

Influence of Father Absence on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Keiyo Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

The presence or absence of significant person in one's life influences feelings and subsequent behaviour of individuals. This study was designed to investigate the effects of father absence on academic performance among secondary school students. The study sought to achieve the following specific objectives: To investigate the difference between academic performance of father absent and father present students; To determine the difference between academic performance of father absent and father present boys; and to establish the difference between academic performance of father absent and father present girls. The study was based on Carl Rogers self-theory. Purposive sampling was used to select students from father absent families while random sampling was used to select the students from father present families. An average of three end term examinations served as an index of academic performance. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics was also used to compare the results specifically students t-test. The findings revealed that students from father absent family perform poorly in school as compared to their counterparts from intact homes. The mean of students from father absent family was 10.66 while that of students from father present family was 20.178. This meant that there was a significant difference in academic performance of father absent and father present students.

It was also established that boys from father absent family performed poorly in school as compared to their counterparts from father present homes. The study established that girls from father absent family performed poorly in school as compared to their counterparts from father present homes. The study recommends that fathers as well as mothers should have the right to some time off work to visit the school and that parents should spare enough time to make meaningful relationships with children that can enhance academic performance.

Keywords: Father Absence; Father Present; Boys; Girls; Keiyo Sub-county; academic performance.

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1. Introduction

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) understand Education as a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom; empowerment and yields important development benefits [1]. The same sentiments were echoed by [2] who averred that education is the key to national development. According to [3] the role of education in human development is invaluable. Additionally, development of quality human resource contributes to accelerated development, industrial development, innovation, and reduction of inequalities and provision of efficient and effective delivery of essential services to the citizens [4]. Kenya has a goal of being industrialized by the year 2020 and to become a newly industrialized, middle level income country providing high quality life for all its citizens by the year 2030[5]. Kenya's Vision 2030 clearly focuses on education as a means of development and eradication of poverty. Despite the government's concerted effort in introduction of Free Primary Education and Free Secondary Education, wastage among students has not stopped. Any system of education experiencing high dropout and repetition rates is wasteful because those students who drop out have not gained a lot and furthermore they have consumed resources that would have been used by other students who are not in school because of them. There are various factors that might have contributed towards the low level of academic performance in the Kenyan learning institutions. However, the focus of this study was to determine the influence of father absence on academic performance of students in secondary schools in Keiyo sub-county.

According to [6], many parents today believe the best way to bring up children is to avail superfluous material provisions to their children. This has turned many children to view their parents just like material providers and nothing more and has greatly eroded the mutual cohesiveness that is supposed to exist between parents and their children. When children learn the truth about their origin, and the origin of their young siblings from their own parents, and not from neighbors or house helps, they develop a very deep sense of trust in their parent and create a great sense of security within them [7]. Parents should understand that domestic wrangles can occasion serious stresses to their children and so do whatever is possible to avoid exposing their children to such situations of open disputes among themselves.

According to [8], divorce of parents can be another cause of acute emotional stress to children; hence parents should do their best to avoid separation. Divorce is an unpleasant, stressful and painful experience to all involved but mainly to the children who may not fully understand what problems their parents may be going through. Many researchers have viewed divorce as an unpleasant experience that extends over several years, and not just a single event because the basic structure of the family is completely shaken. This leaves the children in limbo as both parents tear them apart in a desperate need to endear them. Parents should remember the words of Billy Graham as quoted by [6] that "The family is the foundation of every society, you mess up with it and you mess the whole society". Biu insists that, what our children do in school is a reflection of what they see happening in the homes. Parents should take their parenting roles very seriously.

Couples spent so much time in schools and colleges preparing for their careers but do very little or nothing to prepare for parenthood[6]. More time and energy is needed in the rearing of children than that put in the preparation for careers and in the jobs or businesses parents engage in. Single parent families may be created by

divorce, separation, death of one parent, and unmarried parenthood caused by a desire for further education. Divorce is the most prevalent cause of single parenthood. Divorce produces child adjustment problems primarily in families where the parenting practices become disrupted [9]. Many children today live in homes with only one parent involved in their upbringing. The parent is mostly the mother, although there are single fathers struggling to raise their children. Note that single father families are still relatively rare and do not contribute much to the growth of one parent family. Children from mother headed families are often tense, difficult and find it hard to concentrate at school because single parents have less time to help children with homework, are less likely to use consistent discipline and have less parental control and all these conditions may lead to lower academic achievement [10].

