

Examining the Home Factors that Influence Performance in KCSE in Secondary Schools in Mbeere North Sub-County of Embu County, Kenya.

Magdalene Wanjiru Njagi.

Mount Kenya University, Kenya.

Author Email: wanjiruwanjagi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study was to identify the home factors that influence performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in secondary schools in Mbeere North Sub-county. A survey design was used to conduct this study. The study was carried out in Mbeere North Sub-county, which is one of the divisions of Mbeere north Sub County. Mbeere North Sub-county has 4 locations. The target population was all private and public secondary schools in Mbeere north Sub County containing an estimated population of 2002 students, 113 teachers and 12 headteachers. Samples from the government schools in Mbeere North Sub-county were selected using stratified sampling technique. Purposive sampling to select the headteachers and teachers was used. The use of systematic sampling was employed; therefore, ten per cent (10%) of the target student population was incorporated in the sample of the population. A pilot study was conducted in one of the secondary schools but not included in the sample. Data was collected on variables such as parents' occupation, parents' commitment to students' learning, among others. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution were used in the presentation of the data. There was found to be a positive correlation between various home factors such as absenteeism, *miraa* farming and parental occupation and academic achievement. The findings from this study also suggest that students who performed dismally in KCSE examinations also were from homes where parents had low-income occupations (peasants). The study recommended that strict discipline should be instilled in students, while the community is sensitized concerning drug use and abuse.

Key Terms: Academic achievement, candidate, home Environment, influence, performance

How to cite this article in APA.

Njagi, M. W. (2019). Examining the Home Factors that Influence Performance in KCSE in Secondary Schools in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya. *Editon Cons. J. Curr. Educ. Stud.*, 1(2), 32-41. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjces.viii.98>

Introduction

There has been an attempt to continuously review the Kenyan education system over the years to ensure that it satisfies and serves the aspirations of the youth as well as cater to the goals of national development. The passage from one level of education to the next is characterized by competitive national examinations, which are administered at the end of every cycle of the educational system. The examination done at form four of secondary education is the KCSE (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) exams (Mwiria, 1991).

During the colonial era, examinations were part of the restrictive machinery adopted by the colonialists to restrict Africans' access to formal education. The Common Entrance Examination (CEE) was administered at the end of the fourth year of primary school and the Kenya African Preliminary Examinations (KAPE), for the students who desired to join secondary school. These examinations were very successful in serving as eliminating devices. In a class of thirty or more students, it was not uncommon to see only one or two students qualifying to the next level. The performance by African candidates in other exams like the secondary school examination was equally discouraging because many did not pass (Mwiria, 1991).

Failure in examinations contributed significantly to the slow growth rate of African secondary school education. Hence, until 1940, only two secondary schools existed for Africans - St. John Kabaa and the Alliance High School, started in 1930 and 1926 respectively (Kivuitu, & Chenge, 2004). There were only four secondary schools serving Africans by the year 1945. While it may be difficult to reason against the contention that, while other devices which may be viewed by the public to be fairer than selection examinations are absent, examinations, by comparison, are considered the most objective means of selecting those who proceed to the next level of schooling or receive given societal rewards. Other than the attempt

to limit the number of Africans attaining a high level of education, there were other reasons for failure. First, motivation may have been low among many Africans who had few role models to emulate, especially given that there were alternative economic opportunities such as farming or cattle herding that did not require educational credentials. Secondly, parents and some teachers were themselves not very encouraging, particularly to the female students.

The KCSE examinations are graded on a 12-point grade A to E. Table 1 on Grade Point Average illustrates this. The lowest scorer acquires grade E while the highest scorer is awarded grade A.

Table 1: Twelve Point Grade Average for KCSE Examinations

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-C	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
Points	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Source: The Kenya National Examinations Council Office (2005)

Students' performance in KCSE examinations has not been good in a majority of the sub counties in Kenya, except save for a few schools in the Nairobi area and a number of others in some towns. Schools that have repeatedly performed well, for instance, include Alliance Boys High School, Starehe Boys Centre, Mang'u High School, Precious Blood Riruta and several others. Schools in Mbeere North Sub-county have consistently performed poorly over the past few years as revealed below.

