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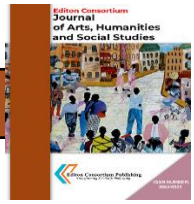

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Educational Challenges in Nomadic Pastoralist Regions: Examining Factors Affecting Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Samburu County

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing students' academic performance in public secondary schools within Samburu County. The study sought to identify key factors contributing to the consistently low performance of students in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams in this region. The study used a descriptive survey design, employing structured questionnaires to collect data from Form IV school leavers and secondary school principals in Samburu County. The study examined environmental, school-related, family-related, and student-related factors affecting academic performance. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, including mean, frequencies, and p-values. The study found that environmental factors, such as drought and insecurity, significantly impacted students' academic performance. In addition, inadequate learning resources and the absence of academic performance policies in schools were major school-related challenges. Family-related factors, especially the educational level of guardians, also played a crucial role. Student-related factors, such as school attendance, study time input, and lack of post-secondary goals, were identified as core contributors to poor performance. The study concluded that multiple factors, both external and internal to the school environment, contribute to the low academic performance of students in Samburu County. The study recommends a multi-dimensional approach to address these challenges, including improving financial support for students, enhancing learning resources in schools, motivating students through role models, and promoting flexible education delivery models. Additionally, community development initiatives aimed at improving parents' economic capacities are crucial to supporting students' education.

Key words: Absenteeism, grade, marks, pastoralists, role models.

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) is a significant indicator of educational achievement, shaping students' future opportunities and career prospects. In Kenya, public secondary schools in rural and marginalised areas, particularly in Samburu County, have consistently recorded poor KCSE results compared to urban regions. Samburu, predominantly inhabited by nomadic pastoralists, faces unique socio-economic and cultural challenges that influence the academic outcomes of students. Among the various factors affecting students' performance, family-related factors are crucial in understanding the barriers and opportunities that shape educational success. These factors include the level of parental education, socio-economic status, occupation, family support systems, and the overall home environment.

Samburu County, characterised by its pastoralist lifestyle, faces persistent challenges such as poverty, limited access to educational resources, and lack of awareness regarding the importance of formal education. These factors are compounded by the mobility of families, which often leads to inconsistent school attendance and disruptions in students' studies. Given the vital role of the family in shaping students' attitudes towards education, this study aims to establish the specific family-related factors that influence KCSE performance in public secondary schools in Samburu County. By examining how parental involvement, educational background, and socio-economic conditions affect students' academic achievement, the study seeks to provide insights into the root causes of poor performance and offer recommendations for improving educational outcomes in the region. Ultimately, understanding these factors is essential for developing targeted interventions to support students and enhance their performance in KCSE exams.

Academic performance in high school enables students to continue with their education at various levels. It is also a ‘value for money’ that the parents spend to educate them. According to Ngware (2006), secondary education enables youth to acquire human capital for access to higher education and improve their skills for the labour market. It also makes 'casual' workers more productive and less affected by poverty than those with lower education levels. Statistics in Kenya show that there has been remarkable growth in secondary education, with 151 secondary schools at independence (1965) and a gross enrolment of 30,120 students. By 1999, this had grown to 3234 schools with a gross enrollment of 661,824 students. However, performance in secondary schools has been quite low. For nine years (2001 to 2010), the average mean score was 4.4, while in Nairobi Province now County, it has been around 10. However, during this period, only 0.75 per cent (30 out of 3998) qualified to get a mean grade of B+, which guarantees direct entry to university.

This study therefore, sought to analyse factors that determine performance of the students in KCSE within the existing socio-economic situation of nomadic pastoralist communities to guide interventions initiated as solutions and to provide guidelines in formulation and implementation of education policy framework that suit these communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been carried out in different context to ascertain factors influencing academic achievement of students in primary, high school, colleges and universities. Most of these focused on socio-economic status.

Socio-economic status (SES) can be defined as a person’s overall social position… to which attainments in both the social and economic domain contribute’ (Ainley et al., 1995). When used in studies of children's school achievement, it refers to the SES of the parents or family. Socio-economic status is determined by an individual's achievements in education, employment and occupational status, and income and wealth (Ainley et al., 1995).

