

# Effects Of Parental Income And Support On Students' Participation In Free Day Secondary Education At Public Day Secondary Schools In Imenti North Sub-County, Kenya

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*Abstract: The Government of Kenya (GoK) introduced free day secondary education in 2008 to increase students transition from primary to secondary school. In this mode, the government gives capitation which covers tuition, learning and teaching materials and pays school support staff. The parents in turn were required to buy school uniforms for their children, provide them with lunch and personal school as well as ensure and monitor their children's attendance to school. The latter charges parents with a responsibility in their children's education. Parental support which is mostly dictated by the parent's income is key for students to benefit from this Government initiative. The aim of this study was to find out the effects of parental income and support on students' participation in free day secondary education at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya. The target population for the study was students and head teachers at the sub-county's public day secondary schools. A total of 220 students (113 boys and 107 girls) participated in the study. The researcher visited 11 public day secondary schools in the sub-county from which all the head teachers were included in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. A questionnaire for head teachers and another for students were applied. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data and the findings were presented in percentages and text. It was found that 85.00% of students at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya had challenging home environment, quite unfavourable for academic activities. Students were found to seriously lack separate rooms at home from where they could conduct their studies with 72.00% of respondents reporting to suffer the challenge. Also from these homes, 75.00% of the respondent students said they relied on kerosene lamps (mainly tin lamps) to light their rooms which posed health challenges because of straining their eyes due to dim light and smoke emitted. They also pointed out that they could not study for as long as they wanted because they had to save kerosene given the prevalent family poverty. The study also found that 63.64% of the parents at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county were single mothers 75.50% of which struggled financially to sustain their children in school. It was established that 90.00% of parents in these schools had no decent income. They were mainly peasants and subsistence farmers with a monthly income Ksh 3, 000.00 (US Dollars 30). Parental low income dictated frail support for their children's educational material needs with 54.55% of participating head teachers reporting that less than 50.00% of parents in their schools honoured their financial obligations on their children's education. In addition to non-payment of school fees, parents were also found to falter in support of their children with educational materials not provided by the government. In 73.50% of the classrooms visited, students were found to lack either pens, mathematical instruments, dictionaries and revision books. This resulted to heavy borrowing from their classmates and learning time wastage when they were asked to go home and buy. The study concludes that home conditions were uncondusive for academic activities, parents had very low income to fully and consistently support education for their children and students lacked the necessary support educational materials to participate and fully benefit from free day secondary education offered by the Government at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya.*

*Keywords: parental support, parental income, students' academic performance, home academic conditions, educational support learning materials, learning time*

## I. INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL INCOME AND SUPPORT ON CHILD'S EDUCATION

Parental support has a lot of influence on child's education. The educational support offered to children by their parents has a bearing on their earning levels because it greatly determines the extent to which the parent can afford their

children's education expenditure. Affordability of child's educational materials and fees determine consistency in class attendance, learning motivation levels and resultantly academic performance for the child. Therefore, as Mayer (2002) asserts, parental income has a positive relationship on children's outcomes. A child's confidence, excitement and focus in school is greatly determined by possession of the

required learning materials and payment of levied fees. This factor has greater impact on students from low income households who view education as the only exit from poverty associated with their families. However, for poor families, theirs is a double edged sword. As they grapple with the challenge of meeting education expenditure, their options for education quality are limited. As Mayer (2002) notes, increase in education expenditure influences parents' decision on the quality of school, which affects the grade of the children and their ability to progress to a higher level. Her analysis further shows that the influence of parental income on child's education is differentiated in gender and age. An increase in parental income influences more of the male child than the female and also family income is more important at adolescence compared to childhood. Mensah and Kierman (2010) found that primary school children in England between 2005 and 2006 in families experiencing low socioeconomic status had lower development in communication, language, literacy and mathematics. Poor family environment indicates poorer educational outcome of children. When families have high income, they can afford to buy extra textbooks, stationery, provide extra tutoring to improve children's academic performance and hence ensure their children attain higher levels of education (Willingham, 2012). On the contrary, a low income resourced family may be constrained in even meeting the basic necessities in life, hence cannot adequately support children with educational resources (Donkor, 2010). According to Becker and Tomes (1986), parents of high socioeconomic status (SES) may have access to credit facilities while that of the low SES parents may not thereby limiting their ability to provide basic or supplementary resource for their children's education. There is a direct link between child's educational attainment and resources invested in them. According to Haveman and Wolfe (1995), the investment theory shows that children are bound to attain higher education on the average compared to their parents in accordance with the weight of resources invested in them.

