



HOW PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL INFLUENCES CHILDREN'S LEARNING OUTCOMES IN MBOONI EAST SUB COUNTY, MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

The study sought to underscore the influence of parental involvement in activities at school on learning outcomes among preschool learners. Its purpose was to determine the influence parental involvement in activities at school on learning outcomes among preschool learners in Mbooni Sub County, Makueni County. The study adopted a descriptive survey design that use structured interviews and questionnaire that intended to verify information, perceptions opinions and views of the respondents and an observation schedule for collecting data on the learning outcomes of the children. The dependent variable of the study was learning outcomes among preschool learners in Makueni County, Kenya, while independent variable was parental involvement in activities at school. The target population was teachers, parents and preschool learners in the County. Purposive sampling was used to select the teachers and parents whereas simple random sampling was used to select learners. A sample of 42 teachers, 33 parents and 72 ECDE learners were involved. Validity of the instruments was tested during piloting. Reliability of the instruments was ascertained through testing and re-testing to a sample that was not sampled for the actual study. Data was collected after acquiring permit from NACOSTI. Instructions and arrangements on how to collect the data was made with regard to dates agreed between the researcher and the respondents on when to deliver the questionnaire and observe the children during live lessons as well as conducting of the interviews. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and

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quantitative techniques. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the specific themes and presented in narrative forms whereas the quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages with the help of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23). The data was presented using tables in order to get the findings. This study may inform teachers, parents and policy makers about the influence of parental involvement in activities at school on children's learning outcomes in Mbooni East Sub County. The study highlighted the significance of parents- teachers meeting, parent teacher child association, school feeding programmes as well as parents being resource person in passing first-hand information to children as they discuss different roles they undertake in the community. The study thus recommends partnerships of all stakeholders through proper communication and feedback. The National and County Governments should ensure food security in the preschools to enhance school retention, attendance rates, and enrollment for better learning outcomes among other benefits.

Keywords: parental involvement, learning outcomes, preschool learners, activities and parent teacher association

1. Introduction

Parental involvement at school activities may refer to the actions and interactions that parents have at the school building. This includes attending open-house events and parent-teacher meetings, volunteering for tasks at the school such as cooking, and serving in classrooms as tutors, guest speakers, helpers on field trips or in other locations; participating in workshops at school; and attending or leading PTA meetings or other committees.

The term parent involvement has many different meanings, ranging from Lopez and Cole (1999) broad definition of activities that allow parents to participate in the learning of their children at home or school, to more detailed descriptions. Henderson and Mapp (2002) cite several different studies concerning partnerships that support children's learning outcomes. These include parents participating in activities that engage children in learning activities at home, supervising children's time spent away from school, discussing school with their children, and attending school events (Epstein, as cited in Henderson and Mapp, 2002). The two authors further found that some of the benefits derived from parent involvement include higher grades, improved scores on assessments, better school attendance and better behavior and attitude both at home and school. Parents' literacy attitudes and activities can have an effect on the skills of children's acquisition of literacy skills (Bennett, Weigel, and Martin, 2002), it is therefore out of these parent's attitudes and activities that lead to parental involvement into children's learning activities.

Throughout the world, efforts are made to involve parents in the education of their children at home as schools strive to improve education quality. For example, in Japan teachers make demands on parents to involve themselves at home and school in

activities such as monitoring homework and attending school functions among others (Holloway, 2000).

In Kenya, educational policy advocates for parental involvement, although its emphasis is mainly on better quality teaching and greater administrative efficiency. Through legislation, the Kenyan government provides for the democratic management of primary schools by the stakeholders, involving the school managers, parents and the community in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2001). This implies that the creation of an environment conducive to parental involvement in schools and silent to the role of parent at home. In pursuant of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and Universal Primary Education (UPE), the government of Kenya has also considered and initiated Free Primary Education (FPE) thus achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goal No.4, which ensures inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This has most often been motivated by a concern to increase the schooling success and reduce school dropout and retention rates.