This influences academic performance in school, from the primary grades through the undergraduate education [11]. Loving fathers also have positive influence on achievement in boys and personal adjustment in girls. Loving fathers who provide limit setting, moral reasoning and reasonable and firm guidance without imposing their will can help promote their children's competence [12]. One is therefore motivated to ask the question: "What is the influence of father absence on academic performance of the secondary school students in Kenya?" It's against this background that the study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i. To investigate the difference between academic performance of father absent and father present students.
- ii. To determine the difference between academic performance of father absent and father present boys.
- iii. To establish the difference between academic performance of father absent and father present girls.

The null hypotheses of the study were stated as follows:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present students.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between academic performances of Father absent and father present boys.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present girls.

2. Literature Review

More often than not, single parent families include a mother and children whose original father no longer lives in the home. Living in a one-parent family is likely to be followed by lowered academic performance [13]. Other studies have also shown that children whose fathers have been absent for prolonged periods tend to have lower scores on tests of intellectual and academic attainments than father-present children matched broadly for socio-economic status. This is because children living with both biological parents remain in school longer and attain higher educational qualifications than children with absent fathers in particular children from father absent are more likely to drop out of school than children who live with their fathers[9].

Further, studies done by [14] in London have also indicated that children living with divorced or separated mothers had significantly low arithmetic scores (and slightly lower reading scores) than children living in two-parent families. Study findings revealed that these children tended to have poorer housing, lower-family income and their fathers were more likely to have had (at the time of the child's birth) semi and unskilled occupations - these factors have been found to be associated with poor school performance. Nevertheless, the attainments of children living with widowed mothers were similar to those of children from intact families; there were some indications of slightly adverse effects on the performance of boys. It seems likely then that the tension and difficulties associated with divorce are responsible for most of the associations between father absence and low attainment but that lack of interaction with the father may also play some part, at least for boys [14].

Single mother households are far more likely to have inadequate economic resources than two parent families, and there is some evidence that the poverty they experience is more extreme than that of other impoverished groups [15]. Economic hardship can lower food consumption, affecting children's nutrition and health. Fewer economic resources also mean that single mother can be less able than other mothers to invest in educational resources for their children such as in enrichment activities, books and computers [16]. In addition children in single mother families are more likely to live in deprived areas with lower quality schools and these "neighborhood effects" may have negative consequences for their children.

3. Research Methodology

The study was descriptive research design because it investigated the influence of father absence on academic performance of students in secondary schools in Keiyo sub-county, Kenya. The study was based on Carl Rogers's theory of the self. In his contribution to the "self theory, Carl Rogers, presented a system of psychotherapy called 'person ', which was built around the importance of the self in human adjustment. He viewed the self as phenomenological and that it is of central importance to the individual's behavior and adjustment. According to Carl Rogers we all need love and acceptance in order to actualize our potential and at first place where we get love and acceptance is in the family, that is the reason why children from father present families where parents are loving and caring perform well in school, unloving parents lowers a child's self-esteem and the resultant effect is low academic performance. The study involved form two and three students from ten secondary schools out of the twenty nine schools in Keiyo District, Rift Valley Province, Kenya. Students were selected from form two and three. Only students who had completed at least one year in the school were included in the study. Students were selected from father absent and father present families. One hundred students were targeted in the study, fifty boys, and fifty girls. The students were selected through purposive and random sampling. Self-esteem inventory was used to ascertain the self-esteem level of students. The scores were designed to the various levels as follows: 0-40% - low academic performance; 41-60% - average academic performance; 61-100% - high academic performance.