Table 2: Performance per Grade (2000 – 2004).

Grade	A	A-	B+	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E	Y	X	Total	Pass%
Year	Entry														
2000	0	3	5	4	16	43	47	71	79	59	15	1	0	2	345 71 21
2001	0	0	6	6	27	41	51	73	69	58	41	0	1	0	373 80 21
2002	0	1	3	8	17	31	43	64	67	54	22	1	0	0	311 60 19
2003	1	0	4	8	20	31	60	74	71	59	16	0	1	3	348 64 18
2004	0	2	5	14	26	44	50	64	80	61	40	14	0	391	91 23
Tot.	1	6	23	40	106	190	251	346	366	291	134	3	6	5	17 68 366 102

Source: Mbeere North Sub-county (2005)

Key

Y – Examination Irregularities.

X - Enrolled but Failed to Sit Examinations

Pass- Total Number of Candidates Scoring C+ and above.

Among the major goals of education is to assist students in acquiring skills, knowledge and attitudes that will help them lead productive and successful lives. Tests aid in the assessment of the extent to which these attitudes, skills and knowledge have been achieved. Other roles of tests in Kenya today are as discussed earlier. The secret behind success in examinations is influential school leaders fully supported by parents and administrators (Hess, 1999). At the end of every four years of secondary education in Kenya, numerous young people join the labour market. The students' academic performance determines what they expect to do in future. Table 2 (Passes per Grade in Mbeere North Sub-county (2000-2004) shows that the examination performance in Mbeere North Sub-county has become a matter of concern. Table 3 shows the best-performing secondary schools in the Sub-county in a period of five years.

Table 3: List of Best Performing Secondary Schools (2000–2004)

Year	School	Mean Grade	Mean Score
2000	Siakago Boys High School	C	6.2733
2001	Siakago Girls Secondary	C	6.0676
2002	Siakago Girls Secondary	C	6.3380

2003	Kiambeere Complex	C	6.1942
2004	Siakago Girls Secondary	C+	6.5459

Source: Mbeere North Sub-county (2005)

Koech (1999) noted that the goal to industrialize in the 21st century requires deliberate and intensified measures to reduce wastage, increase access to education and improve the quality and relevance of education at all levels. Pathetic performance in KCSE would definitely have adverse effects on the country's efforts at poverty reduction. Consistent poor KCSE performance means trouble for the disadvantaged parts of the country since it has intergenerational ramifications. Students who perform poorly miss the opportunity for self-advancement and communal development, a situation that discourages the interested parties' support to education.

As shown in Table 2 (Performance per Grade in Mbeere North Sub-county), it is evident that very few students obtain grades to qualify them for University entrance. The Joint Admissions Board (JAB) requires that every candidate who wishes to join the university should acquire a mean grade of C+ and above. In spite of this, the public universities require a candidate to score B+ for entrance. However, there are openings in the parallel degree programmes and the private universities for those with the minimum requirement. Poor performance at KCSE deprives the majority of candidates in Mbeere North Sub-county an opportunity to acquire higher education. In the year 2000, only 71 candidates obtained a mean grade of C+ and above out of a total population of 345 candidates in the Sub-county. This constituted only 21% of the group. In the subsequent year, 2001, the number of those who obtained C+ and above increased to 80 out of 373 candidates representing 21 % of the university hopefuls. In 2003, only 64 candidates and 91 in 2004 realized the minimum requirement. This represented 18% and 23% respectively. Given this state of performance in KCSE in Mbeere North Sub-county, the researcher found the need to carry out a

study to establish the influence of the home environment on KCSE performance in the Sub-county.