Studies and reviews by Amato (1987) and Mukherjee (1995) found that children from low-SES families are more likely to exhibit lower levels of literacy, numeracy and comprehension patterns that eventually affect their educational attainment as

compared to children from high-SES families. These children also have lower retention rates (children from low SES families are more likely to leave school early) have lower higher education participation rates (children from low SES families are less likely to attend university), exhibit higher levels of problematic school behaviour (for instance truancy); are less likely to study specialised maths and science subjects; are more likely to have difficulties with their studies and display negative attitudes to school; and have less successful school-to-labour market transitions.

Studies on causes of low academic performance have mainly focused on dividing the causal factors into three:- parents (family causal factors), teachers (academic causal factors), and students (personal causal factors) (Diaz, 2006).

Different authors gave varying reasons for low academic performance. Valle et al. (1999), quoted in Diaz (2006), attributed it to low ability and luck. They mention that some students have a naturally low capacity to perform while others just pass exams due to luck being on their side.

Slater (2002) asserted that academic performance is influenced by task goal orientation and specific task performance characteristics. That is, task performance is influenced by the value one attaches to the job. So if students take academic performance seriously then they can perform better. The view was also supported by Yi Chia (2002).

Other studies about factors associated with academic performance have identified contextual and social characteristics of students as important factors. These factors include family, peers, school, and community Murphy (1986).

In this study, factors that affect students' performance can better be understood by splitting them into four categories: environmental-related factors, school-related factors, family-related factors and student-related factors. Berliner (2009) listed seven factors that are not related to school practices but affect school performance in a negative way, such as low birth weight and non-genetic prenatal influences on children; inadequate medical, dental, and vision care, often a result of little or no medical insurance; food insecurity; environmental pollutants; family relations and family stress; and neighbourhood characteristics.

Berliner (2009) suggests that after-school programs, summer programs, and other enrichment programs that may not be available for children living in poverty, but could off-set some of the ill effects of poverty, could be considered a seventh OSF.

Yvonne et al (1998), similarly mentioned that students' performance is very much dependent on socio-economic background as per the statement, 'high school students' level of performance is with statistically significant differences, linked to their gender, grade level, school location, school type. Student type and socio-economic background'.

Educational performance at school has also been found to vary according to the student's sex (Horne, 2000). In particular, reviews of the evidence suggest that boys suffer an educational disadvantage relative to girls, especially in terms of performance in literacy (Buckingham, 2000b).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 4 presents the gender of the respondents who participated in the study.

Table 1: Gender and Academic Performance of Respondent * KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

Gender of respondent	Students' KCSE performance		Total **N=100(100%)**
	Average N=46(46%)	**Low N=54(54%)**	
Male	30(30 %)	40(40%)	70(70%)
Female	16(16%)	14(14%)	30(30%)

The grading key was as follows;

Category	Grade range	Points
High	C+ and above	7 and above
Average	D+ - C	4 – 6
Low	E – D	1 – 3

From the table it shows that 70 (70%) of the respondents interviewed were males, while 30(30%) were females. 46 (46%) of the respondents (30% males and 16% females) attained average KCSE marks while 54(54%) attained low scores (40% males and 14% females). It indicated that in terms of the composition of secondary school students, there was gender disparity in favour of male students. We did not find a respondent with a C+ and above. It seems they were away working or studying. Most of the trading centres were in the interior, so only those who had C (plain) and below were found.

The age categories of respondents' guardians are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Age Category of Guardian* KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

Age category of guardian	Students' KCSE performance		Total N=100(100%)
	Average N=46(46%)	Low N=54(54%)	
26-35 years	6(6%)	6(6%)	12(12%)
36-45 years	6(6%)	14(14%)	20(20%)
46-55 years	18(18%)	22(22%)	40(40%)
Over 55 years	16(16%)	12(12%)	28(28%)

The majority of the respondents' guardians were in the 46-55 years age bracket, constituting 40 per cent. 12(12%), 20 per cent, and 28 per cent were between 26-35 years, 36-45 per cent and over 55 years, respectively. It also showed that 6 (6%), 6 (6%),18 (18%) and 16 (16%) had the age of guardians with ages between 26-35 years, 36-45 per cent,46-55 years and over 55 years had low KCSE marks compared to 6 (6%), 14 (14%), 22 (22%) and 12 per cent who scored average marks.