4. Results

4.1 Academic Performance of Students with Father Absent and Father Present

This study sought to determine the difference in academic performance of students with father absent and father present in secondary schools in Keiyo Sub-county. The marks were obtained from the students past exams from the previous terms. Marks were standardized from the original raw score to Z-scores and later to T- scores to avoid the discrepancy created by the various grading systems in different schools. The distribution of the marks was later tabulated into father present, absent and as per the gender as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Academic performance of students with Father present

Mean	Frequency	Percent
0 – 10	0	0
11 - 20	0	0
21 – 30	0	0
31 – 40	6	12.0
41 – 50	17	34.0
51 – 60	21	42.0
61 – 70	6	12.0
70 and above	0	0
Total	50	100

As shown in Table 1, majority of students under this category scored between 51 and 60 marks representing 42% of the total sample. This is a clear indication that these are average students with a high potential of improving further. None of these students scored below 20% and over 70%. Only a paltry 6(12%) scored 61-70 marks. Table 2 shows the academic performance of students with father absent.

Table 2: Academic performance of students with Father Absent

Marks (Out of 100)	Frequency	Percent
0 – 10	0	0
11 - 20	1	2.0
21 – 30	15	30.0
31 – 40	15	30.0
41 – 50	18	36.0
51 – 60	1	2.0
61 and Above	6	0
Total	50	100

Table 2 indicates that majority of the students with father absent scores between 41 - 50%, which represented 36% of the study sample. This is almost 10 marks lower than the performance of students with fathers present.

None of the students scored below 10 and non above 61%, again 10 marks below compared to students with father present, where none scored below 20% and above 70%. The mean of students with father present was 50.03 while the students with father present performed much better compared to the ones with father absent.

The standard deviation of students with father present was 9.52 while that for students with father absent was 8.02 this tells us that many of the students with fathers absent scored close to the mean of 36.78.

This means that the difference between the two groups is significant.

4.2 Academic Performance of Father Absent and Father Present Boys

The other concern for this study was to determine the difference in the academic performance of father present and father absent boys.

The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Academic performance of father present against father absent Boys

Mean	Father Present Boys		Father Absent boys	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
0 – 10	0	0	0	0
11 - 20	0	0	0	0
21 – 30	1	4.0	9	36.0
31 – 40	1	4.0	9	36.0
41 – 50	10	40.0	7	28.0
51 – 60	9	36.0	0	0
61 – 70	4	16.0	0	0
71 and Above	0	0	0	0
Total	25	100	25	100

Academic performance was also compared between boys with father present and those with father absent.

As shown in Table 3, many of the boys 10(29.4%) with father present scored 41-50 marks.

This is almost half of the sampled boys. Majority of the boys with father absent scored between 21-30% and 31-40%, which is almost 10 marks lower than the boys with father present.

None of the boys with father absent scored over 50%.

Generally boys with father present performed better than their counterparts with father absent.

4.3 Academic Performance of Father Absent and Father Present Girls

The other concern for this study was to determine the difference in the academic performance of father present and father absent girls.

The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Academic performance of father present against father absent Girls

Mean	Father Present Girls		Father Absent Girls	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
0 – 10	0	0	0	0
11 - 20	0	0	1	3.8
21 – 30	2	7.7	6	23.1
31 – 40	3	11.4	6	23.1
41 – 50	8	30.8	12	46.2
51 – 60	11	41.5	1	3.8
61 – 70	2	7.7	0	0
71 and Above	0	0	0	0
Total	25	100	25	100

Just like the boys the girls with father absent performed poorly compared to the ones with fathers present. As shown in Table 4, a majority of the girls (41.5%) in the father present group scored between 51-60% while only one of the girls in father absent scored the same. This is a clear indication that girls with father present perform well academically. On the other hand none of the girls in the father present category scored below 20% while in the father absent one girl (3.8%) had a mark below 20. Two girls (7.7%) in the father present group scored between 61-70% while none of the father absent girls scored the same.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

To test the null hypotheses the mean scores, standard deviations and t-values were computed as indicated in Table 5.

Note: Parenthesized entries are the standard deviations. Unparenthesized figures are the mean scores. *P<.05

The first null hypothesis was:

HO₁: There is no significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present students.

The computed mean for academic performance for the father absent students was 10.66, the standard deviation was 4.08, while the mean for academic performance for the father present students was 20.178, their standard deviation was 2.67. The t statistic obtained was 11.72. The t statistics obtained was higher than the critical value. This therefore means that the t-value was significant at $p < 0.05$. The first null hypothesis of the study was rejected and the alternative accepted. This meant that there was a significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present students. The father present students performed well academically than the father absent students.

