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## The Effect of Children's Involvement in Housework to Academic Performance in Early Childhood at City Primary School, Nairobi, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*Research in early childhood emphasizes the interplay between the home and the school in enhancing quality holistic experiences n children in the early years. However, the rise in industrialization and technological advancements in modern day society have had tremendous effects on childhood experiences that have all along been significant to the development of children including the participation of children in housework. This was a descriptive study whose purpose was to find out whether or not school children in urban households are being involved in housework and how this relates to their academic performance. Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used and purposive sampling techniques were employed. Target population ere 6-8-year-old children, parents and teachers City Primary school, Nairobi County, Kenya. Findings showed that most children in urban areas did not participate in housework, few who did had positive views but opportunities were limited. School work and house helps ere a major competing force to children's participation in housework. Recommendation is that parents, teachers and policy makers should be enlightened on the role of housework in developing academic competence in children.*

**Keywords:** *Academic competence, Child labour, Child work, housework, household chores*

### **1. Introduction**

The early years of an individual are considered the basis of development of every aspect of the human being. The quality of learning experiences at this age at school and at home, have lifelong effects on the holistic development of an individual This requires focusing on competency that takes into account the cognitive, social and physical abilities. Early childhood education meets these goals through approaches that are both family and school based. This, therefore, requires a combined effort by teachers and parents in child upbringing that builds on family values and school related functions that build on academic competence without compromising the child's holistic development.

Studies by Rosmann, (2008) and Bazley and Ennew, (2006), show that one way of enhancing children's holistic development is involving them in activities done at home as a means of family growth and survival such as housework. Work at home, constituting housework/household chores, are activities that children can naturally get involved in as they observe and role play their parents, older siblings, relatives and others. Cunningham and Stromquist (2005) indicate that this has been a traditional practice in many households throughout the world where children would take part in maintaining the home through performing housework. This traditional practice suggests that most cultures throughout the world recognized that learning begins at birth and involved children in housework as a stepping stone to the development of essential skills critical for holistic development. These traditional practices were affirmed by the Jomtien conference on Education for All (Jomtien conference, Thailand, 1990) which asserted that learning begins at birth and early learning experiences are recognized as critical in early childhood

Children in traditional African families have been involved in supporting the family by participating in housework. However, modern life appears to have promoted ways of socializing children which are likely to focus on schooling to the neglect of skills that children used to develop at home through participating in house work. For example, families are employing house helps to free children to do homework at home. At school, Otieno (2004) further highlights that teachers insist on academic tasks at the expense of holistic development of children.

In as much as research (Rosmann, 2008) indicates that children who are likely to be successful are those that received early childhood programs that target the development of a holistic individual, it has not been established whether children in modern day society are taking part in housework and how this is affecting their academic performance at school. This is critical in ensuring holistic development of children in early childhood education. There are other studies that have been done on children and work but not particularly household chores. This study carried out an investigation to establish whether families in Nairobi involve children in housework and the reasons thereof, the contribution of this phenomenon on children's academic performance, and the opinions and perspectives of children and parents towards engaging children in housework.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The theory of Erik Erikson on human psychosocial including personality development formed the framework of this study. This theory emphasizes the role of society in shaping the child’s psychosocial development during the early stages of development. According to Erikson (1979), each individual undergoes eight stages of development each posing a conflict that should be resolved before proceeding to the next stage. These stages follow a sequence and are influenced by biological changes and environmental experiences in the individual child’s context.