It is hoped that the findings of this study may be useful to a number of stakeholders in the education sector: First, the education planners may understand the influence of environment on performance in national examinations and as a result, respond appropriately to reverse the poor examination results. Secondly, it is also hoped that the policy makers may use the findings to sensitize the parents, learners and the public on the effects of the environment on performance in KCSE as a way of trying to alleviate the problem in the sub county. Thirdly, the findings of the study may stimulate the interest of future researchers to undertake further investigations in this field to come up with more solutions to the problem. Fourthly, it is hoped that the recommendations of this study may be used to help improve the performance of KCSE in this region of Kenya hence the quality of human resource output.

Methodology

A survey design was used to conduct this study. The study was carried out in Mbeere North, which is one of the sub counties of Embu County. The Sub-county has four locations. The target population was all private and public secondary schools in the Sub-county, where there are twelve secondary schools. Two of these are private secondary schools. The twelve schools contain an estimated population of 2002 students, 113 teachers and 12 head teachers. Samples from the government schools in the Sub-county were selected using stratified sampling technique. Purposive sampling to select the head teachers and teachers was used. The use of systematic sampling was employed; therefore, ten per cent (10%) of the target student population was incorporated in the sample of the population. Two research instruments were applied in the study, namely questionnaires and observation schedule. A pilot study was conducted in one of the secondary schools not included in the sample. The headteacher, 9 (50%) of the

teachers and 45 (50%) of the students in Form Four were interviewed. An observation schedule was used in observing the physical facilities in the schools within the Sub-county. After the collection of data, a formal follow-up letter from the researcher was sent to the headteachers thanking all the respondents for their co-operation. The questionnaires were counter-checked for satisfactory completion. Data was collected on variables such as parents' occupation, parents' commitment to students' learning, among others. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution were used in the presentation of the data.

Literature Review

Parents' Influence

Parents have a significant role in influencing if not determining the educability of the pupils with whom the school has to deal with. Social scientists who have researched the social roots of differential achievement have officially endorsed this view. Parents perform their role of influencing the child's motivation and interest in the school culture by giving support and generally supplementing the activities of teachers in school. It, therefore, follows from such a view that those interested in reforming education would be particularly committed to bringing about better school-home cooperation. By doing so, parents currently not playing a role in their children's education can hopefully become more enlightened and thus be better placed to provide the type of conducive environment that their children need (Young, 1994).

However, parents should not be studied in isolation but in relation to other facets of the interactional nexus within the school itself. There are four main aspects of great importance to the achievement in school by children. What are the key aspects? First, a good parent must have 'knowledge' about the manner in which the school operates, the methods needed and their pedagogical justifications (Musgrove, 1978).

Secondly, a successful parent is one who has an interest in their child's education and is motivated for the child's success. The third element in this successful coexistence is that the parent should be capable of cueing into the teachers' system of relevancies. This means that the parent should be aware, through whatever means, of what, in the teachers' view constitutes the excellent parent. The last element regards the parent being willing and able to play their role in a manner conformable to the teachers' definitions. It is important to emphasize that the parent should, through whatever means necessary- including impression management - 'convince' the teacher of their commitment to good parenting. Academic performance has, unfortunately, been considered as the primary indicator of a successful learner. This is glimpsed from the media hype every year surrounding the announcement of KCSE results. Delight and disappointment affect not only the candidates but also relatives, parents and friends as well (Musgrove, 1978).

Parents' Education

Access to education is increasingly selective as one moves up the system. Parents usually strive to provide at least as much education for their children as they received, which means that differentials are often passed on from one generation to the next. A study of a Kenyan village showed that most farmers' children had only primary education or none at all, whereas children whose fathers were clerical workers or professionals all reached standard five and were the only ones to go beyond standard eight. These parents saw the need more clearly than the less educated farmers and manual workers and encouraged their children to remain in school. Parents who found primary school enough for them see that their children at least complete secondary school (Eshiwani, 1988).

