	34(16%)	210(100%)
My parents/guardian pays my school fees on time	70(33%)	77(37%)	16(8%)	16(8%)	30(14%)	210(100%)
My brothers/sisters encourage me to work hard in school	51(24%)	75(36%)	7(3%)	35(17%)	42(20%)	210(100%)
My parents/guardian advices me on my future career	75(36%)	72(34%)	19(9%)	33(16%)	12(6%)	210(100%)
I have adequate reference/revision books at home(text books/newspapers/magazines)	103(49%)	12(6%)	2(1%)	12(6%)	12(6%)	210(100%)
My parents/guardian are my role model in my education	56(27%)	58(28%)	17(8%)	29(14%)	50(24%)	210(100%)
My parents/guardian consults my teachers on how I perform in school	103(49%)	72(34%)	12(6%)	7(3%)	16(8%)	210(100%)

Table 1: Students' response to the relationship between family background factors and students' academic performance

Table 2: Regression analysis on family background factors and students' academic performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error	Beta t	Significant
(Constant)	49.120		5.921		8.296 .000
Family	.129			-.062	
Factors	-.095				

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study findings discussed above, it is clear that for a student to perform well in the district public day secondary schools, home environment must be conducive. Learning does not only take place only in school, but also at home where the students take private studies and revision. Consequently, the person(s) with whom the students stay at home and their level of education have far-reaching influence on the students' academic performance.

As the family background of student has been found to be the most important factor affecting students' academic performance in district public secondary schools, parents/guardians should provide conducive study environments at home, provide adequate reference materials and be good role models to their children at home.

The results of the study suggests that parents should realize that they are the source of dependency of their children. Thus, they should identify interesting ways of participation to help their child in educational activities at home. They should be more involved in their child's education. This will help the child to gain the trust of their parents. Parents also need to identify their strengths and weaknesses in their parental involvement strategies at home so that they improve on the degree of involvement and its effectiveness and provide more assistance to their children whenever it is needed. By so doing, parents will inculcate a better positive learning attitude and behavior in the minds of their children; based on the amount of help and the quality of parental involvement they provide.

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