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INFLUENCE OF SELECTED PARENTAL FACTORS ON THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING LITERACY SKILLS IN LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MATHIRA WEST, NYERI COUNTY- KENYA

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Citation:

Muriuki, N. C., Ogembo, O. J., & Ituma, G. M. (2023). Influence of selected parental factors on their involvement in their children's learning literacy skills in lower primary schools in Mathira West, Nyeri County, Kenya.. In: Mutembei Henry, Nduru Gilbert, Munyiri Shelmith, Gathungu Geofrey, Kiboro Christopher, Otiso Wycliffe, Rithaa Jafford, Miriti Gilbert, Gichumbi Joel, Mwathi David, Gitonga Lucy Nanua Jackin, Kahindi Roseline, Jonathan Kathenge & Muthui Zipporah (Eds.). *Proceedings of the Chuka University Tenth Annual Internationa Research Conference held in Chuka University, Chuka, Kenya from 5th to 6th October, 2023. 42-46 pp.*

ABSTRACT

Involvement of parents in their children's education is of paramount importance for academic and moral development of a child. Parental involvement is however affected by many factors. This study focused on the influence of selected parental factors on their involvement in children's education specifically learning of literacy skills in lower primary school. Specifically, this study focused on the influence of selected parent's personal characteristics, the influence of parent's socio-economic status, the influence of family type and the influence of family size on a parent's involvement in their children's learning of literacy skills at lower primary school. The study was conducted in Mathira West-Sub- County, Nyeri County, Kenya. It adopted a descriptive survey research design with a target population of 2882 respondents. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires from 297 parents with children in lower primary school and 36 lower primary school teachers. A structured interview was also conducted with 12 head teachers. Quantitative data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data from interview was analyzed thematically. Descriptive statistics including frequency and percentages as well as mean and standard deviation was used to describe the relationship between the variables while Chi Square was used to test the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable at 95% level of confidence based on the objectives. Results obtained showed that parent's age, their level of education, family monthly income and family type significantly influences parent's involvement in their children's learning of literacy skills. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of education actualise implementation of parental empowerment and engagement policy to enhance parents' capacity for involvement in their children's learning. School Management should organise sensitization seminars to help improve the capacity of parents to be involved in their children's learning. Class teachers on their part should foster a more positive approach towards parental involvement in their children's learning to help encourage less involved parents to get more involved.

Key words: Parent's Selected Characteristics, Parental Involvement, Literacy Skills

INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized worldwide as human right implying that every child of school going age has a right to education. In recognition of its significance, United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) declared that every child has a right to free basic education (UNCRC, 1990). This was ratified by United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20th November 1989 entry into force 2nd September 1990, in accordance with article 49. Dakar World Conference on education, in

fulfillment of this commitment called for “Education for All” (Dakar, 2000). Member states collectively committed themselves to achieve education for ‘every citizen in every

society.’ Since then, most countries, Kenya included have endeavored to provide free basic education for all its citizens, children of school going age getting special preference.

One of the most important areas in which basic education seeks to build the capacity of learners’ is general literacy which is a prerequisite for the individual and collective success of the learners. Despite the importance of mastery of literacy skills, evidence show a worrying trend of significant proportion of learners in basic education failing to achieve minimum levels of proficiency despite having been beneficiaries of educational opportunities in their countries. Table 1 presents a summary of findings from a study conducted by UNICEF (2022) among 202 countries worldwide on foundation learning.

Table 16: Minimum Proficiency in Reading and Numeracy in Percentage in some selected Sub-Saharan Africa Countries

Country/learning area	Reading	Numeracy	Total
Ghana	21.40	15.70	15.55
Lesotho	43.80	13.30	28.55
Malawi	18.90	12.60	15.75
Zimbabwe	44.00	25.00	34.50
Togo	18.00	4.00	11.00
Average	28.35	12.90	20.63

Chad 24.00 6.80 15.40

The Table 1 indicates that number of learners who could read in the six selected countries averaged at 28.35% which is way below the UNICEF target of attaining minimum proficiency in reading by 2030. Data also indicates a very low level of numeracy skills, some studies attributing significant correlation between proficiency in reading and numeracy. Similar observation was made by Uwezo Learning report (2021) for Kenya which recommended a need for a concerted effort towards level of literacy in the country. Table 2 presents findings on proficiency in reading by grade 4 learners on grade 3 content