Studies conducted in Kenya reveal that successful parent-teacher partnerships require a sustained mutual collaboration, support and participation of teachers and parents at home and at school in activities that can directly affect the success of children's learning. For instance, Ndegwa, Mengich, and Abidha (2007), in a study conducted in Kenya; state that parents who did not involve themselves in their children's education gave several reasons for not doing so. For example, some of the parents were not literate or the educated ones were too busy and compensated by taking their children for tuition. Koech (2010) investigated the role of parents in enhancing preschools children education in Uasin Gishu District and found out that parental involvement in education was low.

Common sense tells us that getting parents concerned in the schooling of their children is a good thing. Thus, parents being the first educators of their children, have a responsibility to support their children's learning at school. Parents have an important role to play in their children's victory and accomplishment at school (Avvisati, Besbas and Guyon, 2010). For preschool to have the desired positive effects, however, it needs to be of high quality. Making preschool accessible is not enough. The quality of the early childhood experiences is also key in determining outcomes. Increasing parental involvement in children's education is evident for positive impact on children's academic success.

Parental literacy skills are perceived as significant in motivating parents to get involved in their children's learning and this involvement in children's learning activities is evident for positive impact on children's academic success. There are different types of parental involvement within the environment encompassing child's growth, development and learning. These include; parental engagement in decision making in issues pertaining the child's learning, provision of learning materials and Parent Teacher Child consultation. The benefit accrued by the children who enjoy such parental involvement foster learner attitude towards schooling, thus decreased school dropouts and improved learning outcomes (Desforjes and Abouchaar 2003). This study

therefore attempted to determine the influence of parental involvement in activities at school on children's learning outcomes and came up with some ways of motivating all parents to get involved and participate in their children's education.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of parental involvement in activities at school on learning outcomes among preschool learners in Mbooni East Sub County, Makueni County.

The study was guided by the objective to determine how parental involvement in activities at school influence children's learning outcomes in Mbooni East Sub-county, Makueni County.

2. Research Methodology

The study utilized descriptive survey design since it attempts to describe the characteristics of the variables of the study as claimed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). A research design is a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer a research question and a flexible strategic plan to be followed by researchers when conducting their research (Creswell, 2009). This research design was used because it usually involves the use of structured interviews and questionnaire that intended to verify information, perceptions, opinions or views as the two explain. Likewise, it gives a picture of the state of affairs as it exists (Kothari 2004). It is recommended for studies that strive to describe opinions, characteristics and perceptions of respondents. The study was based on interviewing parents on the strategies they employ, their involvement in activities at school.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Parental Involvement in Activities at School and Learning Outcomes amongst Preschool Children

As per the objective, the study sought to determine parental involvement activities at school and how they positively impact learning outcomes amongst learners in preschools in Mbooni East Sub County, Makueni County. In this study, 42 questionnaires were administered to preschool teachers and, in return, 38 questionnaires were filled and returned. At the same time, the researcher also carried out an interview among 33 parents and 28 participated. In addition, the researcher carried out an observation among 65 preschool learners out the 72 sampled. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1;

Table 1: Response Rates

Respondents	Sampled Respondents	Those Who Participated	Achieved Return Rate (%)
Preschool Teachers	42	38	90.5
Preschool Parents	33	28	84.8
Preschool Learners	72	65	90.2
Total	147	131	89.1

Source: Field Data (2019).

From Table 1, Preschool teachers, parents and Preschool learners registered a response rate of above 77.8%. This confirmed the findings of Creswell (2009) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate and of suitable levels to allow for generalization of the outcomes to the target population.

3.2 Gender of the Respondents

Information about the distribution of the respondents by gender was collected and the results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

Gender	Preschool Teachers		Preschool Parents	
	f	%	f	%
Male	8	21.1	10	35.7
Female	30	78.9	18	64.3
Total	38	100	28	100

Source: Field Data (2019).

