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Pauline Kerubo and Lucy W. Kibera

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Single Parenting and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

Kerubo M. Pauline

School of Education, University of Nairobi, Kenya
Email: paulinemagara@gmail.com

Kibera W. Lucy

School of Education, University of Nairobi, Kenya
Email: proflucykibera@gmail.com

Abstract

This study sought to establish the academic performance of secondary schools' students brought up by single parents. In particular, the study aimed at establishing the family type structure students in secondary schools in Taita Taveta belong to; assessing the nature of assistance given to the students by their parents; examining the level of discipline exhibited by the students given their family type structure; and finally determining the level of involvement by parents in the students' academic attainment. A survey descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Simple random sampling was employed to select seventy (70) students from targeted secondary schools who constituted the respondents for the study. Data was analyzed using a set of descriptive statistics. The study results established that to a great extent, students from single parent family type background scored poorly compared to those from two-parents family type on the aspects of students' discipline and extent of involvement of parents in their children's academic activities as well as on academic attainment. Single parents are therefore urged to involve themselves more with their children's academic activities and disciplinary matters in order to enhance the students' academic performance.

Keywords: Single Parenting, Academic Performance, Parental Involvement

1. Introduction

In the last three decades, single parent families have become very common in Kenya (Daily Nation, 2013). Researches investigating the relationships between the influence of family on academic performance of children have often characterized single family structures as deficient and both parent family structure as protective (Family Initiative, 2015). The description of these family structures implicitly suggests that a two-parent family type structure is more ideal for the socio-emotional and wholistic development of the child where deficiencies of one parent are likely to be covered by the other parent. In most cases, being brought up by one parent, denies a child the opportunity to learn from two parents (Olayinka, 2009). Unfortunately, one parent family structure is on the rise. For instance, in United States of America (USA) it is estimated that about half of children aged 15 years live in a single-family structure (Anderson, 2002). This trend has tripled during the past 50 years and is still on the rise among non-white Americans (US Census, 2010).



According to Shariff (2011), education involves acquisition of knowledge through which an individual develops competencies, behaviors, attitudes and habits required to mold a productive and law-abiding citizen. The classical philosopher Plato advanced that education constitutes conscious and deliberate transmission of knowledge to members of society and especially to the new generation. Plato was of the view that education is assumed to have occurred when an individual acquires discipline in conformity with the values and laws of a given society.

A study by Guo and Harris (2000) conducted in Ghana and South Africa revealed that academic attainment of students was significantly influenced by the economic welfare of a family as measured by level of education and income. Often the level of education of a parent makes children aspire to catch up with their parents especially when they have achieved higher levels. In addition, high level of income assists parents to finance their children's education including provision of sufficient educational materials. Kitange (2011) established that majority of children from one parent were most likely to drop out of school by the age of 17 years compared to those from two-parent family setup. Such parents often lived in undesirable neighborhoods due to the cost of the more conducive environments. On the average, 17% of children between 0-14 years lived with one parent in Europe (OECD, 2014) while in USA, children of less than 18 years living with one parent constituted 27% of the children (USA Census, 2016). In Africa single parenthood constitutes 40%. Some 45% of all children in Kenya do not live with two biological parents (Demographic and Health Survey, 2017). This is attributed to various factors such as absence of male head in families due to the fact that they work far away from home. There is also very high pregnancy rate of teenagers, most who end up as single mothers.

Single parents are often faced with a myriad of challenges particularly financial power. In an attempt to enhance their financial power to support their families they often work for longer hours thus living their children unattended. Consequently, this makes such children lack adequate attention in their studies and acquisition of proper acceptable social norms as well as resources to meet basic needs. According to Taita Taveta Strategic Plan 2016-2020 poverty level stands at 57.2%. As expected, poverty level of one parent family structure is higher that of two parents.

The County has been classified among the worst performing counties in national examinations in the country. For instance, in the 2014 K.C.S.E examination data placed Taita Taveta County secondary schools' academic performance among the worst at position 34 out of 47 counties. In the same year, the county managed to get only five 'A' mean grades. The majority of students (76 percent) in County scored below grade 'C' mean grade. The county's mean scores for the years 2012 to 2016 were as follows: 2012 (4.48), 2013 (4.53), 2014 (4.23), 2015 (4.34) and 2016 (4.29) (The County Director's Office Mwatate, April 2017).