Table 17: Uwezo Minimum Proficiency in Reading in Percentage
 Gender/Levels of Below Approaching Meeting/Exceeding-achievement Expectation
 Expectation Expectation

Male	37.7	24.1	38.2	Female	31.8	25.0	43.2
Average			34.8		24.5		40.7

information obtained shows that only 38.2% of boys in grade 4 met expectation in a grade 3 content reading test. Similarly, only 43.2% of girls in grade 4 met the expectation. Findings imply that only 40.7% of grade 4 learners met expectation in a grade 3 reading assessment. This is a worrying trend considering the fact that a significant proportion of learners in grade 4 (approximately 60%) had minimal mastery of literacy skills expected of a grade three learner.

Poor mastery of literacy skills by majority of learners in most developing countries, Kenya included has been attributed to number of reasons. Notable amongst the many reasons are poor learning environment, adoption of inappropriate teaching methods, lack of appropriate instructional materials and facilities as well as minimal parental involvement in their children's education (Akala, 2021). Relative to the focus of this study, parents are required to be active participants in the education of their children. However, their involvement level is wanting UNESCO (2021). A report by Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD 2021) showed that where parents were involved in children's education, there was a lasting benefit not only in their education but also on their social-emotional development.

In Kenya, the new Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) has parental empowerment and engagement as one of the guiding principles signifying acknowledgement of the value of having parents participate in the children's education (BECF 2017).

Parent's Age and their Involvement in Children's Learning

There are mixed research findings on the impact of parents' age and how they are involved in their children's learning. A study by Cantalini, Guetto, and Panichella (2020), aimed at analyzing the consequences of later motherhood and fatherhood on children's senior secondary school education in Italy. The study also aimed at establishing the role of mother-father age difference. Findings showed that younger parents are often less involved in their children education. Giving an example, the study stated that children with mothers aged less than 30 years often have less supportive and stable households. This is because many young parents are often less equipped for parenting.

Similar observations had been made by Hofferth and Reid (2002) in a study based in U.S.A that the age of a parent can affect the quality of parenting and by extension education of children. This is to a significant extent contributed by the socioeconomic status of the parent. However, in examining the relationship between parental involvement and children's academic achievement, it is important to put in to consideration other key factors such as the socioeconomic status of the parents. This is because less advantaged parents are likely to face more challenges that may affect their level of participation. Offering a contrary view, Addo, Sassler, and Williams (2016) on a study on

assessing the relationship between maternal age and marital status at first birth with youth academic performance that was based in United States, stated that younger parents are more involved in their children education compared to older parents. This is because the younger parents have more energy to engage their children and can also relate better with younger children. This is especially true for pre-primary and lower primary education.

Research focused on various African countries have also been undertaken to investigate how a parent's age influences their involvement in their child's education. Chikoko and Mthembu (2021), in a study on impact of poverty on basic education in South Africa showed that increased use of technology in education makes younger parents find it easier to be participate in their children's learning. The young parents are more confident assisting their children to learn using technology since they have better skills to access learning methodologies, resources and contents to be learned from the internet.

A study conducted by Dungumaro (2014) on living arrangements of children in sub-Saharan Africa and their implications on schooling revealed that some of the hindrances to enough involvement by younger parents includes and not limited to; economic instability, marital instability and social engagement. Older parents are likely to be more stable economically and so they don't use most of their time working to meet their basic needs. They are likely to be more involved in their children's education due to availability of time.

In Kenya, research findings by Akello (2020) on influence of parent's participation in learning of their children's achievement in KCPE, showed that the age of a parent can have an impact on the level of their involvement in their children's education. According to him, younger parents who are more educated and have a better income are more involved compared to elderly parents with a low education level. On the other hand, Thuba (2018) states that when younger parents are employed on full time basis and have other children in school, they rarely get involved in their children academics when compared to elderly parents with few school going children. Therefore, the data on the impact of a parent's age on involvement in their children education is inconclusive and inconsistent. The study findings on impact of parent's age and their involvement in their children learning could not be fully relied on by this research as it depends on other key factors that impacts both aged and younger parents such as education level, family size and occupation. It was therefore of essence to carry out this research in order to fill the existing conceptual gap with a focus in learning of literacy skills in lower primary schools in Kenya through a study in Mathira West Sub-County.

