

The Influence of Parental Socioeconomic Status, Involvement In Learning Activities And Its Influence On Children's Academic Performance In Urban Informal Settlements in Westlands Division - Nairobi County

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Abstract

The purpose of this study sought to investigate how parental socioeconomic status and involvement in students' learning activities can influence academic achievement of students in selected secondary schools in urban informal settlements of Westlands Division in Nairobi County. The study was premised on the classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity and social Darwinism proposed by Charles Darwin. A descriptive survey design using a sample of 125 respondents comprising of 91 students, 18 teachers and 16 parents was used to execute the study. The main tools for data collection were questionnaires for students, Focus Group Discussions for teachers and Interview schedules for parents. The quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics while the qualitative data from interviews was managed through thematic techniques. The major findings of the study indicate that parental socioeconomic status and school involvement has a powerful impact on students' academic achievement. After the statistical analysis it was concluded that parents' socioeconomic status and involvement in learning activities were facilitating factors towards good academic achievement among students. It was therefore recommended that schools should strengthen the collaboration between home and school in Westlands informal settlements.

Key words: Academic achievement, urban informal settlements, Parental involvement, Parent-teacher relationship, Socio-economic status

1. Introduction

According to Karl & White (1982), for decades, especially in western countries, researchers, both theoretical and empirical ones, have asserted that socioeconomic status is one of the best predictors of students' academic performance.

According to Marzano (2002), it is observed that the higher the socioeconomic status of the student family, the higher the academic performance of their children.

Socio-economic status is a definite background variable that represents a feature of the social structure in society. Qakes&Rasi (2003) assert that families in which parents are privileged educationally, socially and economically promote a higher level of achievement in their offspring. Williams (1987) & Williams (1993), also give assert that the parents give a higher level of psychological support for their children through enriched atmosphere that promotes and encourages the development of skills required for success at school.

According to Jeynes (2002), the socio-economic status of a child is usually determined by parental occupation status, income level, and the environment in which the child is brought up in. It is affected by parents' involvement in learning activities and effective parent-teacher relationship. It is understood that low socio-economic status negatively and depressingly affects students' academic achievement due to high additional stress and tension at home.

Socio-economic status is an expression which is used to differentiate between people's relative status in the community on the basis of income, occupation among others. Studies by Emmon (2005) & Jeynes (2002), have repeatedly found that socioeconomic status affects students' outcome. According to Meneal (2001), socioeconomic status has also been shown to override other educational influences such as parental involvement in their children's schooling.

Ramey & Ramey, (1994), observe that, in third world countries, families with lower socio-economic status often lack the financial, social and educational support that characterizes high socioeconomic status families. Lower socio-economic status parents have inadequate or limited access to community resources that promote and support children's development and school performance. According to Eamon (2005) & Duke (2000), at secondary school level, students hailing from low socio-economic status are trained to respect authority and obey orders that employers like in manual labourers. Conformity and obedience are encouraged rather than individual critical thinking and evaluative abilities amongst the students at this level.

Most researchers and experts think that the low socio-economic status negatively affects the academic performance of students. As a result of low socio-economic status their needs and demands remain unfulfilled and that is why they do not show better academic performance.

Studies around Africa by different scholars such as, (Eamon, 2005), (Duke, 2000) & (Jeynes' 2002), have indicated that there is a significant difference between low and high socioeconomic status. Low socio-economic status are often portrayed as disadvantaged in terms of having lower income and lower levels of education and therefore being associated with disadvantaged school performance and outcome.

In January 2003, the Kenyan Government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) and with it, an extra 1.3 million children enrolled in public schools, raising the figure from 5.9 million. (Kenya Economic Report,2010). Despite this increase, statistics available at the ministry of education indicate that more than one million children are still out of school in Kenya, and this is attributed to various socio-economic and cultural factors that are yet to be tackled. Kariga (2009) & Orodho (2013), established that provision and academic achievement in education in some Kenyan communities continues to be undermined by parents' socio-economic status and political factors.