Since the family is the first socializing agent for a child during the first six formative years of life before joining school life, it can be stated that parenting contributes a lot



to children's emotional, social and mental growth. Generally, a two-parent family type structure is more likely to be conducive in bringing up children. It is expected that any weak points of one parent can be compensated by the other parent. In addition, one parent family type has a higher probability of overstretching him or her with responsibilities leading to neglect of children in terms of socio-emotional support including academic support system.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The study's objectives were to:

- i) Establish the family type structure students in secondary schools in Taita Taveta belong to
- ii) Assess the nature of assistance given to the students by their parents
- iii) Examine the level of discipline exhibited by the students in school given their family type structure
- iv) Determine the level of participation by parents in the students' academic attainment.

2. Research Methodology

A mixed research method approach encompassing survey and a qualitative approach was adopted because it enabled collection of data from the respondents with relative ease. Data was collected from a randomly selected sample of 80 students and 34 teachers from targeted secondary schools using structured and open-ended questionnaires through personal interviews.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Demographic Characteristics

The collected data was analysed to provide background information on the units of study. Table 1 highlights the results. The results show that male and females students in the targeted schools were equal at 50% respectively. Further, the majority of students (67%) ranged between the age of 13 to 15 years while 50% of the schools selected constituted mixed day schools. The boarding schools for boys formed 20% of the targeted schools which was twice as many for the girls at 10%.

Table 1: Students' Demographics and School type

Bio data	n	%
Male	35	50
Female	35	50
Total	70	100
Age of students		
13-15 years	47	67
16-18 years	18	26
Over 19 years	5	7
Total	70	100



Category of Schools		
Boys only boarding schools	14	20
Mixed schools	35	50
Boarding schools for girls	7	10
Co-ed and boarding schools	14	20
Total	70	100

Key: n= Frequency and % = Percentage

3.2 Students' Types of Family Structures

When the data on the type of family structure the students belong to was analyzed, the study results are shown in Figure 1.

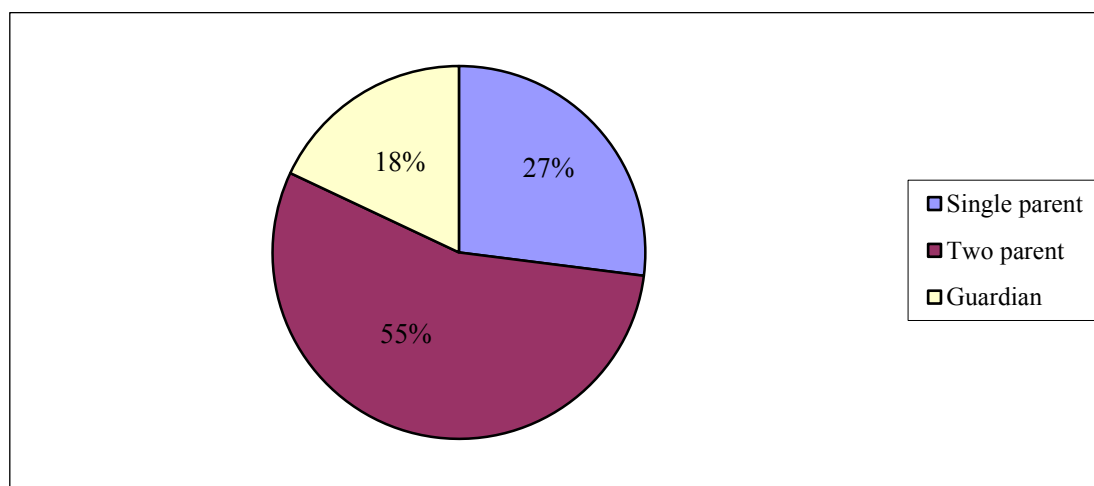


Figure 1: Student Family types

The findings depicted in Figure 1 reveal that 27%, 55% and 18% of students came from single parent families, two parent families and guardian type of family respectively.