Parent's Gender and how it affects their Involvement in their Children's Learning

Different researchers have undertaken differing approaches when researching on the correlation between the gender of parents and the level at which they are involved in their children's learning. A study by Terriquez (2013) in United States on fathers' involvement in their children's schools explains that fathers are often less involved in their children's education compared to the mothers especially for young children. Specifically, fathers are less likely to assist in completing assignments and are less likely to interact with their children in matters education. However, a study by Le and Phuong Nguyen (2021) based in Vietnam on effects of parents being engaged in English language learning showed that where both mother and father are in full time employment, there is often no gender difference when it comes to being involved in their children's learning.

Research based in South Africa by Chikovore et al. (2012), on father involvement in young children's care and education states that fathers and mothers are active participants in varying education engagements and tasks. For example, fathers are involved more in specific learning activities such as physical play, information technology, math and hobbies. On the other hand, mothers are likely to be more involved at home work and learning of literacy. Additionally, he observed that fathers in a single parenthood family are more involved in their children education as compared to fathers in a both parent's family. Further, a study done in Ghana by Gina, Onsong and Osei (2014) shows that fathers are more involved in talking to their children about their education expectations and less involved in

guiding them when doing their school work. This is unlike mothers who are more likely to actively engage their children in doing school work.

In Kenya, Symwene (2022) conducted a study on parental involvement approaches and their effect on acquisition of literacy skills in the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) among learners in early years of education. The study findings showed that teachers involved parents in pupils' learning of literacy skills by reading story books with their children and writing together, helping with home-work, sourcing of reading and writing materials, story-telling and playing sound and word games before reading activities. The study findings also indicated lack of cooperation and time by some parents as serious challenges in the attempt to actively engage parents in their children's learning. Another challenge was inadequate reading and writing materials and inappropriate knowledge and skills by teachers. This research showed that female parents were more involved in their children's education compared to the male parents.

Similarly, Kaptich, Kiplangat and Muthua (2019) studying on relationship between parental involvement in pupils' educational activities at school and their academic performance states that mothers are more informed about the educational requirements of their children and they are available to assist them compared to the fathers

Parent's Level of Education and their Involvement in their Children's Learning

One of the key parental factors that influence the level and type of a parent's involvement in their child's education is the parent's education level. A study conducted in U.S. A by Bloir, K. (2020) on a journal; Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness showed that the educational qualification of parents had strong influence on educational and economic achievement for their children. The research further stated that parents who have attained College education spent more time in their children learning. They modeled achievement behaviour, provide opportunities for their children to engage in achievement experiences, engaged in age-appropriate activities, and nurtured their children's talents. The exposure to these behaviors and activities lead to a child's improved academic achievement. Higher parental levels of education are associated to a better quality of life, as well as less behavioral and health problems, lower rate of unemployment and that translates to a better learning environment for the children. The study suggested among other intervening factors that when young parents' educational opportunities are increased, they will have long lasting positive effects on their children's educational success and open life opportunities for them. Cheung and Pomerantz (2015) in USA showed that communities with low education levels among the Hispanics showed low levels of participation in their children's educational activities in comparison with the white parents with a high education level.

Adding to the debate, a study by Benner, Boyle, and Sadler (2016) in Europe showed that the level of education achieved by parents significantly determines the schools that their children are likely to attend. One of the reasons is that parents are likely to take their kids to quality schools similar to where they studied. This is a significant factor considering that most good quality school find ways of ensuring parental involvement and in some cases offers training concerning parental involvement. For example, according to Byrne and Paseka (2019), some schools have created programs where parents are given opportunities to communicate with the teachers and enquire about their children education progress.

A study by Idris, Husseun and Nassir (2020) in Pakistan examined the association between father and mother educational qualification for their children's education success Findings showed that high level of education of the parents positively influenced their children's academic success.