In early childhood, these stages are; basic trust versus mistrust (0- 1 year), autonomy versus shame and doubt (2-3 years), initiative versus guilt (4-5 years), and industry versus inferiority (6-11 years). The resolution of the conflicts in one stage enables the individual to have the capacity to resolve the next conflict in the preceding stage. If positive social conditions prevail during a particular stage of development, it leads to acquisition of a number of social and cognitive skills appropriate for that stage. Njagi (2009) further explains that, if the child does not receive the psychosocial needs of that particular stage such as encouragement and psychosocial support, it leads to lack of development of the relevant skills. The focus of this study are the six to eight-year-old children who are fall in the fourth stage of Erikson’s psychosocial theory which is industry versus inferiority.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

This model is a diagrammatic representation of the study variables. It shows the visual relationship between the study variables, the extent of children’s involvement in housework, children’s and parents views in housework and the non-study variables at home such as the presence of house helps and the availability of time for involvement in household chores. The resultant outcome is achievement of overall academic competence. This is shown in Figure 1

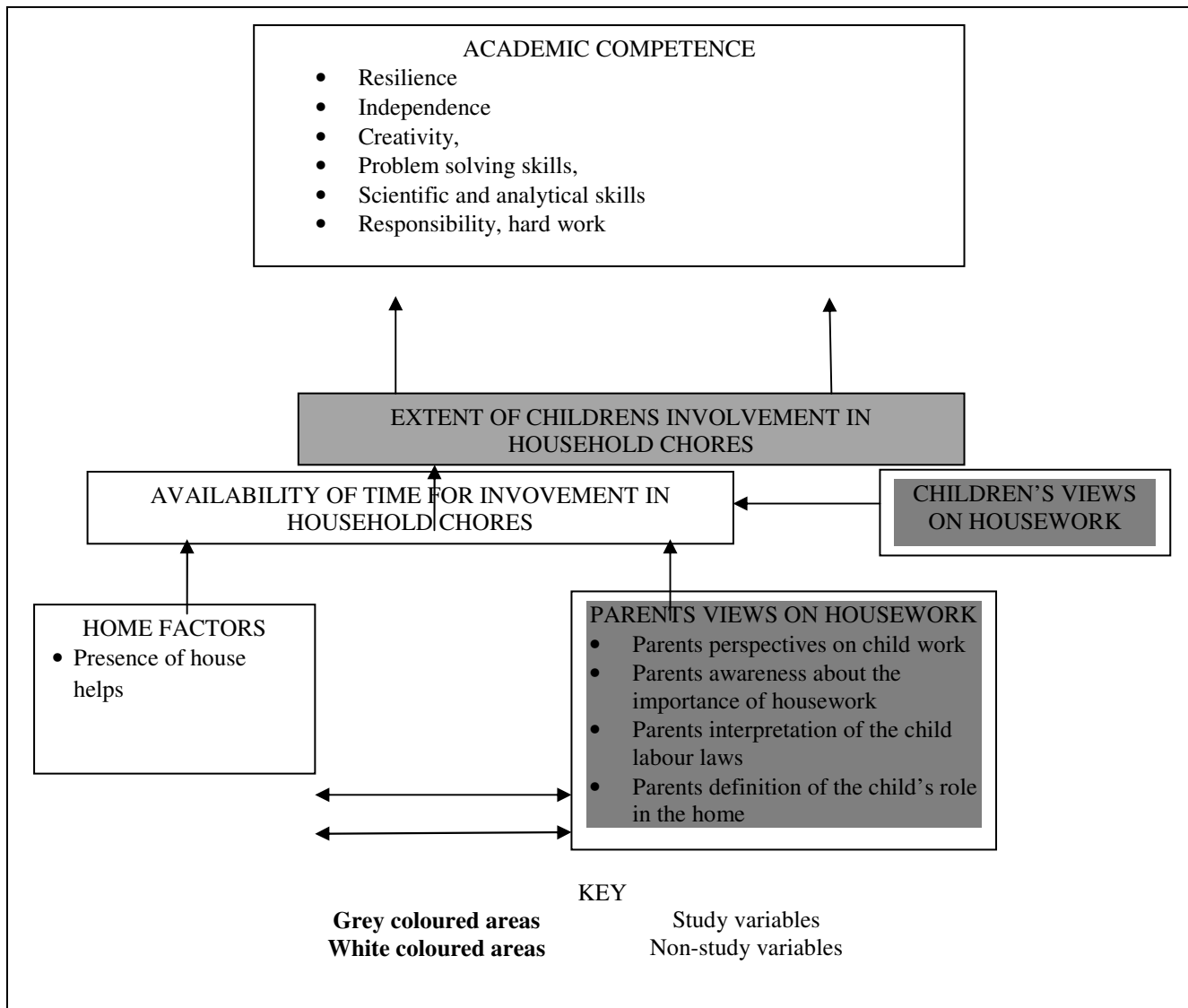


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework  
Source; Author

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

This was an exploratory descriptive survey which was concerned with narration of facts and characteristics concerning individuals and situations in the study. Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. The researcher's choice to use a qualitative paradigm to conduct this study was encouraged by the views of Maxwell (2005) who explains that the aim of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of the situations, experiences and actions of participants in the study, and to give an in-depth analysis of the participants' perspectives of the subject under study. This approach was therefore the most appropriate way to investigate the problem at hand and answer research questions.

It used questionnaires and interviews to provide in-depth descriptions as given by children and parents about their attitudes and lifestyles concerning the involvement of children in housework and the impact of this to the development of academic competence in children. It employed an inductive, open ended strategy whereby the underlying motives and desires of the subjects were brought out, using in depth interviews for the purpose.

This qualitative research was interested not only in the physical events and behavior that were taking place, but also in how the participants made sense of these and how their understanding influenced behavior. These qualitative approach generated results and theories that are understandable and experientially credible, both to the subjects and to others. The researcher was also able to conduct formative evaluations that were intended to help improve existing practices and also in engaging in collaborative or action research with practitioners or the research participants.