Table 2 indicates that a fair of majority (78.9%) of the preschool teachers were female whereas only a paltry 21.1% were male. In the same case, majority (64.3%) of the Preschool parents were female with 35.7% being male. These data reveal that there was adequate gender parity at all levels of the study and that the extent to which involvement of parents in children's learning.

3.3 Levels of Education of Preschool Teachers

The research instruments also elicited information on level of education of Preschool teachers. The results are shown in Table 3;

Table 3: Levels of Education of Preschool Teachers

Educational Qualifications	Preschool Teachers	
	F	%
Certificate	23	60.5
Diploma	10	26.3
Bachelors'	5	13.2
Total	38	100

Source: Field Data (2019).

Table 3 shows that majority (60.5%) of Preschool teachers had certificate qualifications, 26.3% had Diplomas whereas only 13.2% were Bachelors' degrees' holders. This information reveals that the respondents met the minimum qualification to be teachers at Preschool levels and were thus expected to be competent to answer the research questions on the extent to which parental involvement influence learning outcomes amongst Preschool learners.

3.3 Parental Involvement in Activities at School and Learning Outcomes amongst Preschool Learners

Descriptive data were collected from Preschool teachers and to examine the influence of parental involvement in activities at school on learning outcome amongst Preschool learners the results are shown in Table 4;

Table 4: Views of Preschool Teachers on the Influence of Parents

Involvement in activities at School and Learning Outcomes amongst Preschool Learners

Summary of Test Items	VF %	O %	S %	R %	N %
I engage parents in parents teachers association meetings	71.1	12.2	1.3	10.1	5.3
I encourage parents to have parents teachers child association meetings	66.9	13.2	2.4	12.7	4.8
I invite parents to talk to children about education	80.5	12.4	1.6	3.3	2.2
I involve parents in school feeding programme	67.4	19.7	3.5	5.3	4.1
I notify parents on prize giving days	69.6	13.8	1.6	10.6	4.4

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 4 shows that a majority (71.1%) of the preschool teachers indicated that they very frequently engage parents to participate in school PTA committee meetings to enhance children's learning outcomes. At the same time, 12.2% often. However, only a paltry 1.3% of the preschool teachers engaged parents sometimes, 10.1% rarely whereas 5.3% never engaged parents at all. This showed that although majority of the teachers embraced the significance of PTA meetings to enhance children's learning outcomes, other teachers didn't know that PTA meetings 'importance for improving learning outcomes. These findings agreed with the findings of a longitudinal study conducted in Uasin Gishu by Koech (2010) about parent-teacher partnerships for enhancing school children's education in which he asserted that when parents are involved in decision-making in school committees, a conducive environment is created and school children register impressive academic grades, improved behavior and attendance. These findings thus affirm the fact that parents have direct responsibility over the learners that might be affected by the implementation of policies and the parents could themselves be affected by those policies, meaning that they form part of the relevant policy publics. The findings were also consistent with the assertions of the Government White Paper (2002) which, though doesn't legalize parent participation in school management and does not contradict it either, recommends that parental participation in school management is desirable and could lead to improved academic performance among other benefits. The Government White paper (2002) further asserts that, in most

Kenyan schools, occasions when school administrators may interact with parents on official days include the PTA meeting days. Other schools also have what they call academic day, visiting day, parents conference and other days as may be arranged by school administrators. Thus, such family and school interactions have been established to contribute to school children's holistic development.

The study also reveals that a fair majority (66.9%) of teachers disclosed that they very frequently encouraged parents to have Parent Teacher Child Association meetings as did 13.2% often. At the same time, 2.4% of the Preschool teachers sometimes encouraged parents, 12.7% rarely whereas 4.8% never encouraged parents at all. Parent Teacher Child Association enables the parent to understand the strengths and weaknesses as well as talented or gifted child thus supporting them appropriately. At the same time through PCTA meetings, parents are provided with the needed information on how they can assist and support the school and their children to learn. These findings were consistent with the recommendations of the Uganda's Education Act of 1969 which shows that parents' responsibilities among others include participation in the promotion of discipline, school budgeting, provision of learning materials, teacher's welfare, structural development and caring for children. These findings also lend credence to the assertions by Nancy and Lorraine (2004) which revealed that parental school involvement consists of activities like volunteering at school, communicating with teachers and other school personnel, assisting in academic activities at home and attending school events.