In a world increasingly based on achievement, certificates proclaiming success in examinations are also required. The

child of elite parents usually gets a head start in educational attainment. His parents are well educated and may teach him to read before he enters primary school, child-rearing patterns emphasizing self-reliance, working towards remote goals, periods of quiet and ability to work and play on his own, socialize the child for schooling. The emphasis in more impoverished illiterate homes, on the other hand, is on group activities, instant obedience, ascription and the satisfaction of short-term needs, which adjust school life very difficult. Parents who lack education do not understand their children's need to be alone to study and expect them to help with work on the farm, in trade, or around the house. They see education as a 'good thing' but do not know how to help their children succeed. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the elite children tend to be most successful in primary leaving examinations. If on the basis of these examinations, the elite child goes to a long-established boarding school with well-qualified teachers and a good library, while the poor child attends a new day school with a small library and teachers who have only a few years of secondary schooling themselves, then the former is more likely than the latter to succeed in the secondary leaving examinations. Education level, especially the mother's, is a significant resource that appears related to academic performance (Taylor, 1991).

Socio-Economic Status of Parents

School fees may be necessary from the standpoint of the national economy, but it introduces a barrier into education selection, especially where the highest status schools have higher fees than ordinary schools. Many parents of large families can afford fees only for a few, so they must select which children are to be sent. They may be chosen on the grounds of demonstrated intelligence, but other factors are sometimes more important, the child who is troublesome, or not strong enough to work on the farm, is sent to school. The first son is usually sent as an investment for the future.

There is a definite relationship between educational attainment and the socio-economic background of the family, including the level of education and income of both parents. Parents' influence on the educational aspirations for their children varies in relation to their socio-economic status, with a lower degree of influence, particularly among lower-income parents. Middle and upper class students tend to stay in school longer and do better while at school than students from the lower socio-economic classes (Thomas, 1992). Banks (1973) states that poverty may have an inhibiting effect on ambition, and achievement.

In Kenya, since most students sit for similar national examinations, students from wealthy family backgrounds have an advantage over those from deprived backgrounds. They usually scoop the top marks and join national schools. Most from poor backgrounds are destined to sub county schools where facilities are inadequate and the overall performance poor (Njeru, 2003). Middle and upper –class children are socialized in a way that maximizes their learning potential compared with lower-class children, for example, they grow up in smaller families, live in homes that are more likely to be stocked with books, are more likely to be given educational toys, are more encouraged to defer immediate gratification in favour of long-term goals, and are more exposed to the values needed for educational success (Njeru, 2003).

Family Expectations

If the family expects that a child will remain in high school and attend college, the expectation will influence the motivation of the student. Middle-and upper –class families are inclined to take it for granted that their children will do well academically, lower-class families are less likely to make the same assumptions (Njeru, & Orodho, 2003).

Data Analysis and Discussion

The home environment is believed to enhance teacher's performance and pupil learning; therefore, parents have a

responsibility to ensure that they foster a conducive atmosphere not only for the physical, social and spiritual growth of their children, but also the academic. In this regard, the home environment in this study was discussed under the following:

Parents' Occupation in Mbeere North Sub-county

With regard to parents' occupation, the students were asked to indicate the specific occupations of their parents. The data are represented in Tables 4 and 5 respectively
*Q = Question

Table 4: Students' Response to Fathers' Occupation (n=125)

Father's Occupation	(f)	Percentage
Peasant Farmer	73	59
Formal Employment	34	27
Business	07	05
Jua Kali Art	11	09
Total	125	100

Table 4 shows that majority of the students' fathers 73 (59%) were peasant farmers. 27% per cent of the fathers had formal employment. Formal employment varied from high-level jobs such as banking to low-level ones such as secretaries, nursery school teachers and drivers. The fathers that engaged in business comprised 7 (5%) of the total number, and 11 (9%) were Jua Kali artisans. Jua Kali refers to small scale untrained artisans.

Table 5: Students' Responses to Mothers' Occupation (n=125)

Mother's Occupation	(f)	Percentage
Peasant Farmers	89	71
Formal Employment	28	23
Business	08	06
Total	125	100

Table 5 shows that majority of the mothers the Sub-county were peasant farmers, that is, 89 (71%) of the students indicated that their mothers were peasant farmers while only 28 (23%) were in formal employment. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that parental occupation affected students' performance in examinations.

