

Research Article

THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN THE URBAN SLUMS OF LAIKIPIA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The millennium goal 2 focuses on the achievement of universal primary education under which target 3 strives to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full cycle of primary schooling. This paper is based on a study that investigated the effect of socio-economic status on student's academic performance in Laikipia County, Kenya. The study adopted a case study design. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The pupils were sampled using simple random sampling while the teachers and head teachers were purposively sampled. Data obtained showed that families with a lower socio-economic status often struggle with providing academic support for their children, negative environmental factors such as drug abuse, early marriages and early sexual involvement negated any meaningful pedagogic gains, that these children have low academic expectations, are more likely to exhibit behavior related learning problems and that the academic level of the parents was correlated to the pupils' learning outcomes. There should be concerted effort to empower parents living in urban slums and appropriate strategies put in place to increase the educational motivation for children living in urban slums.

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INTRODUCTION

The Millennium development goal 2 endeavors to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. According to UNESCO (2009) this has been an investment goal for the entire world. In a bid to stress the importance of primary education, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 declares that everyone has a right to education. During the education for all conference held in Jomtien Thailand (1990), countries and organizations from all over the world pledged to provide education for all by 2000. Towards this end, Kenya has made great strides. In 2003, parliament passed a bill on free and compulsory primary education for 6-14 year old children. However in the free primary education programme parents still cater for other expenses such as uniforms, lunch, transport, books, and school committee charges among others. This implies that free education is still very costly for some parents to send children to school. With more than half of the country's population living below the poverty line on less than one dollar a day, the free primary education policy does not adequately serve them. Majority of these families live in urban slums. Though urbanization has been associated with the promotion of literacy and education in that educational facilities are more advanced and accessible, the costs of other items like transport, food and housing is higher in towns than in other settings.

These impacts on the ability of poor households to send their children to school (Eric, 2009). Many factors which are beyond a child's innate ability influence his/her academic achievement. Key among these is socio-economic status of the child's family. Socio-economic status refers to levels of education, income and professionalism of an individual or a group. Although children from both low and higher economic statuses attend school, the effect of lower socio-economic status on student achievement cannot be ignored. Children from lower socio-economic status often face additional challenges including lack of learning resources, difficult learning conditions and poor motivation all of which affect their academic performance. Families from a lower socio-economic status often struggle with providing academic support for their children. Limited time and financial resources make it difficult for these families to create a favorable learning environment for children at home. Lack of a positive learning environment at home negatively affects their academic achievement in school. Similarly, the level of parental education is a proven factor in predicting the academic achievement of their children. According to Barry (2005) better educated parents are more likely to read to their children, use complex language and a wider vocabulary with their children. Therefore their children develop language skills, vocabulary and cognitive skills earlier this situates children for academic success. Children from families in lower socio-economic status are more likely to exhibit behavior related problems compared to their counterparts from families in higher socio-economic status.

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Kean (2005) found out that securely attached children typically behave better. Socio-economic status contributes greatly to behavior. Children raised in poverty do not choose to behave differently but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that the affluent children may never have to confront. This undermines good performance. Some behavior challenges that children from low socio economic status have to contend with include. Many children from poor families face emotional and social problems as a result of the weak and anxious emotional attachments acquired at a tender age. In impoverished families there tends to be a higher prevalence of such adverse factors as teen motherhood, depression and inadequate health all of which lead to decreased sensitivity towards the infant and later poor school performance and behavior on the child's part (Shah, 1993). Parents with low income are often overwhelmed by low self-esteem, depression, powerlessness and inability to cope. These feelings get passed along to their children in the form of insufficient nurturing, negativity and general failure to focus on children's needs.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the knowledge gap theory by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) which stipulates that increase of information in society is not evenly acquired by every member of society. People with higher socio economic status tend to have better ability to acquire information. This leads to a division of two groups; a group of better educated people who know more about most things and those with low education who know less. Lower socio-economic status people have no knowledge about public affairs issues, are disconnected from news, events and important new discoveries.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to;

- Find out the socio-economic factors influencing academic performance among children living in urban slums.
- Find out whether environmental factors affected learning.
- Identify behavior problems exhibited by children living in slums.
- Determine the occupational aspirations of children living in slums.
- Explore parental education as a factor in children's academic achievement.