### 2.2. Variables

The independent variable was involvement of children in housework which included: varieties of chores done at home such as; washing dishes, dusting, sweeping, setting the table and so on, and the frequency of performance of each chore per week. The study challenged the emerging views that work in the family can be a waste of study time. The study used various mechanisms to establish whether work in a family was a positive or a negative thing.

The dependent variable was the quality of the engagement of the child at school in his/her academic work. The researcher was interested in whether children who appeared to indicate active participation in family household chores also indicated good records in academic performance as measured by their classroom tests in all the learning activities such as science, mathematics, language, physical exercises, social studies and creative activities and life skills. Participation in school did not just reflect academic performance but also how the teachers rated the child in general involvement with school activities. For example, leadership skills, pro social activities and willingness to take risks in learning.

### 2.3. Study Site

The study was carried out in City primary school in Nairobi County, Kenya. Nairobi is the capital and largest city in Kenya. Nairobi County was purposively selected because it is a highly populated urban area, consisting of a predominantly cosmopolitan population which was the main focus of this study. It is the most populous city in East Africa. According to the 2009 population census, 3,138,295 inhabitants live in Nairobi. The growth rate of Nairobi is currently 4.1% (Travel discover Kenya, 2011-2012). Most parents in this city were found to have acquired basic literacy skills and were enlightened on the existing labor laws. Majority of the parents were also in full time work (employed/self-employed) and engage the services of house helps at home. The challenges of modern life and the pursuit of respect for children rights were issues that required research in modern parenting. In African culture children perform household chores and the family considers this as a measure of competence and a way of socializing children to be productive members of society. Whether families living in Nairobi were still respecting this African beliefs and values was a critical issue of research and Nairobi location was suitable for this study.

### 2.4. Target Population

The target population in this study was lower primary school; standard one to three children in City Primary school, Nairobi County, Kenya, teachers and parents. Children in this age group were relatively independent physically, mentally and socially thus were capable of taking part in some housework. They also fell into the theoretical framework that formed the basis of this study. The children and parents gave firsthand information on their practices, opinions and beliefs related to the involvement of children in housework while the teachers gave information on the children's academic competence.