Statement of the problem

Parental socio-economic status is positively correlated with both educational attainment and achievement especially in urban informal settlements. School going children and adolescents are the most vulnerable members of any community and disproportionately suffer from poverty and inequality. Most are still not able to access education mainly due to socioeconomic factors.

Westlands informal settlements of Nairobi County are an example of such areas where students access to education is still a mirage as compounded by socioeconomic factors.

Therefore the study sought to establish the relationship between socioeconomic factors and their contribution to access and attainment of academic performance of children born and bred in Westlands informal settlements of Nairobi County, Kenya.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To establish the extent to which the relationship between parental socioeconomic status influences students' academic achievement in urban informal settlements of Westlands Division in Nairobi county
- ii. To examine the impact of parental involvement in schooling activities and academic achievement of students in informal settlements of Westlands Division.
- iii. To establish the extent to which effective parent-teacher relationships affect students' performance in the urban informal settlements of Westlands Division in Nairobi County.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research questions:-

- i. How does parental socioeconomic status parental socioeconomic status influences students' academic achievement in urban informal settlements of Westlands Division in Nairobi county
- ii. To what extend does the impact of parental involvement in schooling activities and academic achievement of students in informal settlements of Westlands Division in Nairobi County.
- iv. How does effective parent-teacher relationship affect students' performance in the urban informal settlements of Westlands Division in Nairobi County?

2. Literature review

Effect of parental involvement in learning activities

Parental involvement is defined as having an awareness of and involvement in school work, understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and the student success in schooling, and a commitment to students. Williams *et al*, (2002) surveyed parents of children aged 5 – 16 years and attending schools in England to establish their degree of involvement in their children's education. A telephone survey was used to contact two thousand and nineteen households in order to conduct interviews to establish parental levels of practical help in schools, their relationship with their children's teacher (s) and parents' involvement with homework. 20% of parents felt very involved, but more so in primary schools than secondary schools. Mothers felt more involved than fathers. 35% strongly agreed that they wanted to be more involved whilst around three quarters of parents wanted to be at least somewhat more involved. 94% found school "welcoming" and 84% reported that the school was willing to involve them. Despite this level of satisfaction, 16% felt they might be seen as troublesome if they talked too much. Parents describing themselves as "very involved" reported providing more practical help in school than other parents and they were the keenest to be, yet more involved. 21% of parents claimed to have helped in class at some point and 9% claimed so at every opportunity. This statistics tell us that those children whose parents get involved in their learning activities develop more keenness on study and tend to perform better as compared to those of parents who are non – involved.

In regard to homework, parents were much more involved in the early years. 70% with year I children claimed to help with every piece of homework. This dropped to 5% by year II. As children got older, parents lost confidence in their ability to help. 58% of parents claimed to speak regularly with their child's teacher, in the main about progress but not infrequently about behaviour (27%) while many parents wanted to increase their involvement to include, for example, supporting extra-curricular initiatives, they felt that the main barriers to further involvement were the limitations of their own time. In the present context the interesting findings in the survey are (a) there is a level of parental involvement and a desire for more (b) there are considerable differences between parents in levels of involvement. An important issue not reported on is the level of parental support for education and learning outside of schooling matters. Yet, it is this form of parental involvement which is most strongly related to achievement.

Sacker *et al* (2002) showed that socio-economic status had its impact in part, negatively through material deprivation and in part, positively through parental involvement and aspiration. It is upon the gap created of parental support for education and learning outside of schooling matters that my research will seek to fill. Additionally, in order to make the cited researches more reliable, more than one instrument would have been used in data collection. In addition, the researcher would have cross tabulated the findings as to go deeper in finding the roles that parents play and why they do so. This research limitation creates a gap for further research.

