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Influence of Selected Socio-economic Factors on Cognitive Development in Pre-School Children in Sabatia Sub-County, Kenya

Christine Luvai Ludenyi

Tutor, Department of Education Planning and Management,
Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Everlyne Vomogi

Tutor, Department of Education Planning and Management,
Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Abstract:

The World Bank survey done in 2016 show that Sabatia Sub-County is the poorest sub-county in Vihiga County. This is because most parents are not educated nor employed. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of family income on cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-County in Kenya. The study was based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory that postulates that learners' basic needs should be satisfied first before other needs are met. It employed descriptive survey to collect data and explain the association between the independent and dependent variables. It targeted 197 public pre-schools, 18 private pre-schools and 420 pre-school teachers. The schools were stratified according to Wards and simple random sampling was used to select 20 public schools, 2 private schools, 42 pre-school teachers and 42 parents. Instruments for collecting data were questionnaires for pre-school teachers and interview schedules for parents. Expertise judgement of the supervisors was used to determine the validity of the research instruments while the test-re-test method was used to test reliability using the Pearson Product Moment of Correlation Coefficient (r) Value. Piloting of the research instruments yielded an alpha value of $r=0.85$. The researcher analysed the data using descriptive statistics through frequency counts. The results of the study showed that parents' level of income greatly influence cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub County. The study concluded that some learners in pre-primary schools in Sabatia Sub County were underachieving due to their Parents' Level of income. This study recommended that strategies should be sought to empower parents both economically and socially within the sub county. Initiation of economic activities in the sub county was highly recommended.

Keywords: Selected socio-economic factors, cognitive development, pre-schoolchildren

1. Introduction

The years of pre-school are important in the life of an individual. The first five years lay the foundation for learning the basic attitudes (Wambiri and Muthee, 2010). There are many social, economic and environmental factors that affect young children in both positive and negative ways. Children can be easily affected by many things parents and adults take for granted since they are so vulnerable (Sirin (2005). This study will focus on the following socio-economic factors; family income level, family size, parent's level of education, parent's occupation. Socio-economic status is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's family economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education and occupation (Marmot, 2004). The household income, earners' education and occupation are examined when analysing a family's socio-economic status. Socio-economic status is broken into three main categories; high, middle and low. In describing the three areas, a family or an individual may fall into when placing a family or all the three variables; education, income and occupation can be assessed (Annette, 2003).

A family's socio-economic status in USA is based on the income of the family, education level of parents, occupation of parents and the community social status such as community contacts, association with groups and family academic performance in the community. Children from families with high socio-economic status are well prepared since they have access to a wide range of resources and quality care toys and books to encourage them in various learning activities at home, (Bergen, 2016). By the age of 24, individuals within the top family income quartile are eight times more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree as compared to individuals from lower family quartile. Exposure to adversity and low SES are likely to decrease educational success. This leads to lasting impact on learning behaviour and health (Mclaughlin, 2016). A child's lack of interest, attention and lack of cooperation in school is related to her mother's socio-economic status (Morgan, 2009).

In Europe, inequalities attributed to mechanisms such as family dissolution and socio-economic background have increased the educational gap in school going children (Europe Trade Union Institute, 2012). One of the most determinants of educational disparities is the socio-economic background children in deprived families have lower

chances in life and worse educational outcomes (Mchanahan, 2009). Another mechanism that increases the risk of transmitting social inequalities from parents to children is family dissolution. There has been a profound shift in family structure in Europe within the past few decades (Kalmijin, 2007). The heightened risk for children with divorced parents of lower educational outcomes has been demonstrated by research (Amato, 2001). Various pre-school activities that parents participate in like communicating with the school and attending meetings at school influence the academic performance of pre-school children (Okumu, 2008) A study done in Dandora Zone of Nairobi County revealed that Parents who are more confident in their decision making and parenting impart more knowledge of their children's development (Benner, Tan & Kim 2009).

In Sabatia Sub-county, most ECD centres have low enrolment as compared to the enrolment in grade one. Most children are also taken care of by their grandparents who might not know the importance of ECD education to the children. The ECD centres lack enough learning materials for the learners to interact with. The study aimed at finding out the influence of selected socio-economic factors on cognitive development in pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-county.