The targeted population were the 150 six to eight-year-old children of both genders in the lower primary section, classes one to three, 1 parent/guardian of one or more children (100 parents/guardians) and 6 teachers, giving a total population of 256.

### 2.5. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

#### 2.5.1. Sampling Techniques

The researcher purposively sampled City Primary School because of the unique nature of the school in that it had children from a variety of socioeconomic background and cultural groups. With the assistance of the class teachers, the researcher selected children based on their academic abilities, socioeconomic characteristics (slum families representing the lower socioeconomic class, middle income earners such as employed civil servants and so on) and cultural backgrounds (represented by ethnicity of the children). Parents/guardians were selected.

### 2.5.2. Sample Size

Of the total population, 30.08% (77 respondents) were selected. Fifteen children from each class were purposely selected giving a total of forty-five children. As a result, one of the parents/guardian of the selected children each, was also purposely selected based on those who were likely to be readily available and willing to participate, from different socio-economic classes, those that had and had not employed services of house helps in their homes and those whose homes were easily accessible to the researcher giving a total of thirty parents/guardians. Two teachers formed the sample.

RESPONDENTS	TOTAL POPULATION OF CHILDREN, PARENTS, TEACHERS, CLASS 1-3	SAMPLE		
		Male	Female	Total
Children (class 1-3)	150	23	22	45
Parents	100	15	15	30
Teachers	6	-	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>77</b>

*Table 1: Total population of lower primary children, teachers and sample frame of the respondents*

### 2.5.3. Construction of Research Instruments

The primary data collection instruments included; oral interview schedules and questionnaires. In addition, data was taken through naturalistic observation, and document analysis and descriptive field notes in a journal to capture any other information that was relevant to the study but which was not included in the research instruments. The instruments (oral interview schedules and questionnaires) were administered to collect information on involvement in housework, perspectives of parents and children towards involving children in housework and the performance of children in the various activity areas.

### 2.5.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to analyze the data obtained. This involved uncovering and discovering themes that ran through the thick narratives in the raw data and interpreting the implication of those themes for research questions. As explained by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), it involved generation of themes, categories and patterns through the process of coding, annotating and searching for interconnections.

The researcher began by reading the interview scripts, observational notes and documents that were to be analyzed. During the reading, the researcher wrote notes and memos on what she read and heard and developed tentative ideas about likely relationships and categories in the information. After this the researcher organized this raw data from the field notes and narratives into various codes by identifying the various categories in the data which were distinct from each other and then established the relationships among these categories. This coding process fractured the data and rearranged them into categories that facilitated comparison between ideas in the same category and eventually helped in the organization of data into broader themes and theoretical concepts.

Once the themes, categories and patterns were identified, the researcher used descriptive statistical methods and measurement scales to present the information. It involved measures of central tendency such as the mode, mean and median which were calculated and presented in form of frequency distribution tables, bar charts, curves and line graphs.

### 2.5.6. Limitations of the Study

Home observations were part of the methods of data collection. This was a limitation because the sample collected from the parents was not randomly selected as this relied on the willingness of the parents to allow the research to be conducted in their homes. This had an influence on the validity of the results as the sample collected was not representative enough. In order to overcome this, the researcher was very selective and selected parents from different backgrounds in order to enhance the representativeness of the sample selected.

## **3. Results, Interpretations and Discussions**

### *3.1. Housework and Children's Academic Competence*

The researcher carried out content analysis of children's progress records and conducted a survey with children and teachers to find out the relationship between involvement in housework and their academic competence. The following pie chart presents these findings;