Parents moral support to their children requires a booster of resources for the achievement of better educational outcomes. Financially stable parents are more likely to invest heavily in their children's education and morally support their children in a bid to account for their life in school. Internationally, UNESCO (2006) and the World Bank (2009) found a strong positive correlation between literacy and poverty. There exists evidence that family poverty is closely associated with family instability, unemployment, and alcoholism, which can potentially impair children's educational attainment (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006). The attendant effects of family poverty spells doom for child's education especially in slums and remote villages where the poor are lumped together. For a school going child in these neighbourhoods, it is a double tragedy as threat to their education does not only emanate from their own families but also their neighbours. School non-attendance and dropout rates are more prevalent in slums and remote villages. The fate for a child from a poverty-stricken family is compounded by little or no education at all for their parents. Inspired by the notion that parents' education has a direct effect on family income (Feinstein, et al., 2008), it can be hypothesised that parents' education levels and family income

combine to influence children's school achievement. Owing to increased wages, educated parents with higher incomes are able to provide for their children's education, and thereby increase their children's chances of successful school attainment (Brown and Iyengar, 2008). Evidence shows that low income children lag behind in cognitive development and lie one year behind in vocabulary when they enter school, with long-term attainment consequences. Such early gaps may affect the attitudes of children from low income households towards education (Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2010, Lauder, et al., 2006). Family income has also been found to have a bearing on child's readiness to take advantage of learning opportunities. Eden (2013 in Ward (2013) and Blanden and Gregg (2004) found evidence that poverty, in terms of family resources, has a powerful influence on children's ability to respond to educational opportunities. Poverty unequivocally robs the child of the right educational instruments, attitude, environment and morale, which are the principle elements of success in school. Eden (2013) postulates that poverty, in terms of low family income affects children in several ways such as the absence of learning habits and experiences at home, lack of access to computers, lack of a sense of self-esteem through appropriate interactions with parents, poor housing, an unhealthy diet, possible mental health issues within the family, domestic violence and stress associated with low pay or unemployment. These all make it potentially difficult for children to see themselves as able achievers (Gottfried & Gottfried, 1989).

The parents' closeness with their children is also determined by the economic pressures exerted upon them. Blanden and Gregg (2004) found that parents who are stressed about money and employment, working unsocial hours in more than one job, are likely to have less time to provide their children with an environment conducive for good educational outcomes. From these reviews it is widely recognised that if pupils are to maximise their potential from schooling, they will need the full support of their parents (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Feinstein, et al., 2008; Brown & Iyengar, 2008; UNESCO, 2005). The impact of parental income on their children's education is expected to tarry in the family beyond children's' generation. This is because children's lack of good education owing to family poverty means that the effects will trickle to their own children whose education will likewise be dogged by lack of proper support and guidance. The lack of literacy owing to poverty is negatively linked to reduced parental educational support to their children (Nyamugasira, Angura, & Robinson 2005).

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- The objective of this study were to:
- ✓ determine the effects home academic conditions on students' participation in free day secondary education at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya
  - ✓ establish the income levels for parents with children at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya
  - ✓ examine the influence of availability of learning material on students' participation in free day secondary

education at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county, Kenya

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used for this study. This design was appropriate for this study in that it enabled obtaining of information concerning the current socioeconomic status of parents with students at public day secondary schools in Imenti north sub-county, Kenya and describe this status with respect to educational needs of their students. The target population for this study was students and school head teachers of public day secondary schools in the sub-county. Form 3 (grade 11) students were sampled to represent the students in the study owing to their experience in day secondary schools on what is required for them to achieve academically. From a total of 22 public day secondary schools in the sub-county, 11(50%) were randomly selected to participate in the study. This gave rise to 440 Form 3 students from which 220 (50%), 113(51.36%) boys and 107(48.64%) girls were randomly picked to take part in the study. All the head teachers in the schools visited were included in the study. The study used questionnaires to collect data. This instrument was preferred because it allows simultaneous collection of data on a large population. Additionally, study participants were at a position to provide accurate information because they could read the questions and respond to them at a personal level. The findings of the study were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in percentages and text.

## III. STUDY FINDINGS

The ages of students who participated in this study had an impetus to the study. Majority of them, 86.00% were above 18 years. Ideally, students who enrol at grade 1 in Kenyan system of education at the government's recommended age of 6 years, are aged 17 years at grade 11. The respondents attributed this overage to delay in joining Form 1(grade 9) the first year in secondary school after completing primary education. Of those who had these delays, 30.00% cited family poverty as a causal factor. They said that the requirements for their enrolment in Form 1, such as school uniform, textbooks, stationery, meal fees which were quite a burden to their already impoverished families, made them delay enrolment or forgot about secondary education until the arrival of miraculous aid from sponsors. Some said that they were in school courtesy of benefactors whose aid came after they had stayed at home for as long as 3 years after their primary school education. They said that poverty in their families could not allow them to prioritise education. The study also found that almost half of respondent students, (48.00%) had transferred from one school to another during their secondary education. Majority of the transfers (47.00%), the respondents said were occasioned by lack of school fees, as compared to 16% who transferred because of unfavourable climate and 10% who transferred in pursuit of a better school in academic performance. A further search revealed that of those who transferred because of school fees, 50.00% resorted to schools

near their homes so that they could mitigate education cost by cutting off transport expenses to and from school.