2. Statement of the Problem

A key role is played by parents in modelling their children, ensuring the communication between them and their children is effective and providing the crucial needs as regards to their cognitive development in Sabatia Sub-county. As seen earlier in the background of the study, parents' socio-economic status has been acknowledged as life and power of the child. This fact has not been fully embraced within pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-County. The survey conducted by in 2016 showed that Sabatia Sub-County is the poorest in Vihiga County. This is because most parents are not employed. Uwezo (2011) study on literacy learning in Kenya established that close to one hundred thousand eligible children were out of school. Most of the pre-schools in Sabatia receive children from disadvantaged families within. These children lack good care from their parents due to a number of socio-economic factors. Most parents low incomes and do not know how to improve the cognitive development of their children (Mwangi 2004). Due to this problem, cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-County has been dwindling in the past five years, making pre-school children lag behind their counterparts in other sub-counties. This research, therefore, sought to determine the influence of family income level on cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-County.

3. Literature Review

Studies conducted show that children from lower income households do less well than their peers from rich families in school (Omuruyi, (2014). Parents with good income are able to stimulate their children's cognitive development by providing them the reading and playing materials which are needed in both psychomotor and cognitive development. Increasing income reduces maternal depression which is important for children's learning outcomes.

Social economic statuses of families are positively associated with the dimension of the wellbeing of children. This includes cognitive test scores; problems behaviour modifications, mental health, emotional functions, educational attainment and physical health (Lina Njoroge, 2007) Good health in children is achieved through a balanced diet. a balanced diet enables children to be in school always and ensure that the children are active and attentive while at school. Parents with good income are able to provide their children with good diet. Differences in children's cognitive and behavioural development are found in children before the children start school. Children from families with high income have higher cognitive assessments as compared to those from low income families. Parents who have good income provide a supportive home learning environment which is associated with children's early achievements (Mwangi 2004).

When poverty exists across the generation, child test scores are lower but they are higher when material advantage is long lasting (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Children from rich backgrounds are more active in primary school years as compared to children from poor backgrounds. 97% of children from rich families reach the expected level of upper primary by the age of eleven years while only around three quarters of the children from poor families reach this level (Aikens, 2008). Children from poor families who perform badly at the age of seven are likely to improve and perform better than their counterparts from better-off families in upper primary.

Katherine et al; (2007) in his study identified parental income upon which vocational and academic success of secondary children lies. According to him parental income affects the psychological balance in the classroom causing low perception and concentration, sickness, frustration and emotional disability in academic performance in the school work. In sub-rural school areas, parental income is not sufficient to sustain the academic and personal social life of students. A family with high socio-economic status is more successful in preparing its young children for school because they have access to wide range of resources to support and promote cognitive development of their children than low income families. The parents from high income families are able to provide their young children with high quality child care, books and teaching facilities like computers and laptops to encourage them in various learning activities at home. This helps in the cognitive development of these children as compared to children from families with low income.

The cognitive development of children depends on the available resources they interact with. Children in families with greater resources can access opportunities for positive outcomes than the children from low income families. Limited parental resources can result in higher risks of cognitive development. Low income parents may not afford to offer proper supervision to their children before and after school thus resulting in the children experiencing more difficulties in school (Schultz, 2006). According to a study by Brooks-Gunn and his colleagues (1996), the income of the parents for the first three years has a strong effect on the cognitive development of the child. Many studies report that the low income of parents lessens the child's academic achievement. Parent's economic resources therefore result in children's outcomes. Low family income is associated with low self-confidence and poor school performance for rural.

Increase in the family income relatively increases the quality of life of their children. Families with high income often succeed in preparing their children for schooling because they have access to a wide range of resources to promote, explore and support the cognitive development of young children (UNICEF, 2006) balance diet from high income families builds an individual's confidence to face the challenges in life as compared to poverty-stricken families who struggle to make their ends meet in life rather than children's schooling. Family income sets the road map of academic achievements as children from low income families lack materials which can stimulate their cognitive development as compared to those from rich families (Piaget, 1972). Studies have shown that steady income not only improves cognitive development of children but also their achievements in school. This study assumed that one of the reasons behind depressed cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-County status of the parents' incomes.