Parents' Support

Parents' support was looked at in terms of provision of textbooks and other learning materials, fees payment, provision of private tuition for students and moral support. For a child to perform well in any examination, he needs basic requirements such as books, newspapers, space, light, tables, and chairs and silences both at home and at school. One hundred per cent of the head teachers indicated that provision of textbooks was the sole responsibility of the parent. [2]

The findings of this study indicated 71 (57%) of the students were provided with ample time to do homework and study once at home. However, 54 (43%) of the respondents disclosed that they never got an opportunity to do their homework while at home. Asked whether they received enough textbooks to assist them in revising adequately for the KCSE, 89 (71%) respondents declined while 36 (29%) had these facilities. Lack of textbooks was one of the major factors that inhibited good academic performance in the Sub-county.

It was also realized that only 66 (53%) of the respondents attended private tuition at home, while 59 (47%) did not. This may be attributed to the high poverty level, which has an inhibiting effect on achievement. The teacher questionnaire disclosed that most of the parents' commitment to their children's learning was low (see table 6). The commitment of the parents was measured through the parents' response to fees payments, provision of textbooks and encouragement in terms of provision of time to do private study. [2]

Table 6: Teachers' Response to Parental Commitment to Students' Learning (n=21)

Levels of Commitment	(f)	Percentage
Very High	—	—
High	08	38
Low	12	57
Very Low	01	05
Total	21	100

Students of high academic potentials have been wasted due to lack of commitment from their parents to their education. Some students, on the other hand, have ventured into greater academic heights because of encouragement and resources rested into their education by their parents (Ayot, & Briggs, 1992). From the responses to the teacher questionnaire, none of the parents in the schools was very highly committed to his/ her child's learning as fees was paid late, and textbooks were not sufficiently supplied.

The commitment of parents to fees payment was also assessed. It was realized that 64 (51%) of the students suffered from a lack of school fees. This means that only 61 (49%) of the students enjoyed an interrupted time of learning as the others were regularly required to go home to collect school fees.

Table 7: Students' Response to Causes of Absenteeism in Secondary Schools (n=125)

Cause	(f)	Percentage
Sickness	15	12
Lack of School Fees	64	51
Suspension	11	9
Never Absent	35	28
Total	125	100

Table 7 shows that the main cause of absenteeism in schools is a lack of school fees. 64 (51%)

The head teacher questionnaire showed that lack of parental support was the primary factor affecting performance in secondary schools in the Sub-county. It was also shown on the students' questionnaire (see Table 7) that the major problem encountered by students was lack of school fees. This was represented by 64 (51%) of the respondents. The researcher went ahead to find out why this problem was prevalent, and it was discovered that most students came from destitute families. This can be understood by looking at Table 4 on parents' occupation, which shows that over 63 (50%) of the parents were peasant farmers. Peasant farming in the Sub-county has low earnings because the Sub-county is in the ASAL of Kenya.

If the rate of poverty is not reduced, the poor children will continue being denied their right to meaningful education as those who are rich grab the opportunity hence inequitable provision of educational opportunities. Existing income inequality among parents leads to unequal consumption of knowledge by the learners (Ayot, & Briggs, 1992)

The poverty levels in the Sub-county seem to be aggravated by the fact that most of the parents of the secondary school students do not engage in any meaningful kind of farming. Farming is essential to education in that parents sell their farm produce in order to pay school fees. From the data obtained from the students' questionnaire, 95 (76%) of the parents practice subsistence farming with 31 (25%) of them growing miraa as their cash crop. Although miraa growing seems to improve the economic status of families, it does not seem to affect academic achievement positively. From the teachers' questionnaire, miraa growing affected academic achievement negatively in that 75(60%) students lacked interest in education as they already had money from miraa growing and picking. Teachers also suggested that most students (boys) in the area started abusing the drug, thus

deteriorating in their academic work. This could well account for the low-level discipline among students, as observed by the researcher in 2 (40%) of the institutions visited.