In addition, a study by Chikoko and Mthembu (2021) in South Africa showed that there is a correlation between the aspirations of the child and the furthest the parent has gone in terms of academics. This is because many educated

parents inspire their children on the value of education and are willing to offer time and resources to assist them achieve a higher academic performance. In addition, Mbaluka, Brand, and Henry Saturne (2021) in their study based in South Africa states that many educated parents have high expectations of success for their children and are keen to guide and mold their behavior.

Dungumaro (2014) in a study on living arrangements of children in sub-Saharan Africa countries, (Guinea, Kenya, Senegal, S. Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique) and their implications on schooling, indicated that homes with uneducated parents or with parents with low academic levels often lack reading materials at home

In African countries with high levels of illiteracy, parental involvement in their children's education was found to be low (Fajoju, Aluede, & Ojugo, 2015). Often combined with a poor social economic status and demanding physical occupations such as manual labor, many parents lack the time, resources and confidence to assist their children in education.

In Kenya, a study by Chemagosi (2020) focused to assess the influence of parental level of education on early childhood learners' academic performance in Nandi County, Kenya. Findings showed that a low education level by parents often results in low levels of engagement in their children's learning. Often, low education level by the parent means that the household lacks learning resources and parents lack adequate skills to assist in school assignments. Despite the fact that the study in Nandi County showed that parents' low educational qualifications had negative implications on their participation in their children's learning, it concentrated on Pre-primary education in general, contrary to this study that targeted lower primary parents as the main respondents.

According to a study in Kenya by Ngesu and Atieno (2019), learning begins at home and therefore parents must be cautious to ensure they teach children the right things. Again, any kind of involvement with reading activities at home goes a long way to impact positively on the expressive language as well as comprehension skills. For example, comprehension is increased through shared reading where a child is assisted and engaged by their parent when reading. However, an illiterate parent can suffer from a low self-esteem if they did not experience success in school (Nyabuto & Njoroge, 2014). Literature reviewed indicated that educated parents had enough skills needed to get involved in their children education. They were confident and hence likely to volunteer and offer inputs in decision making processes in School Board of Management and Parents' Association. However, the reviewed studies did not show how parental level of education influenced parental involvement specifically in their children learning of literacy skills in lower primary school.

The study purposed to investigate the influence of selected parental factors on their involvement in children learning of literacy skills in lower public primary schools in Mathira West, Nyeri County, Kenya

METHODOLOGY

The research employed descriptive survey research design. Adopting a descriptive survey research design enabled collection of quantitative data from a large number of research respondents that was, 249 lower primary school parents and 36 grade three teachers who responded to several close ended questions using questionnaires for parents and lower primary school teachers. The researcher also collected qualitative data through an interview schedule from 12 head teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Parents' Demographic Information

Information on grade one, two and three parents' demographics was sought based on their gender, age, number of children and family type among other factors. Findings showed there were more females (59.0%) parents compared

to males (41.0%) who participated in the study by returning useful questionnaires. With regard to age, data obtained show that more parents of the lower primary school children were either less than 35 years old (40.2%) or 35 to 45 years old (37.8%). Results on family size based on number of children showed that a majority of the families either had less than 3 children (39.0%) or between 3 and 5 (51.8%) compared to families who indicated having more than 5 children (9.2%). With regard to type of family, data obtained showed that majority were either from nuclear (49.0%) or single (37.3%) families as compared to those from extended (11.6%) or polygamous families (2.0%). Findings on level of education show that a majority of the parents (78.8%) had basic education (primary or secondary education) compared to those who either had no formal education (2.0%), or post basic education (19.2%).

Teachers’ Demographic Information

Data obtained from the teachers showed that there were more female teachers (72.3%) compared to male teachers (27.7%). Findings showed that all teachers sampled were trained teachers. Results on teaching experience showed that majority of the respondents either had between 5 and 15 years (52.7%) or more than 15 years teaching experience (36.1%).

(a) Age and Parent’s Involvement (Parents view)

Results showed that a significant proportion (72.4%) of grade one, two and three parents believed that at their age, they were adequately involved in their children’s learning literacy skills.

(b) Age and Parent’s Involvement (teachers’ view)

Findings indicated that more than half of the teachers sampled (53.7%) believe that age of parents determine the extent of their involvement in their children’s learning of literacy skills.