METHODOLOGY

Case study research design was adopted for the study. The target population was 1,381 where a sample of 56 pupils, 24 teachers, 1 head teacher and 50 parents participated in the study. Two questionnaires and an interview schedule were used to collect the data needed after validating and determining their reliability. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data obtained.

RESULTS

The study identified the socio-economic factors influencing academic performance among children living in urban slums.

Employment status of the parents

Information on Table 1 shows the employment status of the parents. Majority of them (89%) were not employed which may mean that they were not in any formal employment.

Table 1. Employment status of the parents

Employment status	frequency	percentage
Employed	6	11
Not employed	50	89
Total	56	100

These findings concur with Denny (2004) who found out that poverty is a major predictor of teenage depression. He maintains that emotional problems impact academic performance negatively in that children with emotional problems get easily frustrated and give up on tasks even when they are about to succeed. This may also inhibit their ability to work well in cooperative groups leading to poor performance in school. These findings agree with Lacour and Tissington (2011) who found out that poverty directly affects academic performance. This is particularly so since poverty determines access to pertinent resources.

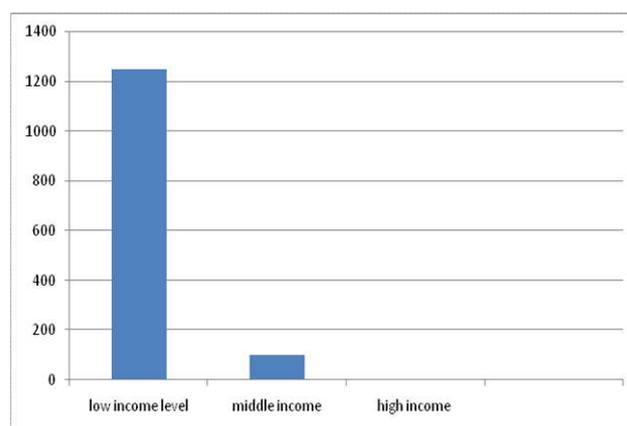


Figure 1. Parents' income levels according to the head teacher

The study sought to find out the income levels of the parents. Results on Figure 1 indicate that majority of the parents 1250(92.5%) were low income earners. This implies that Parents were not able to buy learning materials or afford medication for their children and this may lead to frequent absenteeism. Shah (1993) found out that there are higher stress levels in poor families than in the affluent families and the ability to provide for a child affects his/her psychological balance in the classroom. Shittu (2004) maintained that the income levels of parents affected the academic performance of students through the provision of a conducive home environment and learning resources.

Environmental factors affecting learning

Environmental factors play a major role in influencing academic performance. In bad environments students may be exposed to negative influence causing their performance to fall. Information on Table 2 shows the kind of environment to which the learners in the urban slums are exposed to. All the teachers (100%) felt that high prevalence of drug abuse, negative attitude towards education from the surrounding

Table 2. Environmental factors affecting learning

Environmental factors	Very often	Often	Never	Very rarely	rarely
High prevalence of drug abuse	(100%)	(0%)	0%	0%	0%
Negative attitude to education in the surrounding school environment	100%	(0%)	0%	0%	0%
Early marriages /sexual involvement in the community	(100%)	(0%)	0%	0%	0%
Quality of sanitary facilities	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%

community; early marriages and sexual involvement were some of the environmental factors that had the greatest impact on educational performance. These findings agree with UNESCO report (2006) which maintains that school environment is indispensable in the teaching/learning process and that lack of a conducive and safe environment negates any meaningful pedagogic activities. Howarth (2002) observed that living in a stigmatized neighborhood can lead to low self-esteem presenting particular challenges for schools in helping pupils develop positive identity and take their position in the society. This agrees with Lupton (2004) who found out that a child from a stressful home environment tends to channel that stress into disruptive behavior at school leading to poor academic achievement.

Behavior problems exhibited by children living in slums

The study sought to find out some of the behavior problems exhibited by children living in the slums and how they impacted on learning. Study findings are shown on Table 3.