It was established that the parents assisted their children at home by giving them ample time to do their homework. Most of the parents also provided their children with private tuition. Nevertheless, some of the parents were unable to pay school fees on time, which meant that so their children were made to go back home and collect school fees. This resulted in a significant loss of school time. Moreover, the parents failed to provide the necessary textbooks for KCSE exam preparation and were not dedicated to the provision of quality education for their children. Miraa farming was found to inhibit academic excellence in several schools because the students usually abused it. In contrast, parental occupation seemed to directly affect performance in examinations since the parents with low-paying occupations were unable to pay school fees in good time thereby causing the time wastage by students who were sent home to collect fees. It was also established that there was a lack of role models in the neighborhood for the students to emulate. Lastly, the study established that culture was detrimental to excellent KCSE performance.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions on the influence of the home environment on KCSE performance in the Sub-county have been made from this study. There is a positive correlation between absenteeism caused by lack of school fees and academic achievement. Absenteeism can be an early indicator of subsequent dismal KCSE performance. Similarly, students who are constantly out of school may develop low self-esteem and finally perform very poorly in examinations. Community factors such as miraa farming, poor attitude towards education, lack of role models in society and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), among

others, influence negatively on performance in KCSE examinations. The study also discovered that parental occupation influenced students' performance in KCSE. The findings from this study also suggest that students who performed dismally in KCSE examinations also were from homes where parents had low-income occupations (peasants). This inhibited the parents' ability to paying school fees on time. The researcher's personal opinion is that until school fees are paid on time, the KCSE examinations results would continually be poor. The long distances travelled to and from school by some students negatively influenced their performance in KCSE.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings, the researcher made the following recommendations that can help education

stakeholders realize their objectives. The community should be educated concerning drug use and abuse. The counselling departments should hold drug-related seminars. Furthermore, those socio-cultural practices that hinder active learning should be discouraged in these forums. Local leaders and politicians should vigorously push for education improvement in the Sub-county. All parents should be enlightened about the importance of education. This may facilitate the parents' change of attitude towards education; commit themselves more towards their children's education and revitalize their energies towards payment of fees. Strict discipline should be instilled in the pupils. This should be a collaborative effort of both teachers and parents.

REFERENCES

- Ayot, H. O., & Briggs, H. (1992). *Economics of Education*, Nairobi. Educational Research and publications.
- Banks, O. (1973). *Success and Failure in Secondary School*. Methuen and Co. Ltd, London.
- Eshiwani, G. (1988). *Education in Semi-Arid Areas: A Study of Determinants of School Achievement in Kajiado District*. BER, KU Nairobi.
- Hess, J. (1999). *Education and Social Change: Empirical Studies for the Improvement of Education in East Africa*. Max Planck for Human Development, Berlin.
- Kivuitu, P., & Chenge. F. (2004). *Milestones in History and Government*. Nairobi, Longhorn Publishers (K) Ltd.
- Koech, J. (1999). *Totally integrated quality education and training*. Education Commission Report, Ministry of Education. Nairobi, Government Publishers.
- Musgrove, P. W. (1978). *The Moral Curriculum: A Sociological Analysis*. Methuen & Co. Ltd., Suffolk.
- Mwiria, K. (1991). *Education for Subordination: African Education in Colonial Kenya*. BER, KU, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Njeru, H., & Orodho, J. A. (2003). *Access and participation in secondary school education in Kenya: emerging issues and policy implications*. Nairobi, Institute of Policy Analysis and Research.
- Taylor, G. P. (1991). *Social Change, Social Welfare and Social Science*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, London.
- Thomas, K. (1992). *Using Examinations to Improve Education*. Washington D.C. The World Bank.
- Young, G. (1994). *Colour, Class and Country*. UK, Zed Books Ltd.