4. Materials and Methodology

The researcher employed descriptive survey to collect data and determine the association between the independent and dependent variables. She targeted 197 public pre-schools, 18 private pre-schools and 420 pre-school teachers. The schools were stratified according to Wards and simple random sampling was used to select 20 public schools, 2 private schools, 42 pre-school teachers and 42 parents. Instruments for collecting data were questionnaires for pre-school teachers and interview schedules for parents. Expertise judgement of the supervisors was used to determine the validity of the research instruments while the test-re-test method was used to test reliability using the Pearson Product Moment of Correlation Coefficient (r) Value. Piloting of the research instruments yielded an alpha value of $r=0.85$. The researcher analysed the data using descriptive statistics through frequency counts. The results of the study showed that parents' level of income greatly influence cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub County.

5. Findings

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of family income on cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub-County. To achieve this objective, the researcher sought the opinions of pre-school teachers using a closed ended questionnaire and recorded and analyzed their opinions thematically in a five-point Likert scale as recorded in table

| Item | Always | Very often | Often | Rarely | Not at all |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Family Incomes' ability to pay fees influence cognitive development of pre-school children. | 13 31% | 14 33.3% | 11 26.2% | 3 7.14% | 1 2.4% |
| Family Incomes' ability to buy personal effects for their children influences their cognitive development of pre-school children. | 11 26.2% | 13 31% | 8 19.05% | 7 16.7% | 3 7.14% |
| Family Incomes' support for school feeding programmes influence cognitive development of pre-school children. | 15 35.7% | 10 23.8% | 11 26.1% | 4 9.5% | 2 4.7% |
| Family Incomes' enables parents to buy learning materials for their children that influence cognitive development of pre-school children. | 13 31% | 12 28.6% | 5 11.9% | 8 19.05% | 4 9.5% |
| Parents who participate in school programmes influence their cognitive development of pre-school children. | 14 33.3% | 15 10% | 9 21.4% | 3 36% | 1 2.4% |
| Parents who give their children snacks influence their cognitive development. | 17 40.8% | 12 28.6% | 9 21.4% | 3 7.1% | 1 2.4% |
| Parents who buy play toys for children to use in school influence their cognitive development. | 15 54% | 13 46% | 5 11.9% | 5 11.9% | 4 9.5% |
| Parents who ensure their children come to school influence their cognitive development. | 15 54% | 12 28.6% | 10 23.8% | 3 7.1% | 2 4.8% |

Table 1: Family Income and Cognitive Development of Pre-School Children

Results in table 1 showed that a total of 38(90.5%) pre-school teachers asserted that ability of parents to pay school fees always, very often or more often influence cognitive development of their pre-school children. Only four were of the contrary opinion. Another majority 32(76%) said parents who buy personal effects for their children influence their cognitive development of pre-school children. 10(24%) did not agree with this suggestion. A majority 36(85.7%) of pre-school teachers also generally agreed that parents who support school feeding programmes influence cognitive development of their pre-school children. About six respondents said such parents either rarely influence or do not influence at all. On the suggestion that parents who buy learning materials for their children influence cognitive

development of pre-school children, 30(71.4%) of the respondents agreed that they indeed always, very often or more often cause this influence.

Another majority 38(90.5%) pre-school teachers concurred with the construct that parents who participate in school programmes influence the cognitive development of their pre-school children. Only four did not support this item. A similar number 38(90.5%) of pre-school teachers also supported the statement that parents who give their children snacks influence their cognitive development. About 33(78.6%) respondents also confirmed that parents who buy play toys for children to use in school always, very often or more often influence their cognitive development. And a majority 37(88.1%) pre-school teachers confirmed parents who ensure their children come to school contribute to their cognitive development.

During the interview between the parents and the researcher, a majority of them remarked 'Our children do not take breakfast before going to schools. Our limited incomes can only provide two meals in a day. That means we prepare porridge for our kids for lunch. We rarely eat lunch during school holidays'. Clearly this showed that the learners do not get the basic health requirements at home.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the study showed that parents' level of income greatly influence cognitive development of pre-school children in Sabatia Sub County. The study concluded that some learners in pre-primary schools in Sabatia Sub County were underachieving due to their Parents' Level of income. This study recommended that strategies should be sought to empower parents both economically and socially within the sub county. Initiation of economic activities in the sub county was highly recommended.

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