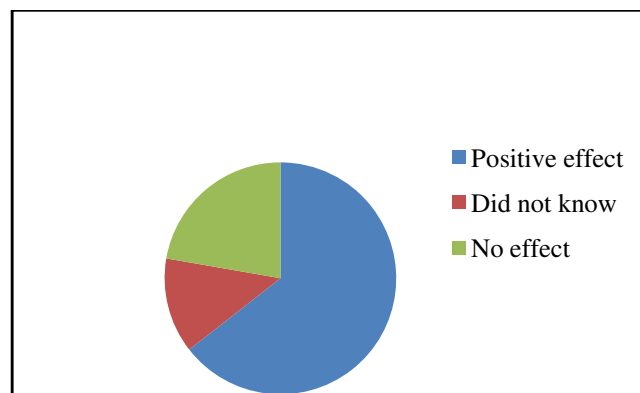


Figure 2: Children's perspectives on the contribution of participating in housework on their schoolwork

From the findings, majority of the children (64.4%) thought that housework had positive effects on their schoolwork. Few children (13.3%), did not know the effects of housework on their academic competence while others (22.2%), said that housework had no effect on their academic competence.

### 3.2. Results from Documentary Analysis

From the documents analyzed, it was observed that there was strong relationship between engaging in housework and performing well academically. From the records and documents analyzed, the few children who engaged in household chores were found to perform well in school and had good academic performance.

### 3.3. Reasons why Children Gave Positive Responses on the Contribution of House work on Their Schoolwork

Most children (64.4%) were of the opinion that the few times they engaged in housework and the few chores they did had a positive impact on their school work. Children gave four categories of reasons related to; acquisition of virtues, development and mastery of skills and concepts, language skills and opportunities for exercise/relaxation.

#### 3.3.1. Acquisition of Virtues

Housework enabled them to develop virtues which were important to their learning at school such as responsibility and self-reliance. These children were observed to be less dependent on the teacher. For instance, they could tidy up after an activity, they could clean themselves up, they could try to solve mathematical problems by themselves first and only go to the teacher when they were stuck and so on. Such children therefore gave the teacher easy time as they also struggled to perform academic tasks by themselves.

Some verbatim expressions given by children include;

'It makes me stronger.'

'I learn to be hard working, clean.'

'I learn to take care of my property.'

These statements imply that assigning children household chores is seen by some children as an important way to build responsibility and self-reliance. Children start seeing themselves as useful and start developing self-reliance at an early age (Rutherford, 2001). This is a strong basis for hard work and determination in these children.

#### 3.3.2. Development and Mastery of Skills and Concepts

Children reported that, when they engaged in the chores, they manipulated a variety of materials and equipment and related with other children and adults. As a result of this, they acquired numerous skills and concepts which were useful in learning activity areas such as science, mathematics, language, social studies, life skills and psychomotor abilities. They explored the environment around the home as they worked enabling them to develop discovery and exploratory skills. This was an important skill in science activities in the classroom which required them to discover ideas, concepts and scientific explanations to natural phenomenon.

Children also reported that when they go for nature walks and other educational tours, they are likely to employ these discovery skills which they have learnt at home. They are also likely to observe objects, and processes such as cleaning, and how machines in the home worked and so on. These skills are vital when doing scientific experiments and carrying out projects. Participating in housework also gave them vivid images of some concepts learnt at school. They gave remarks such as;

'housework helps my mind to be active in class.'

'it makes me clever.'

This was because, while performing housework, they made use of all their senses. They could see, touch, feel, smell and even taste the materials and equipment with which they were using and this is enhanced multisensory learning. They developed important abilities and concepts which they naturally apply on their school work. These included; observation, counting, subtraction, and creativity which they naturally applied to all learning areas such as; mathematics, science, creative and other learning activities.

### 3.3.3. Language Skills

Some children also attested to the fact that they acquired a lot of language when engaging in housework, they spoke, listened and communicated with one another and to adults. They gave remarks such as;

‘I have learnt new words’

‘I can say the names of the tools I use’

‘We talk and say stories as we work’

### 3.3.4. Opportunities for Exercise/Relaxation

In addition, some children reported feeling a sense of relaxation as they worked. They talked and laughed with others and they felt a sense of accomplishment once they complete a chore. They gave responses such as;

‘It keeps me happy’

‘I feel nice and enjoy myself when washing my handkerchiefs’

‘I feel happy when we talk and chat with my sister as we polish our shoes.’