Table 1: Chi Square Analysis on Influence of Age on Parents Involvement in their Children’s Learning

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	CC
Pearson Chi-Square	14.196 ^a	3	.003	.232
Likelihood Ratio	13.962	3	.003	
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.098	1	.148	
N of Valid Cases	249			

Chi square results $X^2(3) = 14.196, p = 0.003$ showed that age significantly influenced a parent’s involvement in their child’s learning of literacy skills. Qualitative findings showed that a majority of the head teachers believed a parent’s age determined their level of involvement, younger parents being more involved compared to their elderly counterparts.

Gender and Parent’s Involvement in their Children’s Learning Literacy Skills (Parents’ View)

It was established that a majority of the parents sampled (65.72%) believe their gender determined the extent to which they got involved in their children’s learning of literacy skills.

Gender and Parent’s Involvement in their Children’s Learning Literacy Skills (Teachers’ View)

Findings implied that a significant proportion of teachers sampled (65.67%) believe gender determines the extent to which parents are involved in their children’s learning literacy skills.

Table 2: Inferential interpretation on Influence of Gender on Parents' Involvement in their Children Learning of Literacy Skills

	Value	Df	Asyn Sig. (2-sided)	Exa Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.175 ^a	1	.676	
Continuity Correction ^b	.097	1	.756	
Likelihood Ratio	.175	1	.676	
Fisher's Exact Test				.378
Linear-by-Linear Association	.174	1	.676	
N of Valid Cases	249			

Chi square results $X^2(1) = 0.175$, $p = 0.676$ showed that gender does not significantly influence a parent's involvement in their child's learning literacy skills. Qualitative findings indicated concurrence of a majority of the interviewees on gender as a determinant of parent's involvement in their children's learning literacy skills, females being perceived to be more involved than their male counterparts

Level of Education and Parent's Involvement in their Children's Learning Literacy Skills (Parents' View)

Findings showed that a majority of parents (69.28%) believe that their educational levels influenced how they involved themselves in educational activities of their children.

Level of Education and Parent's Involvement in their Children's Learning Literacy Skills (Teachers' View)

Data obtained implied that a significant number of the teachers (77.33%) indicated that a parent's level of education influenced how they were involved in learning of literacy skills.

Table 3: Chi square interpretation on Influence of Level of Education on Parents Involvement in their Children's Learning.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	CC
Pearson Chi-Square	26.116^a	4	.000	.261
Likelihood Ratio	32.169	4	.000	
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.824	1	.051	
N of Valid Cases	249			

Chi square results $X^2(4) = 26.116$, $p < 0.001$ showed that level of education significantly influenced a parent's involvement in their child's learning literacy skills. Qualitative findings confirmed the significance of parent's level of education as a determinant of their involvement in their children's learning highly educated parents being highly involved in their children's learning

CONCLUSIONS

Data on selected parental characteristics showed that a parent's age and level of education have significant influence on their involvement in their children's learning of literacy skills but gender of a parent has no significant influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

The findings of this study indicated significant influence of parent's age, level of education, occupation, family income, family type and family size on their involvement in children's learning literacy skills.

The study therefore makes the following recommendations:

- i. The Ministry of Education should actualize implementation of guidelines on Parental Empowerment and Engagement to ensure that parents are sensitized on the importance of their involvement in their children's learning.
- ii. School management in conjunction with the local leadership should organize sensitization workshops to help capacity build parents on the significance of involvement in their children's learning. In the process, categories of parents identified as minimally involved should be given priority.
- iii. Class Teachers should strive to project a more positive attitude towards parents with low academic background and low socioeconomic status to help enhance their involvement in their children's learning literacy skills. Teachers must make effort to understand each parent's uniqueness based on their differences in traits, socioeconomic status, family type and family size in order to manage them individually as far as involvement in their children's learning of literacy skills is concerned.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study suggests the following areas for possible further studies;

- i. The study was conducted in Mathira West sub-county Nyeri County, Kenya. Studies in other locations on the influence of selected factors on parent's involvement in their children learning literacy skills.
- ii. This study mainly focused on public primary schools. A comparative study on influence of selected parental factors on parent's involvement in learning literacy skills among public and private schools is suggested.
- iii. A comparative study of influence of selected parental factors on parent's involvement in their children's learning literacy and numeracy is also advised.

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