The study established that preschool teachers invited parents to visit schools and talk to children about education. This view was supported by an impressive majority (80.5%) of the teachers who invited parents very frequently as did 12.4% of the teachers who invited parents often. However, 1.6% of the preschool teachers would sometimes invite parents, 3.3% rarely whereas 2.2% never invited parents to talk to their children about education. Parents have different experiences in life and have varied professions and thus when invited as speakers or resource persons they explain and demonstrate activities and in this case children get first-hand information from the source. It is evident that though some teachers may involve parents in activities in school there are parents who will never get an opportunity to volunteer to assist in classroom since they are never invited. These sentiments were echoed by Beecher (2002), that recognition has been given to crucial role play of parents and also on the rights and responsibilities of parents in the management of schools. On the same breath, Epstein and Sanders (2002) discussed parents' diverse ways of participating in school management to also include communicating with teachers, participating in academic-related activities at school and home, and communicating the positive value of education to the learners, adding that these are each related to school performance.

The study also reveals that majority (67.4%) of the sampled teachers indicated that they very frequently involved parents to support school feeding programmes to enhance quality of children's education whereas 19.7% often involved them. However, 3.5% of the preschool teachers sometimes involved parents, 5.3% rarely whereas 4.1% never at all since these preschool teachers did not believe in involving parents in school

feeding programme was essential and this would enhance growth and development of the child the better learning outcomes. It is evident that teachers involve parents in school feeding programmes to enhance retention, attendance rates, enrollment and learning outcomes among other benefits. These findings also supported the findings by Koech (2010) which indicated that increased parents' participation leads to greater teacher satisfaction, improved parental understanding and parent-child communication and successful and effective school programmes.

Majority (69.6%) of the sampled teachers indicated that they very frequently notified parents on prize giving days as did 13.8% who notified parent's often. On the other hand, 1.6% of the preschool teachers notified parents sometimes, 10.6% rarely whereas 4.4% never held prize giving in the school.

3.4 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Findings on the Influence of Parents Involvement in activities at School and Learning Outcomes among Preschool Learners

The researcher also conducted interviews amongst parents to establish the influence of parent's involvement in activities at school and learning outcomes among learners. When parents were asked to give the school activities they engage themselves in during the interviews, majority of the parents indicated that they rarely attended meetings at school. Most of the male parents interviewed were not aware of the preschool meeting and claimed that the communication could have been done to the female parents. One of the male parents interviewed had this to say,

"I am not aware of preschool meeting unless the mother of my children does'. She may be in a better position to explain what they discuss in those meetings."

This revealed that parents may have failed to attend PTA meetings due to lack of knowledge and interest in school matters, lack of time, fear of being involved in money related activities and even as a result of literacy levels. One of the parents reported,

"I don't get time to attend to those meeting, after all what else do teachers talk about except money but I pay what I am asked to though not happy about this because education is free."

In the same vein, the interviewees responded in favor of the view that most preschool teachers never invite them to school to talk to children on education matters. Most parents do not feel welcome in school. They have a feeling that what they may offer is unimportant and inappropriate and therefore may have no great deal in education of their children. Majority of the parents indicated that even if they are invited they would feel embarrassed because of the memories of their own failure in the same schools as remarked by one of the female parents who is a farmer,

"That is the same school I went and thus I feel embarrassed when I get there because I dropped out of standard five. Definitely these teachers know that there is nothing much I can offer to my child with regard to education."

These findings were not consistent with the assertions of Epstein and Sanders (2002) who indicated that discuss parents' diverse ways of participating in school management to also include communicating with teachers, participating in academic-related activities at home, and communicating the positive value of education to the learners, adding that these are each related to school performance. The observations also revealed that most learners had acquired good sharing skills but majority fairly neither cooperated with others nor expressed their needs in acceptable ways. These findings affirm the fact that preschool parents in Mbooni East Sub-county who do not engage in school activities have their preschool learners registering low academic learning outcomes.