Table 3. Behavior problems present in learners

Behavior problem	Yes	No
Anxiety	(100%)	(0 %)
Stress	(100%)	(0 %)
Depression	(100%)	(0 %)
Aggressive behavior	(100%)	(0 %)
Low self esteem	(100%)	(0 %)
Abusive/filthy language	(100%)	(0 %)
Poor Pupils readiness to learn	(100%)	(0 %)

All teachers agreed that anxiety, stress, depression, aggressive behavior, use of filthy language, low self-esteem and poor readiness to learn were some of the behavior problems exhibited by the learners. In most cases stress emanating from poor parental support as well as stigma related to their parents HIV/AIDS status greatly affected pupils' concentration in class. Study findings concur with Shah (1993) who found out that self-esteem and mental preparedness of pupils meant better performance and vice versa. These findings show that performance is affected by what is happening in the mind.

Occupational aspirations of children living in slums

Data on Table 4 indicates that majority of the students (28.5%) aspired for other careers that were not categorized. This probably showed that majority of the learners were not decided or aware of the possible career options. Teaching was chosen by (21.4%) of the learners. This showed that they were aware of teaching as a career possibly through modeling their teachers and admiring them. The learners who aspired to work in factories were (16%) while those who were not yet decided about their future career options accounted for (14.2%). This could have been possibly because they were not sure of completing the school cycle.

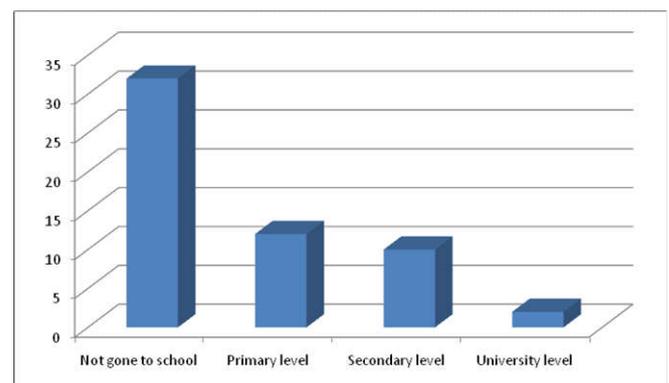
Only (5%) of the learners aspired to work in government ministries, 2% aspired to be lawyers and a further (2%) aspired to work in the bank and none of the pupils aspired to be engineers. These findings revealed that the learners shied away from those careers that required high qualifications and long duration in training. These findings agree with Barry (2005) who found out that parents with higher education levels have stronger confidence in their child's academic abilities and they also have higher expectations of their child. This motivates the child to aim for high ranking professions such as engineering, medicine and law. This concurs with (Kean,2005) maintained that as children become aware of higher tuition fees required for higher levels, they often lose their motivation to perform well due to their inability to pay for higher education.

Table 4. Participants' Occupational Aspirations

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching	12	21.4%
Company/bank employee	1	2%
Government official	3	5%
Engineer	0	0%
Lawyer	1	2%
Other	16	28.5%
Self-employed	6	10.7%
Factory	9	16%
Not decided yet	8	14.2%
Total	56	100%

Parental education as a factor in children's academic achievement

Expectations for school success are placed on children in school and at home by their parents. Information in Figure 2 shows the parents level of academic achievement.

**Figure 2. Parents' level of academic achievement**

Majority of the parents 30(53.5%) had no formal education, 10 (18%) had only attained primary level of education, 7(13%) had secondary level of education, 2(4%) had gone up to university while 6(11%) were either deceased or the pupils were not aware of their level of education. This implies that the literacy levels of majority of the parents living in urban slums were very poor and this could affect the academic performance of their children negatively.

Barry (2005) observed that the literacy levels of parents were correlated to the performance of pupils in class. He further argues that the level of parental education is a proven factor in predicting the academic achievement of their children.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made from the findings of the study.

- It is clear that majority of the parents of children living in the urban slums have no formal employment and as a result their income levels are very poor. These parents need to be economically empowered through the creation of income generating projects.
- The environment surrounding the schools in urban slums has a negative influence on academic performance. The teachers should sensitize the parents as well as the pupils on the negative impact of the environment
- All teachers agreed that anxiety, stress, depression, aggressive behavior, use of filthy language, low self-esteem and poor readiness to learn were some of the behavior problems exhibited by the learners. There is need for teachers to put in place programmes to teach learners alternative behavior.
- Career guidance and counseling should be put in place for the students since they had very poor occupational expectations. This would serve to expose them to the various career options available for them.
- Majority of the parents had no formal education. Adult literacy classes should be established for parents living in the urban slums.

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