3.3 Nature of Assistance Given to the Students by their Parents

The kind of assistance given by parents from different family structures to their children is illustrated in Table 2. The results in Table 2 indicate that only (19%) of participating students from one parent family set up said they are often assisted with homework by their parents compared (29%) of those who came from a two-parent family structure. Again, (22%) and (56%) of students from single parent family type and a two-parent family structure stated that their parents were consistently involved with school activities. Further, (16%) and (34%) of the students being parented by a single parent and a two-parent family set up respectively stated that their parents always ensured that they were always provided with basic needs. Some (41%) of students from one parent family type stated that their parents did not often participate in school engagements. On the other hand, only (16%) of students from a two-parent family structure said that their parents were not concerned about academic related activities concerning them. By implication, single parents seem to have less time for

involvement in school related activities. This observation is in agreement with that of (Dixon, 1992).

3.4 Level of Discipline Exhibited by the Students in School Given their Family Type Structure

When the level of discipline exhibited by the students from the two types of family structures were analyzed, the results were as highlighted in Table 3. The results in Table 3 indicate that slightly over fifty or (54%) of the students from a single parent background strongly disagreed that they frequently found themselves being punished versus (39%) of those from a two-family parent type. These findings are contrary to most findings on discipline and parenting by one parent (Ortese, 1998). Some (6%) of students with background of one parent stated that they frequently picked quarrels compared to (18%) of students with both parent family type. Some (28%) and (11%) of students' respondents from one parent and both parent family type respectively stated that teachers often rebuked them about their unbecoming actions. With regard to harmony between single parents and their compared with those with both parents, 31% and 21% of the students from the respective family types admitted that their relationships with their parents was not very cordial. Further, 31% and 11% of students with one parent did not spent much time thinking about school related academic work compared to those with both parents respectively who agreed that they spent a lot of time on their academic work. Finally, the results showed that more students from two parent family structure compared to those from single parent family type respectively were less concerned about consequences of their behavior. These findings contradict those of Ortese, (1998) who found out that students from two parent family background were better behaved relative to those from single-family type.

3.5 Level of Participation by Parents in the Students' Academic Attainment

With regard to the extent to which the students associated their academic performance to their parents' contribution, the study results indicated that 57% of students from two-parent family type and 43% from single-parent family type attributed their parents' contribution to their academic achievement. These findings concur with those of Wanat (1992) who observed that academic achievement of students is related to type of a family structure.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings in this study indicate that the type family structure to a great extent influences the level of involvement of parents in their children's academic activities and discipline as well as their children's academic performance with students from two-parent family type rating better than students from single parent family type on these aspects. Consequently, single parents are urged to involve themselves more with their children's academic activities and disciplinary matters in order to enhance their children's academic performance.



Table 2: Assistance Given to Students by Parents

Type of assistance given to children by parents	Single Parents										Both Parents									
	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total		Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Homework	6	19	15	47	10	31	1	3	32	100	11	29	18	47	6	16	3	8	38	100
Level of engagement in school activities	7	22	17	53	8	25	0	0	32	100	21	56	9	23	8	21	0	0	38	100
Catering for basic needs	5	16	20	62	6	19	1	3	32	100	13	34	17	45	5	13	3	8	38	100
Academic activities	7	22	12	37	13	41	0	0	32	100	11	29	20	53	6	16	1	2	38	100

Table 3: Extent of Discipline among Students from Different Family Types

Family Structure	One parent family set up										Two parent family set up									
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total		Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Statements on Discipline																				
I am often punished in school for misbehavior	1	3	2	6	12	37	17	54	32	100	4	11	5	13	14	37	15	39	38	100
Teachers often quarrel with most of my classmates	2	6	5	15	11	35	14	44	32	100	7	18	8	21	10	26	13	35	38	100
My teacher often complains of unruly actions	4	12	9	28	9	28	10	32	32	100	4	11	4	11	10	26	20	52	38	100
I never follow instructions from my parent	10	31	8	26	2	6	12	37	32	100	8	21	12	32	7	18	11	29	38	100
I spend little time on assignments	3	10	5	15	10	31	14	44	32	100	5	13	11	29	4	11	18	47	38	100
I act without thinking about the consequences of my behaviour	5	15	4	13	11	35	12	37	32	100	7	18	6	16	8	21	17	45	38	100



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