Influence of effective parent-teacher relationship

Parental - teacher involvement has been defined and measured in multiple ways, including activities that parents engage in at home and at school, plus the positive attitudes parents have towards their child's education, school, and teacher. (Epstein 1996). The distinction between the activities parents partake in and the attitude parents have towards education was highlighted by several recent studies. Several studies found that increased frequency of activities was associated with higher levels of child misbehavior in the classroom. (Fendrich, Izzo, Weissberg Izzo, 1999). Whereas positive attitudes towards education and school were associated with the child's increased academic performance. This is according to Bradley & Cox, Rim-Kaufman & Penta (2003). Specifically Izzo et al. (1999) reported that an increase in the parent's school activities, such as increased number of parent-teacher contacts, was associated with worsening achievement, as increased contacts may have occurred to help the teacher manage the child's existing behavior problems. The significance of parent attitudes toward education and school is less well understood, although attitudes are believed to comprise a key dimension of the relationship between parents and school (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Parents convey attitudes about education to their children during out-of-school hours and these attitudes are reflected in the child's classroom behavior and in the teacher's relationship with the child and the parents (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom 1993).

The influence of parent involvement on academic success has not only been noted among researchers, but also among policy makers who have integrated efforts aimed at increasing parent involvement into broader educational policy initiatives. Coupled with these findings of the importance of early academic success, a child's academic success has been found to be relatively stable after early elementary school. (Entwisle & Hayduk 1988).

Based on previous research, Entwisle & Hayduk (1988) hypothesized that parents who have a positive attitude towards their child's education, school, and teacher are able to positively influence their child's academic performance by two mechanisms: (a) by being engaged with the child to increase the child's self-perception of cognitive competence and (b) by being engaged with the teacher and school to promote a stronger and more positive student-teacher relationship.

However, all the studies have not been able to appropriately address the question of parent-teacher relationships in urban informal settlements. That is where the researcher will pick their gap and study the hardships faced by parents residing in the slums and the factors that hinder them from engaging in effective parent – teacher consultations.

Theoretical framework

The study was grounded in, and guided by one of the theories found in sociology and education. I was majorly guided by the classical liberation theory of equal opportunity and social Darwinism as proposed by Charles Darwin. This was in my attempt to find out some of the socio-economic factors that affect children's schooling in informal settlements in Westlands Division of Nairobi County, Kenya. According to this theory, an individual's Socio-economic Status is a product of the environment they live in, thus nature and nurture have a bearing on an individual's destiny. Informal sectors are areas that are neglected by the central government in terms of equal opportunities leading to exclusion in terms of social and economic development and this impact negatively on education.

Socio-economic factors such as family income level, parents' level of education, adequacy of learning and teaching materials or resources and occupation, all influences the quality of education as well as the ability of education to improve life circumstances. Low socio-economic status and its correlates, such as lower education, poverty and unemployment, ultimately affect a society as a whole. The study therefore attempted to find out the extent to which the classical liberal Theory of Equal opportunity and Social Darwinism can effectively be linked to socio-economic factors that influence students' academic achievement in informal settlements where inequalities of education provisions are severe on equity and deficiency grounds.

3. Study methodology

The study employed descriptive survey design. Descriptive design is a design where the researcher describes the status of affairs as they exist. This is a method of collecting information by means of interviews or administering questionnaires. The rationale for using this design is that it allows in-depth study of the subject matter and it is suitable to describe attitudes, views or opinions and behavior patterns of people. Therefore the researcher described affairs as they were factually. The researcher reported her findings through coding, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of the data collected.

The study was conducted in Westlands District of Nairobi County. It is in this District that we find several slums. These slums include Kangemi, Kawangware and Uthiru Districts. There are many challenges faced by both parents and children alike in these informal settlements. This provided an insight to various stakeholders in coming up with ways of alleviating some of the problems. This is because they are the key contributors to poor academic achievement of students in secondary schools in these urban informal settlements.

The stakeholders must also come up with ways of cushioning parents against some of the problems that glaringly impact negatively against their efforts in their bid to push their children through secondary school education.