Table 5: Mean scores and t-values for academic performance

Students	Parent Family		
	Father absent	Father Present	T
Boys & Girls	10.66(4.08)	20.178(2.67)	11.72
Girls	12.38(3.52)	19.5(2.42)	2.03
Boys	10.12(4.08)	20.85(2.77)	2.37

The explanation for the poor academic achievement of students from father absent home is that the mother has so much work and family responsibilities that require time, attention, and money which she cannot meet with the consequence of paying less attention to the education of his/her children. The result is poor academic performance on the part of the children. The study conducted by Hofferth and Anderson (2000) in Texas showed that living in a father absent family is followed by low academic performance. Scott Jones, (1994) notes that when social class is controlled as a variable, research indicates no difference in either intelligence or academic performance between children from father present and father absent families.

The second hypothesis was:

HO₂: There is no significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present boys.

The calculated mean for academic performance for father absent boys was 10.12, the standard deviation was 4.08, whereas the mean for academic performance for father present boys was 20.85, the standard deviation was 2.77. The t statistics obtained was 2.37. This value was higher than the critical value hence the t-value was significant at $p < 0.05$. The second null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted. This meant that there was a significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present boys.

The boys from father present families performed well academically than their counterparts from father absent families. This is because boys from father present homes develop good personality and they hardly have

complex problems because they are secured in the love of their parents. They are well taken care of and are socialized in the best way possible. Both parents devote more attention to supervise their academic work. The literature review in this area is in line with the analysis. This is supported by the research done by [7] in London that growing up in a father absent family is followed by low academic performance.

The third hypothesis was:

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present girls.

The mean for academic performance for the father absent girls was 12.38, the standard deviation was 3.52, while the calculated mean for academic performance for father present girls was 19.5, the standard deviation was 2.42. The t statistic obtained was 2.03 which was higher than the critical value. Hence the t-value was significant at $p < .05$. The third null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted. This meant that there is a significant difference between academic performance of father absent and father present girls. The girls from father present families performed well academically than girls from father absent families. The explanation for the poor academic performance of girls from father absent homes is that girls from this homes experience more behavior problems, are given household chores, and other tasks to perform at home. This invariably affect their education negatively when compare with their counterparts from father present families. In a similar vein girls from father absent families receive less adult attention and involved in fewer join activities with their mothers. As a result they lose out on important kinds of social and intellectual simulation in addition to obtaining less guidance and assistance [18].

5. Conclusion

The findings revealed that students from father absent family perform poorly in school as compared to their counterparts from intact homes. The analysis from the progress records, which was a measure of academic performance, showed that majority of the student from father absent family scored 41-50%, which represented 36% of the study sample. This was 10 marks lower than the performance of students from father present family. Non of then students scored below 10 and non above 61%, again 10 marks below compared to students from father present family, where non scored below 20% and above 70%. The mean of students from father absent family was 10.66 while that of students from father present family was 20.178. The standard deviation of student from father absent family was 4.08 while that of students from father present family was 2.67. This meant that there is a significant difference in academic performance of father absent and father present students.

It was also established that boys from father absent family performed poorly in school as compared to their counterparts from father present homes. The analysis of the progress records which was a measure of academic performance showed that many of the boys from father absent homes scored between 21-30% and 31-40% which was 10 marks lower than the boys from father present homes. None of the boys from father absent family scored above 60%. This analysis showed that generally boys from father absent family performed poorly in school.

The study established that girls from father absent family performed poorly in school as compared to their counterparts from father present homes. The analysis of the progress records showed that majority of the girls from father absent family scored between 20-40%, while a majority from father present homes scored between 51-60%. This meant that there is a significant difference in academic performance between father absent and father present girls.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:-

- i. Fathers as well as mothers should have the right to some time off work to visit the school.
- ii. Parents should spare enough time to make meaningful relationships with children that can enhance academic performance.
- iii. For better academic results parents and teachers should try to foster high self-esteem for their students.

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