When parents were asked how these school activities impact positively on children's learning outcomes, most parents' representatives indicated that their school involvement increases parent skills and information which equip them to assist their children in school related activities when they come back home. They indicated when they are involved in their children's schooling; they meet other parents who provide them with information on school policies, and practices. However, one of the parents reported,

"Attending Parents Teachers meeting is one thing, and performance of my child is another thing, I do not know if there is any relationship between the two."

Other professional parents acknowledged that majority of the less educated parents have changed attitude towards education and thus they have begun to realize the benefits of improved learning outcomes of their children. Besides that, when parents and teachers interact, teachers learn about the parents' expectations for their children and their children's teachers. On further probing parents' representative, PR1, remarked,

"Preschool teachers do not encourage parents to have Parent-Teacher Child Association as a strategy to support learning".

At the same time children were observed during live lesson. It was observed that preschool learner's language skills: picture reading, storytelling and reciting were fairly developed. These observations lend credence to the views expressed by Uwezo (2011) that Kenyan Preschool and primary schools are poorly grounded in language skills. The researcher also observed that preschool learners participate in pretended, hide and seek, socio-dramatic and storytelling play activities. Just like in quantitative findings, these observations further confirmed the views expressed by Abu-Akel and Bailey

(2001) that toddlers can experiment with their environment while older children can manipulate and control their environment. Furthermore, the researcher observed,

“Preschool learners engage in doll house, play shop activities, play kitchen activities, doctor-patient play activities and act parental role activities, though did not like sharing books which may hinder their letter naming, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary skills”.

These observations are also in concurrence with the assertions of Dau (2005) that young children learn by imagining and doing. Dau (2005) noted that those young children pick up stones and pretend they are zooming cars or hop a Lego across the table as if it were a person or a bunny. Just like in quantitative findings, the observations also lend credence to the assertions of Peters and Charles (2011) that as well as being a great way to encourage interaction and communication, role playing shops with their pretend money helps expand numerical skills. In other words, children engage in imaginary play activities with toys or friends and hear some words and phrases one never thought they knew. That is, in promoting linguistic understanding, play shops are great preparatory aids for preschool children.

4. Recommendations for Practice

The study made the following recommendations:

- 1) Results showed that male parents were not involved in activities at school. Parents should attend parent teacher meetings regardless of gender to sensitize them on their rightful roles as academic role models for their children. As well, Parent Teacher Child Associations should be embraced to enable parents understand their children learning with the help of the teacher and should adopt academic practices at home which inspire their children to be high achievers. All parents should be involved in activities at school for their (parents) contribution is significant for holistic development of the child, for example being members of different committees and in decision making.
- 2) It was established that without teachers' invitation, parents did not create time to find out the progress of their children. Parents should avoid the hands-off mindset on matters concerning education of their children both at school and outside school. They should not wait until they are invited by the teacher to go to school but they should sometimes initiate the process and prepare to be speaker at particular time in the classroom. This will enhance their partnership with schools in shaping the behavior patterns of the ECDE children.
- 3) Results showed partnership between parents and teachers is weak and that teachers did not communicate effectively to all parents. Teachers should effectively communicate to the parents and other stakeholders through communication channels that are in place to enable easy flow of information and encourage parents to give feedback.

- 4) The study revealed that School Feeding Programmes are a thing of the past because Government no longer supplies food stuff to the preschools and therefore teachers request parents to support the Programme. The National and County Governments should ensure food security in the preschools to enhance school retention, attendance rates, and enrollment for better learning outcomes among other benefits.
- 5) The study established that prize giving days are not part of the events teachers and parents organize for the children and thus motivation of learner is very low. Teachers should work hand in hand with parents and plan to motivate learners by recognizing their efforts. Parents should always be ready to support the school materially, morally and financially for a smooth running for events and to the best interest of the learner.

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