The target population of this study consisted of 5 secondary schools comprising of 91 students, 18 teachers and 16 parents. The study employed stratified and purposeful sampling techniques to select those who participated in the study. A stratified sampling technique refers to the researcher identifying sub-groups in the target population. In this case, 4 zones namely Lavington, Kangemi, Kawangware and Uthiru. The 4 zones accounted for any differences in any of the sub-groups characteristics. Purposeful technique was used by the researcher to decide who to include in the sample from the four zones. The main instruments for collection of primary data were a structured questionnaire targeting students, a Focus Group Discussion schedule for the teachers and an interview schedule for the parents. In every household interviewed, the researcher interviewed the head of the house. The researcher targeted students in Form 1 to 3 to avoid interfering with the candidate classes. One of the students, in response to a questionnaire on the challenges they faced for lack of parental involvement said that, they were forced to discuss some of their assignments with his friends and teachers before leaving school as their parents did not understand most of the topics taught in Mathematics and Chemistry. He said his mother never joined secondary school and his father never did well as he went to a local day school in his neighbourhood. The teachers participating in the FGD were randomly sampled. Citing an example from the discussion questions number 16, "Discuss some of the unique challenges that you face as teachers who have to work with children from urban informal settlements." one of the groups from Lavington Secondary school cited high rate of dropout due to pregnancies, involvement in drugs and alcoholism, early marriages and constant absenteeism from school. They unanimously agreed that these worked negatively on their academic achievement. In summary, 91 students, 18 teachers and 16 parents participated in the study bringing the total number of respondents to 125.

4. Findings and Discussions

This section presents analysis, interpretation and discussion of findings on the Parental socioeconomic status, their school involvement in students' learning activities and the effect on children's academic achievement in urban informal settlements of Westlands settlements of Westlands Division of Nairobi County. Table 1 shows the type of the family.

Table1: Type of family

Type of Family	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear	67	74
Single Parent	18	20
Others	6	7
Total	91	100

From the table, 74% of respondents came from nuclear families while 20% were from single parent families. 7% came from other kind of families which they established as living either with an elder sibling or a family friend. This means that most of the families sampled were nuclear families.

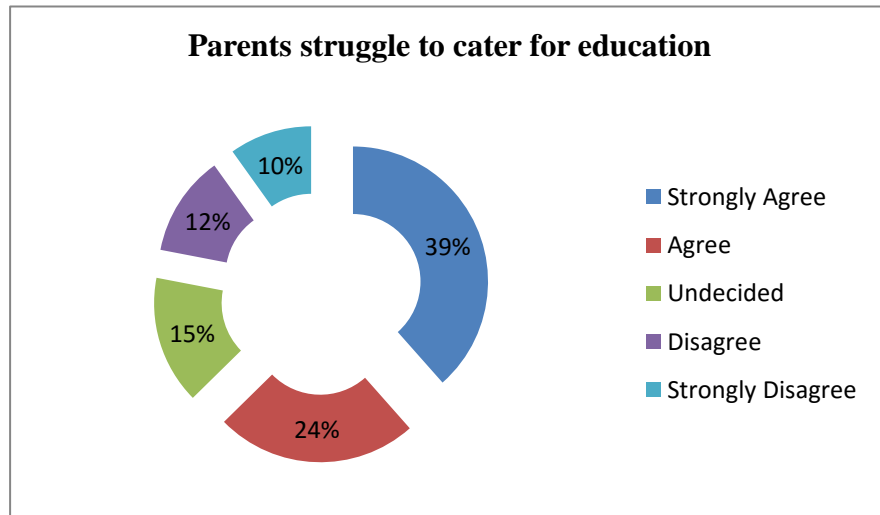
Table 2: Frequency of being sent home

How often are you sent back home for lack of learning provisions and school fees?	Frequency	Percentage
Never	27	30
Rarely	26	29
Sometimes	25	27
Often	13	14
Total	91	100

From the Table 2, 30% of the respondents said they had never been sent back home for lack of learning provisions or school fees. Closely following at 29% were those who said they have rarely been sent home for the same. 27% had sometimes been sent home while 14% had often been sent home for school fees and other learning provisions. This means that some students had sometimes to be sent away for lack of school fees and school provisions.

Data was also sought to establish if students felt that their parents struggled to cater for their education. Data collected was as shown in Figure 1.