The distribution of gender of respondents' guardians is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender of Guardian* KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

Gender of guardian	Students' KCSE performance		Total N=100(100%)
	Average N=46(46%)	Low N=54(54%)	
Male	30(30%)	38(38%)	68(68%)
Female	16(16%)	16(16%)	32(32%)

The table reveals that majority of the guardians were males 68 (68%) compared to their females counterparts (32%).

The marital status of the guardians of the respondents is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Marital Status of Guardian* KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

Marital status of guardian	Students' KCSE performance		Total N=100(100%)
	Average N=46(46%)	Low N=54(54%)	
Married	40(40%)	40(40%)	80(80%)
Single	2(2%)	8(8%)	10(10%)
Widow/er	4(4%)	6(6%)	10(10%)

The table revealed that majority of the guardians were married comprising of 80 (80%), single and widowed formed 10 (10%) respectively.

Presented in Table 5 are the education levels of guardians.

Table 5: Education Level of Guardian * KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

The education level of the guardian	Students' KCSE performance		Total N=100(100%)
	Average N=46(46%)	Low N=54(54%)	
None	16(16%)	20(20%)	36(36%)
Primary	16(16%)	8(8%)	24(24%)
Secondary	2(2%)	12(12%)	14(14%)
Tertiary	8(8%)	14(14%)	22(22%)
University	4(4%)	0(0)	4(4%)

From the table, it revealed that the majority of the guardians did not have basic education. 36(36%) did not have basic formal education, while 24 per cent attained primary education.14 per cent, 22 per cent and 4 per cent had secondary, tertiary and university education. The majority (60%) of the guardians had primary education and below. The majority of the guardians were not the respondents' real parents. 86 per cent of the real parents did not go to school at all. The results established that there was a low education level of guardians, which could be a contributing factor to poor academic performance in the study area.

In Table 6, the occupations of guardians are presented.

Table 6: Occupation of Guardian * KCSE category Cross Tabulation

Occupation of guardian	Students' KCSE performance		Total N=100(100%)
	Average N=46(46%)	Low N=54(54%)	
Employed	2(2%)	2(2%)	4(4%)

Crop farmer	4(4%)	4(4%)	8(8%)
Casual	2(2%)	4(4%)	6(6%)
Business	4(4%)	6(6%)	10(10%)
Herder	34(34%)	38(38%)	72(72%)

The results revealed that most of the respondents' guardians were herders, which constituted 72 (72%). Only 4 per cent were employed, 8 per cent were crop farmers, 10 per cent were business persons, and 6 per cent were casual labourers. Since the majority of the guardians were herders and considering that the nomadic pastoralist was practised in the study area, it showed that education programmes were interfered with in terms of school attendance and, hence, performance.

Table 7 presents who paid fees for the respondents.

Table 7: Who Paid Fees for Respondent* KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

Who paid fees for respondent	**Students' KCSE performance**		**Total N=100(100%)**
	Average N=46(46%)	**Low N=54(54%)**	
Parent	20(20%)	38(30%)	58(58%)
Guardian	20(20%)	10(10%)	30(30%)
Sponsor	10(10%)	2(2%)	12(12%)

The table shows that parents made the largest fee contribution at 58% of the respondents; guardians paid 30 per cent by while 12 per cent paid by sponsors. It could be concluded that parents were the major fee contributors in the study area. From the results, as shown in the table, the majority of students in the low-performance category had their fees paid by their parents. It seems parents had problems paying fees. A notable point also is that the majority (65.2 per cent) of those in the average performance category had their fees paid by sponsors and other guardians. Also, 83.3 per cent of those who were assisted by sponsors in paying fees performed relatively well, being in the average category. It seems then that they had a lot of their time in school. Respondents' family economic statuses are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Family Economic Status * KCSE Category Cross Tabulation

Family economic status	**Students' KCSE performance**		**Total N=100(100%)**
	Average N=46(46%)	**Low N=54(54%)**	
Poor	41(41%)	46(46%)	87(87%)
Middle	4(4%)	6(6%)	10(10%)
High	1(1%)	2(2%)	3(16%)

The table established that the majority of the families in the study area were poor at 87 (87%), with an average income of 5000/- per month and below. Only 10(10%) were middle-income earners (5001/- to 15000/- per month), while 3 (3%) were high-income earners (15000 and above per month). This agrees with the national statistics that 88 per cent of the Samburu County residents are below the poverty line. This showed that families encountered difficulties in paying fees for their children, leading to poor performance in the study area.