Pantley (2006) describes this as a good strategy for children to relax from their academic duties and release pent up emotions and stress which is important for their physical, mental and emotional health.

### *3.4. Discussion*

From these responses and expressions, it is clear that the engagement of housework had a major impact on their academic work at school. It is important to note that children were able to relate their work involvement to positive benefits for themselves as these findings suggest. Engagement in housework enhanced their learning at school. This confirms studies by Rutherford (2001) who explains that, the knowledge and skills children acquire as they interact with home materials, equipment and with more experienced adults are key in increasing their exposure and experience. Stephens and Schaben (2002), point to the complementary role of the school and the family in holistic child development. Familial activities such as housework have a major part to play in development of the child the school alone cannot develop all the competences that children require for academic excellence.

However, it was noted that in most circumstances, children did not get a chance to perform household chores. These benefits of housework were only perceived by the few who got the opportunities to work at home. From previous findings in this study, this phenomenon is attributed to the large amount of work being given at school as homework and restrictions from parents. Schooling has become a more demanding task, taking a significant proportion of children’s time at home.

These responses ascertain studies by Muremo (2006) who noted that the fact that the syllabus is heavily crowded meant that few children had the time or inclination to broaden their knowledge and skills by taking part in other extra curriculum activities at home and at school, including household chores. Muremo (2006) indicates that, there is a lot of pressure on children to perform well in examinations therefore making children to spend long hours in the classroom or doing school assignments while at home. The situation was compounded by the fact that the final grade obtained by students is the sole criterion for furthering one’s education.

This pressure on children to perform well in examinations made children to spend long hours in the classroom or doing school assignments while at home having very little time for other activities such as housework. It was a common practice for children to attend remedial / tuition classes during the school holidays and weekends. The crippling number of hours that pupils from a very tender age had to put in, manifested in the pressure to have them perform well in final examinations, illustrated a sad reality of an education system stuck in the rut of rote learning (Muremo, 2006)

### *3.5. Conclusion*

The findings of this study show that the few times that children engaged in housework, were shown to be mostly for their own personal wellbeing and not to the wellbeing of the whole family.

However, the few children who got opportunities to work, enjoyed it, they felt good when taking part in the maintenance of the home and were willing to take part in it. They appreciated the contribution of housework to their academic competence. It contributed to the skills and concepts learnt at school, and had a tremendous impact on their school work. However, they lacked enough opportunities to engage in it. Teachers were aware of the importance of housework but mainly on its contribution to values enhancement. They were not aware of its benefits on academic skills and concepts.

The curriculum was exam oriented where emphasis was on passing examinations and not on the holistic development of children, it did not offer opportunities for housework because of the heavy workload, emphasis on performance in examinations and the long hours that children spend at school. There was no interplay between the home and the school in learning. Thus, children were missing out on basic learning opportunities at home such as housework which is fundamental to their academic competence and indeed their overall holistic development.

Parents did not give children enough opportunities to engage in housework. To parents, homework and play took more priority than housework and viewed housework as a distraction to school work. Thus, children lacked opportunities to develop initiative and self-driven actions. There was ignorance among both parents and teachers on the contribution of housework on development of academic skills and concepts and to knowledge as a whole.

### *3.6. Recommendations*

The researcher recommends the government, relevant ministries and stakeholders to set up policies on the following areas;

- i. Research concerning child development should incorporate children's ideas and views. Their voices should be heard on matters that concern them such as their interest in engaging in family housework activities.
- ii. Partnership between teachers and parents / home and the school should be enhanced so that the home and the school can work together to promote the involvement of children in household chores.
- iii. Awareness campaigns through both electronic, print media and parent's meetings at school should be carried out intensively to enlighten parents and other caregivers on the importance of housework on child's success in school related tasks.

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