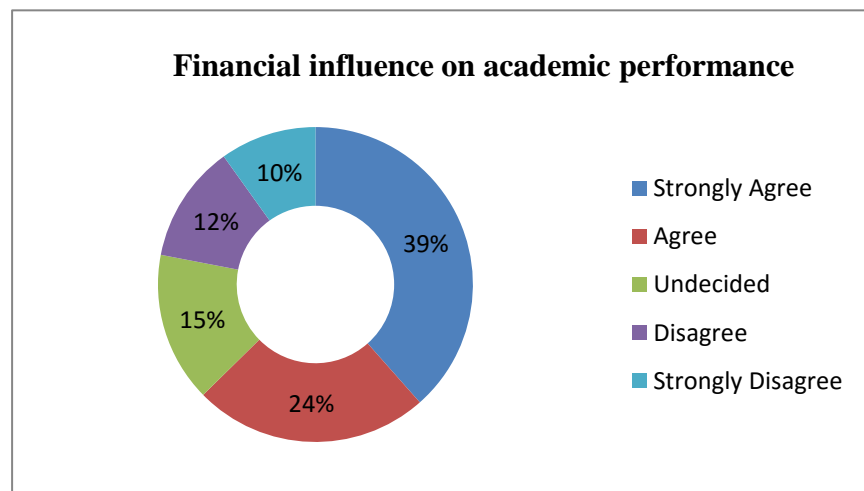
Figure 1: Parents struggle to cater for education



From Figure 1, 39% of students strongly agreed that parents struggled to cater for their children’s education while 24% agreed to the same. 12% disagreed, while 10% strongly disagreed but 15% were undecided. This means that a majority of parents struggled to meet their children’s educational needs.

Data was sought to establish students’ attitude on whether their parents’ financial background influenced their academic performance. Data collected was analysed and is presented in the Figure 2 below:

Fig. 2: Financial influence on academic performance



From the Figure 2, we can see that 39% strongly agreed with the statement while 12% disagreed on the same. 24% actually felt that their parents’ financial status affected their academic performance while 12% of respondents disagreed and another 15% were undecided. This means that a bigger majority of the sampled students were of the opinion that their parents’ financial background had an influence on their academic performance.

The study also sought to find out the parents’ opinion on whether their occupation affected their children’s academic performance. Most parents felt that it actually does both positively and negatively.

The occupation they sited determined whether they had enough time to be with their children to assist in homework and guided them as well as visit their school. The occupation also determined how best they are able to pay school fees on time to avoid disruption of students learning. Occupation on that basis therefore can affect performance in school.

Influence of parental involvement in learning activities on children's academic performance

Respondents were also asked whether their parents assisted them with homework and assignments. Responses are as shown below.

Table 3: Parents assistance on homework

How often do your parents assist you with homework and assignment?	Frequency	Percentage
Never	29	32
Rarely	20	22
Sometimes	24	26
Often	18	20
Total	91	100

According to the Table 3, majority of respondents (32%) said their parents had never assisted them with assignment. 26% had been assisted sometimes while 22% were rarely assisted. 20% had often been assisted by parents do their homework. This means that majority of the sampled students did not receive much help with their homework from their parents.

Students were also asked whether they appreciated when their parents got involved in their school activities. Data collected was as follows.

Table 4: Appreciation on students on parental involvement

Do you appreciate when your parents get involved in your school activities?	Frequency	Percentage
Never	20	22
Rarely	13	14
Sometimes	25	27
Often	33	36
Total	91	100

From Table 4, 36% of the respondents often appreciated when parents involved themselves in their school activities. 27% sometimes appreciated and 22% never appreciated while 14% rarely did. This means that the bigger majority of the sampled students appreciated it when their parents got involved in their learning activities. Asked whether their motivation to do well in school depended on their parents, students gave the following responses.