The majority of respondent students 72.91% strongly agreed that the key areas affecting their education where they would need immediate intervention of their parents and guardians were: conducive study rooms at home, lighting in these rooms, food at home and payment of school fees. From the sample, 72.00% of students said that they did not have separate rooms at home from where they could do their homework. Majority of them said that they lived in congested family houses where they were made to share rooms with their siblings or cousins (for those staying with relatives) many of whom were not students. This made such rooms noisy and unconducive for studies as sometimes their kin played loud music, entertained friends for lengthy periods going even up to midnight or simply they were hostile with reading taking place in their rooms. Many of the students who participated in this study blamed family poverty for not having their separate study rooms at home. The study found that in addition to lack of quiet and comfortable homework rooms at home, there was a nagging problem of lighting. It was established that 75.00% of the respondent students in this study relied on kerosene lamps (mainly tin lamps) for lighting of their rooms while doing homework. Only a quarter of the respondents 25.00% had electricity at home. Those relying on kerosene lamps said, they faced unending problems because their parents and guardians were not at a financial position to keep a steady supply. Additionally, they complained that with kerosene lamps they could not read for as long as they wanted with 65.00% saying that they were made to put them off early to save kerosene, 20.00% complained they did not provide enough light so they strained their eyes and 15.00% said that smoke emitting from smoke was sickening. Even those with electricity at home said, they could go for weeks with power off owing to non-payment of previous consumption bills. When there was a blackout, they said they just called it a day in home studies because they had no alternative lighting. Availability of separate rooms and lighting had great impact on the students' study habits. The head teacher respondents decried an alarming failure of students to complete teachers' assignments. They also noted with concern that generally only a quarter of their students carried study books home meaning they did not read at home. Students responded that lack of study friendly rooms at home, absence of lighting systems as well as unsupportive parents and guardians were the major contributors to their non-readership behaviour at home.

The majority of parents in charge of students in public day secondary schools in the sub-county (63.64%), were found to be single mothers, 20.14% grandparents and 6.22 guardians (relatives and benefactors). Parenting has an impact on financing children education because two parents are at a better position to provide what is required by their children in school. Provision to the needs of students made them more stable, confident and focused in school and this end can be more achieved by two parents as compared to one. Responses from head teachers revealed that students with both parents demonstrated comparatively better characteristics in school. They noted that 63.64% of the highly disciplined students in school were under the care of both mother and father, just like 70.00% of those who attended school daily, 70.00% of those

who demonstrated confidence in studies and 88.89% of those who posted steady improvement in academic performance. Single mothers and grandparents generally struggled to provide to the students as a number of them did not have a permanent abode. It was also found that 90.00% of these mothers, grandparents and guardians were peasants and subsistence farmers. With a monthly income of approximately 3000 Kenya shillings (30 US Dollars), these parents were not at a position to comfortably and fully provide to the educational needs of their children. Justifiably, the most nagging need they itched to satisfy was hunger and whatever remained was so little to satisfy what was required at school. It was found that although most of the parents in day secondary schools in the sub-county were aware about free day secondary education provided by the government (with parents required to meet only the cost of students' uniform, a few learning materials and meals), poverty was a heavy burden on them and financing education was lowly prioritised. Head teachers blamed family poverty for parents' failure of to meet their financial obligations in school. poverty was blamed for 54.55% students' failure in academic performance, non-prioritising of education 18.18% and carefree attitude 9.09%. From these results, it is evident that parents' failure to provide to their children in school did not emanate from naivety or disinterest, but poverty. In fact, some parents resorted to begging even from strangers just to make desperate efforts to salvage learning opportunities for their children. The study also found a correlation between parents' material support for their children's education and concern about their performance in school. It was found that 90.00% of the parents who were consistent in supporting their children education materially were concerned about their discipline in school, 63.64% questioned their academic performance and 70.00% inquired about their school attendance. All the head teachers surveyed were unanimous that parental involvement in their children's education was crucial as it buttressed teachers' efforts in call for discipline and academic performance in school.