Performance Characteristics of Respondents

Performance-related factors were described in the study, and the results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Performance-Related Characteristics of the Respondents

KCSE performance category	Variables	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Average	KCSE grade	46	4	6	4.35
	KCPE marks	46	225	352	277.6
	Study hrs per day	46	6	9	7.87
	Absenteeism from school (%)	46	0.00	77	68
	Absenteeism from class (%)	46	0.00	81	72
Low	KCSE grade	54	1	3	2.2
	KCPE marks	54	190	325	245
	Study hrs per day	54	5	9	7.14
	Absenteeism from school (%)	54	0.00	89	83
	Absenteeism from class (%)	54	.00	89	81
Overall	KCSE grade	100	1	6	4.16
	KCPE marks	100	200	352	245
	Study hrs per day	100	5	9	7.54
	Absenteeism from school (%)	100	.00	86	76
	Absenteeism from class (%)	100	.00	84	79

The table shows that the average KCSE grade for those in the average performance category was 4.41 which is D+. The average for those in low category was 2.4 which is D-. The average was 4.16, D+ grade which agrees with the County average grade in KCSE. The average KCPE marks for the respondents in average performance category was 277.6 marks, while for those in low category was 245 marks. It shows therefore, that KCPE marks influences performance in KCSE.

The analysis also shows that the average study time per day for those in average performance was 7.87 hours, while those in the low category had 7.14 hours of study time input per day. The difference is marginal but still shows that study time input matters in influencing performance in KCSE. Also, 68 per cent and 89 per cent, on average, and low-performance categories absented themselves from school, respectively. This shows that absenteeism has an effect on the academic performance of students in KCSE in Samburu County. That is, absenteeism lowers the KCSE grade. The reasons given for absenteeism were:- school fees- 77 per cent, Home was far -8 per cent, affected by conflicts- 7 per cent, discipline- 1 per cent, delayed looking after livestock- 5 per cent, no reason- 2 per cent. The majority, therefore, said that fees were the main factor that made them absent from school. This concurs with the economic level of guardians, who are 87 per cent poor.

Similarly, 72 per cent in the average category and 81 per cent in the low category missed class while in school. The reason they gave was – waiting at the office -51 per cent, went to town to phone parents

about fees- 28 per cent, and went to hospital- 21 per cent. The majority of them considered waiting at the office to be the main reason for their missing classes. This seemed to be a critical factor that the school administration should look into so that students do not have to wait at the school offices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The results established that performance was generally at grade D+ (4 points) on average. There was also a low education level of guardians, which could be a contributing factor to poor academic performance in the study area. The majority of the guardians were herders, and considering that nomadic pastoralism was the major economic activity, it suggests that diversification of livelihood sources was important in empowering the parents economically to pay fees, which was a major factor affecting academic performance. The findings also revealed that the majority of the families in the study area were poor (87%). This showed that families encountered difficulties in paying fees for their children, leading to poor performance in the study area. Schools, too, had inadequate teaching and learning resources, especially libraries. The importance of role models and after-school goals was underscored by the respondents.

Recommendations: Since this study took Samburu County only as a case to investigate factors influencing academic performance in KCSE among nomadic pastoralists, and due to diverse socio economic and cultural environments that surround different nomadic pastoralist communities, another study can be done involving more nomadic pastoralists regions like Garissa, Wajir, Kajiado, Narok, Turkana, Marsabit, Isiolo and so on. A study can be undertaken which incorporates private secondary schools in nomadic pastoralist areas since this particular one focused on public secondary schools.

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