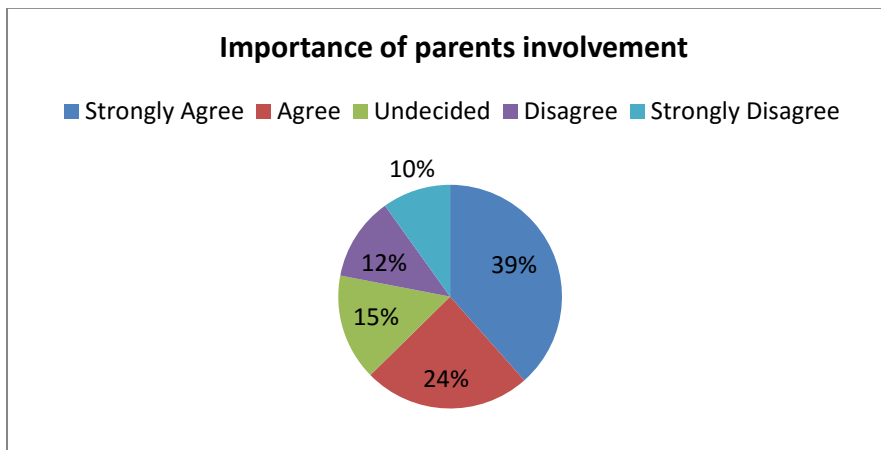
Table 5: Motivation and parental involvement

Does your motivation to perform in school depend on your parents?	Frequency	Percentage
Never	29	32
Rarely	11	12
Sometimes	26	29
Often	25	27
Total	91	100

According to Table 5, 32% of respondents never felt that their motivation to perform in school depended on their parents. 29% felt that sometimes it was a motivation while 27% felt that often parents were a motivation to perform in school. 12% were for the opinion that rarely parents are a motivation. It is clear from the responses of the sampled students that their motivation to perform in school did not depend on their parents.

Students were also asked to give an opinion on the importance of parents being involved in their school activities. Data collected was analyzed and results obtained were as shown below.

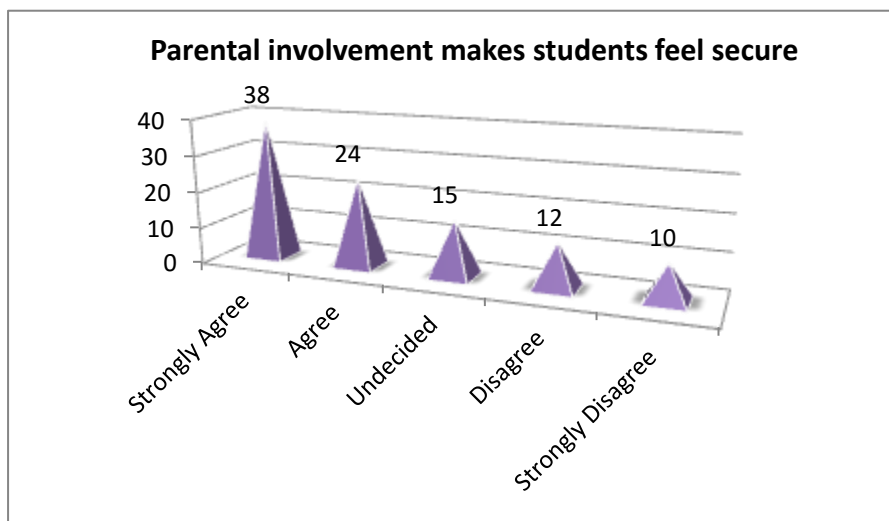
Fig.3: Importance of parental involvement



According to Figure 3, 49% emphasized the importance of parents’ involvement in school activities by strongly agreeing to the statement. Another 29% agreed to the statement while 18% remained undecided. 8% and 3% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. It is clear from the sampled responses that most of the students were of the opinion that it was important for parents to be involved in school activities.

Sampled students were asked whether their parents’ involvement and interest made them feel secure. Their responses are analyzed as follows.

Figure 4: Parental involvement making students feel secure



According to Figure 4, 51% of respondents strongly agreed to the statement while another 29% agreed that they actually felt secure when their parents were involved. 8% of respondents were undecided with an equal number strongly disagreeing. 5% disagreed with the opinion. This means that more than half the sampled students were of the fact that parental involvement in their learning activities made them feel more secure.

When asked whether there was ample communication between them and their parents. Sampled students gave varying responses as analyzed below.