This study also sought to establish the influence of parental educational materials support of their children at day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-county Kenya. From the study, 65.00% of the respondent students said that they lacked school fees (mainly lunch money). The head teachers 54.55% revealed that less than 50.00% of parents in their schools meet their financial obligations in school. Only 36.36% of the school head teachers claimed that 50.00% of parents in their schools pay for their children's education promptly with a paltry 09.09% registering above 50.00% compliance. The respondent students submitted that their parents' failure to pay school fees in time seriously hampered their progress in school because most of the time they would be sent home where some could take weeks before getting back to school. They complained that the dent visited upon their education by absenteeism was quite devastating. Many of them noted that they lagged behind in subjects which required step by step with teacher's instructions, namely, languages, mathematics and sciences. With some teachers being overwhelmed with work, rigid and inconsiderate, these students observed that when they came back to school after missing out for days or weeks, they were not given any differentiated instructions on the topics covered in their

absence. They therefore lagged behind for weeks and because topics in each syllabus are inter-related, their shoddy coverage of one topic led to their poor performance in the whole term or year. A close examination of students' performance revealed that students' presence in school was directly proportional to their performance in languages, mathematics and sciences. From this study, 86.72% of the students who were frequently absent from school had below average performance (grade c-), a mean score of less 50% in languages, mathematics and sciences throughout the year. This could partly explain why boarding secondary schools in the sub-county did better than day secondary schools. The difference comes in the fact that, whereas day secondary schools ended their teaching at 4.00pm to allow time for co-curricular activities and journey back home because many came from far and started lessons at 8.00am to allow all students arrival in school, their boarding secondary school counterparts had extended evening and dawn classes to compensate for the lost learning time.

Apart from school fees, it was found 73.54% of students in day secondary schools in the sub-county had insufficient learning support materials like pens, mathematical instruments, dictionaries, revision books and had no access to extensive reading materials like newspaper articles and magazines. They mainly relied on conventional textbooks and exercise books provided by the government. In 20.00% of the classrooms visited, 60.00% of students lacked either pens, pencils, mathematical instruments, dictionaries, revision books and personal workbooks. Asked why they lacked such things like pens yet they were very cheap, going for as low as 10.00 Kenya Shillings (US Dollars 0.1), the students gave such reasons like the ones they buy are very cheap hence they could not last for long before they developed faults, parents do not buy for them and yet others said, they do not tell their parents about their school needs because they know they would not get any support. Lack of these items demoralised many students and denied them confidence in the classroom. The students said that 85.00% of teachers send them out during their lessons on realising that they lacked the necessary learning materials, 10.00% allowed them to share and 5.00% ignored them. Those sent out confessed that the treatment remains and can go on for weeks if they do not make efforts to acquire the learning items demanded by the teacher. During these weeks they noted a lot is covered in the syllabus without their participation. The head teachers reported that the reason they allowed students to share whatever few materials they had was that sending them home could mean weeks of absence from school and still report back without the said items. However, 86.00% of the students who had shared learning materials with their classmates opined that the practice resulted to a lot of time wastage and distraction from learning. It also resulted to inequality in learning acquisition because the student whose parent had struggled against odds to purchase the items suffered the same way as those of whom had not.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that home conditions for most of the students at public day secondary schools in Imenti North sub-

county Kenya were unfriendly to students' academic endeavours. Students lack of separate rooms from where they could do their studies as well as inappropriate and unreliable lighting systems at home spelt doom for their education. This led to their failure to concentrate, discouragement and low morale. As a result, many students failed to do teachers assignments resulting to some teachers sending them out during their lessons, punishing them with manual work in the school compound during the lessons or requiring them to do the assignments during the valuable class time. For these students, it is a double tragedy. They lose studies at home and at school. Even when they made efforts to complete those assignments, they always had a step or two to do in order to catch up with the others. They always lagged behind in the syllabus. The study also concludes that parental income levels have far reaching effects on students' education at secondary school. The earning ability of the parents determined the level at which they prioritised education for their sons and daughters. For the high income parents, there was sufficient awareness that good education is the key to good life hence the need to provide all the learning materials required and early payment of school levies so as to tame time wastage. These parents had also the audacity to question what their children did in school because they had fully met their part of the bargain. Their children reasonably did better because they had to account for every minute spent in school under uncompromising supervision of their supportive parents. For the poor parents, secondary school education was a god-send opportunity for which they had very frail control over. Due to little awareness and self-blame for inability to provide to their children, they cannot not bring their children to account for their time in school. Even during school academic clinics, they resignedly blamed themselves for their children's poor performance. That is why in these occasions, many of the parents absconded, were non-committal or disinterested with their children's performance in school. The head teachers decried an alarming failure by parents to attend school parents' meetings. This can be attributed to parents' fear of reminder that they had failed to do their part in supporting their children's education. It can further be concluded that students' inadequate possession of the necessary learning materials in the classroom seriously hampered their progress in learning. Time wasted when students are sent outside or home because they do not have one item or another, is difficult to recover and the victims are likely to lag behind throughout the term or even a whole year. Even when they are made to share, there is a lot of time wastage. Some students also feel uncomfortable with sharing their learning materials with their classmates and if pressed to do so they can switch off from learning.

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