Table 6: Ample communication between students and parents

There is ample communication between students and parents	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	35	38
Agree	22	24
Undecided	14	15
Disagree	11	12
Strongly Disagree	9	10
Total	91	100

From the table above Table 6, 38% of respondents strongly agreed that there was ample communication between them and their parents. 24% agreed to the same statement while 15% were undecided. 12% and 10% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This means that most of the sampled students were in agreement that there was ample communication between them and their parents.

Respondents were also to express their opinion on whether their parents made the right decisions for them. Data was collected and is analyzed below.

Table 7: Parents' decisions for their children

Parents make the best decisions for their children	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	41	45
Agree	22	24
Undecided	9	10
Disagree	11	12
Strongly Disagree	8	9
Total	91	100

From the above Table, majority of sampled respondents (45%) strongly felt that parents made the best decisions for them while another 24% agreed to the same. 12% and 9% disagreed and strongly disagreed while 10% remained undecided. This means that a big number of the sampled students were of the opinion that their parents made the best decision for them.

To sum up the section, the study sought to establish what challenges learners faced for lack of parental involvement in their studies. Most of the learners felt that without the involvement of parents, they are likely to make unwise decisions either career wise or discipline wise. Others felt that without their parents they would easily drop out for lack of confidence to press on. A good number of respondents also felt that without parental involvement they would hardly perform well since parents motivate them to do so.

Students were also asked to suggest ways of how well their parents would get involved in their learning. Some of the ideas included: parents visiting their schools often, This will ensure they manage to check on their progress as well as ensuring school fees is paid promptly to avoid waste of time out of school.

Teachers were asked on how they ensured that parents were involved in students' learning activities. Some of the ways that were highlighted included: ensuring that each class has a representative in the PTA; organizing school open days and invite parents; organizing academic clinics; organizing sporting activities that involve parents among others.

Asked whether parents cooperated with the schools, on average three quarters of the parents were seen as cooperative to a good extent. Students whose parents were reported to be uncooperative showed signs of poor performance, being reluctant to bring parents when asked to as well as reporting withdrawal. To improve parental involvement, teachers suggested that sensitization programs should be organized in the communities especially via churches and such forums. It was also the opinion of some teachers that some parents should be forced to take responsibility.

Parents were also asked ways in which they involved themselves in their children's learning activities. Some of the ways identified include helping them with their homework, consulting teachers, committing themselves to payment of school fees as well as inspecting their books. However, most of the interviewed parents sited absence of fathers as a major barrier in their success.

Parents highlighted some of the benefits of getting involved in their children's learning. These included better performance, improved discipline, making them happy as well as giving them a sense of belonging.

Influence of effective parent-teacher relationship on academic performance

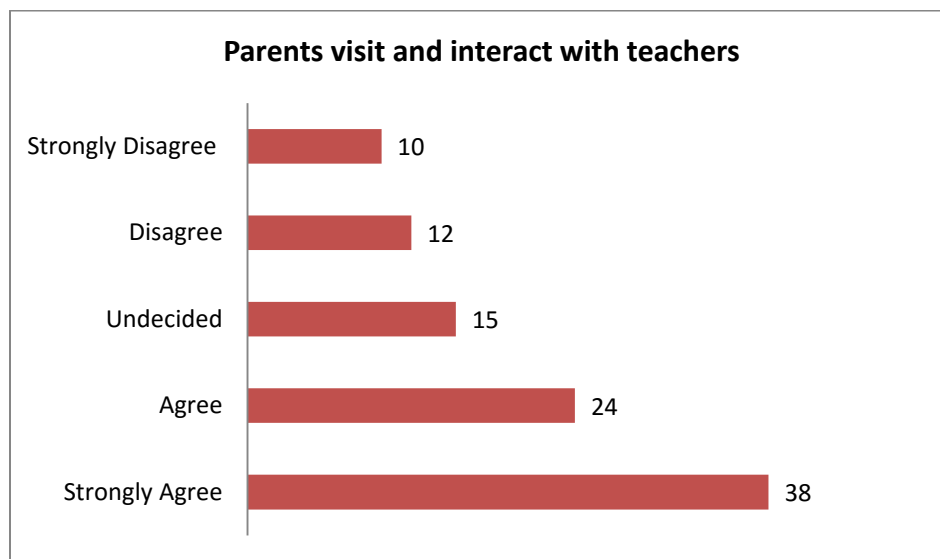
Sampled students were asked whether school systems respected and involved parents in school roles and the general running of the school.

Table 8: Involvement of parents by schools

School systems respect and involve parents	Frequency	Percentage
Never	15	16
Rarely	25	27
Sometimes	23	25
Often	28	31
Total	91	100

According to Table 8, we see that 31% of sampled respondents felt that schools involved parents in running of schools while 27% said that they rarely do while 25% were for the opinion that they sometimes do while 16% said schools never involved parents. It is clear that from the sampled students a big majority of them felt like the school involved parents in the running of the schools.

The researcher also sought to find if parents visited and interacted with teachers constantly. Data collected is analyzed below.

Fig. 5 Parents' interaction with teachers

From the Figure 5, 38% of respondents strongly agreed while 25% agreed. 19% disagreed that parents visited school to interact with teachers. 13% strongly disagreed with an equal number remaining undecided. This means that a bigger number of the sampled students were of the opinion that their parents visited and interacted with teachers often.

Opinion was also sought from teachers on how often parents visited school each term. It was established from their responses that most visited once every term for academic clinics organized by the schools. However, some visited voluntarily though rarely while a big number only visited on invitation by the schools.

When teachers were asked of school activities in their schools that aimed at socialization of parents and teachers, some of such activities that were mentioned included: prize giving days; PTA meetings; career counseling; class meetings; games and sports; open days; mass among others.

From parents' point of view, most parents felt it was advantageous to maintain cordial relationship between them and teachers. Some of the advantages they highlighted include: that it is likely to improve students' performance; that parents are able to understand school policies and avoid being on the wrong side of the school; that they are able to get updates on their children's academic progress, health wise and discipline wise etc.

5. Conclusions of the Study

Subject to data collected from both primary and secondary sources, it can be concluded that parents' socioeconomic status influences students' academic performance as it determined their ability to finance the education of their children, it is likely to affect academic performance since parents who are not able to finance education are likely to have their children lacking most academic necessities and therefore have their performance affected.

On a different approach, children who came from poor families were seen to work extra hard to liberate themselves from such conditions and are therefore likely to perform well academically.

Lastly the study established a significant positive correlation between good parent-teacher relationship and parents' involvement in their children's and academic achievement. Parents' involvement in the learning process was seen to yield positive results. Learners felt that when parents are involved, they guide them in making the right choices in career as well as in discipline. Students' self-esteem was also reported to improve as students felt a sense of security when their parents are involved in their learning.

Good teacher-parent relationship was also seen to yield positive results as far as academic performance is involved. The relationship ensured that parents followed up on their children's discipline, career choices and academic performance and consequently better academic performance is reported among learners.

After the statistical analysis it was concluded that, Parents' socioeconomic status, parental involvement in learning activities and effective parent-teacher relationship were facilitating factors. On the other hand the parents' low ability to finance education was an inhibiting factor to students' academic achievement and attainment in the study locale.

Recommendation of the study

It was therefore recommended that unemployment should be controlled. The best way to approach this can be by offering poor students scholarships, free books and other stationary. Alternatively, basic education should be made entirely free and the government should even consider extending extra help to the extremely vulnerable students:- giving uniform, sanitary towels, writing material among others. In addition it is recommended that the government should take steps to raise socioeconomic status of people and especially, those living in urban informal settlements.

It is also recommended that parents should be highly sensitized about the benefits of parental involvement in the learning of their children. They should be made aware that the back does not stop at merely paying school fees rather their direct involvement with the learning of their children is greatly required to improve academic performance.

It is also recommended that adequate modalities should be put in place to ensure a working teacher-parent relationship. Such relationship was seen to greatly influence academic performance and therefore education stakeholders should ensure that the relationship is maintained at its best for smooth learning to take place.

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