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Influence of Parent Education and Occupation in Enhancing Learning in Child Learning Centers

Dayo Carolyn Kivihya
Kibabii University, Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology
KENYA

Abstract
Parents play a pivotal role in the cognitive development of children in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers. This is because ECDs lay a basic foundation to a child's effort in acquisition of knowledge for use in school and future life. However, due to differences in family set ups among parents, especially in the rural areas, the role of the parent in enhancing cognitive development of the child is hampered. The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the influence of a parent's education and occupation on the learning process of a child. The study was located in Chavakali Sub-County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Parents of ECD going children formed the target population. Simple random sampling was used to select 140 parents who provided data on explaining the role of parents in the cognitive development of children. Two instruments were used to collect data. These were a structured questionnaire for literate parents and interview schedule for parents who could not read and write. Collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were obtained. Further correlations were made between parent characteristics and the effect on learning using Pearson Correlation. Findings from this study revealed parental characteristics have a great contribution to the cognitive development of the child. Given different characteristics, the study recommended formation and strengthening of parent-teacher associations in order for parents to share experiences in cognitive development of their children.
Keywords: Instruction, Occupation, Education, Role, Impact

Introduction

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) involves the developmental experiences of young children before entering into primary school. This level of schooling encompasses all the dimensions of growth and development of the child conceptualized in terms of all developmental experiences that can ensure continuous and individualized process of change in a child (Karen: 1993). This helps a child learn to cope with more complex levels of cognition, emotion, socialization, and speech and body movement. ECDE considers the welfare of the child from conception to the time of entry into primary school (0-6 years). This is a highly vulnerable and

dependable age for the child. Parents and later on teachers are the mentors of a child's intelligence at this level.

The role of parents in cognitive development at present seems to be shifting to due to HIV/AIDs pandemic, illiteracy, hard economic situations as well as innovations in technology. Consequently, parents may abdicate their central role in early childhood development to grandparents, teachers and house helps (caregivers). This is likely to affect child development and the future of the nation socially and economically. Parents have come to realize that active involvement and interaction with teachers is the hallmark of child development centers as they have turned out to give children quality education.

Role of A Parent in Cognitive Development of a Child

A parent has various roles to play in a child's cognitive development in school. These roles could be determined by the parent's education or level of occupation.

Following the Child's Progress in School

Parents learn of their child's progress through the teacher, children themselves or other children. This has weakened the relationship between teachers and parents. Marsh and Willis (1999) established that a strong partnership between parents and teachers leads to quality ECDE programs. Active parental involvement through face to face meetings are highly satisfying to parents because questions about their children are answered immediately. Busy parents take advantage of such opportunities. To enhance close monitoring of their children's progress, parents and teachers are advised to use other means such as writing notes, making phone calls and guiding parents to volunteer as class representatives.

Edwards (2009) observed that parents who were more educated seemed to be more involved in their children's education. This is because such parents understand the importance of a good foundation to a child's education.

Assisting in Instructional Activities

Parents possess a wide range of special skills that can be a welcome varied addition to cognitive development of a child. Some parents get time to function as teacher aides. They learn teaching skills, modeling, guest speaking, leading school trips, preparing teaching materials and maintaining children's records. In this manner they organize sports days, supervise children on field trips, research library literature, prepare supplies of non-Instructional materials, guide teachers in teaching skills, (Marsh & Willis, 1999).

Making Decisions

This is the most active form of parental participation in schools. In some cases Parents can be involved on school committees that screen candidates for teaching positions or that makes selection of physical facilities, play equipment and learning materials. The only more influential way for parents to participate directly in decision making for schools is to become members of the school boards and committees that exercise the legal responsibility for operation of ECD Centres (Marsh & Willis, 1999).

Parent Involvement in School Activities

This is a very passive level of parental involvement in early childhood programmes. Parents assume that "the teacher knows best". Parents are notified of school events and their child's progress. The children take home announcements, report cards, memos and notices. Parents communicate with teachers over the phone. On the other hand teachers visit the children at home and parents may be invited to attend parent-teacher meetings at school. Studies done by Coldron and Bolton (1991) as cited in Marsh and Willis (1999) indicate that some parents take advantage of such opportunities because of their busy daily schedules or their hesitance about appearing personally at the school.

Home visits enhance communication because they make teachers understand every individual child's background (Epstein, 1992). Studies on home visits by Drake (1995), Halsey (2001), Love (1989) and Myers (1997), reveal that children who come from low-income homes often learn responsibility at a very early age, while children from high-income homes may have no responsibilities but greater academic advantages.

Attending Special Events for Parents

This is another level of parental involvement in children's cognitive development. Parents come to school for special events designed for them such as trips, work days (devoted to cleaning up and fixing up building and grounds), attend assemblies with their children, open house days and parents' evenings to know one another and exchange views with teachers. Such events not only enable parents to observe special skills the children have achieved but also provide an opportunity for teachers and parents to interact socially. These events help parents to establish better rapport with teachers for better quality ECDE centres (Marsh & Willis, 1999). Unfortunately, such bonding events are absent in the ECDE centres either because parents are unavailable or too busy to attend.

Raising Funds

Parents are the biggest source of income for schools as they raise funds for the school. This is a factor taken care of by Parents-Teachers Associations. Funds are often needed to purchase books and other reading materials, play materials and equipment, chairs, stationery and utensils for the children's meals. Parents are usually willing to raise funds if they will be put to good use. Most parents however pay school fees and are not willing to be involved in how the funds will be used by the schools (Marsh & Willis, 1999).

Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey targeting parents in public ECDE Centres in Chavakali Sub-county, Vihiga County. Simple random and purposeful sampling techniques were used generating a sample size of 140 parents of ECDE going children. The study used questionnaires and face to face interviews as research instruments. Frequencies, percentages and correlations were used to analyze data.

Results and Discussion

Parents Education Level

The study established that parents' education levels for the children in the ECDE centres was low. The largest group of parents had a KCSE academic qualification. This was represented by 40% while the lowest was KCPE level represented by 29%. 31% of the parents had not reached the KCPE level of education. Being a rural set up that targeted public ECDE centres, there was no child in the sampled ECDE centres whose parent had university level of education. This is shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Parents Education Level

Highest level of education	Frequency	Percent
KCSE Level	56	40
KCPE Level	40	29
Below KCPE Level	44	31
TOTAL	**140**	**100**

This study further sought to establish the relationship between the parents education and their roles in ECDE centres. The results of the Pearson correlation are as shown in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2: Correlation between parents education and their roles

		roles	education
Roles	Pearson Correlation	1	.812**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	140	140
Education	Pearson Correlation	.812**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	140	140

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between a parent's education and their roles showed a significant Pearson correlation (r) of .812 at 0.01 level. This implied that there was a close connection between parent's level of education and their roles in their child's learning. The higher the education a parent had, the more likely he was to perform roles leading to a child's cognitive development. However, it is important to note that this accounted for a coefficient of determination (r^2) of .812 expressed as 81%. Though this showed a strong relationship between parent occupation and their roles, there was still some influence of other variables that contributed to learning.

Simmon (2001) revealed that parents' involvement in their child's education leads to a higher academic achievement, regardless of socio-economic status or parent educational level. Parents

who provide basic needs at home are also likely to provide school learning materials. This helps children learn fast and achieve more.

Parents Occupation

The study also sought to find out the type of occupation parents of ECD going children are engaged in. The majority of parents, who formed 60% of the sampled population were unemployed, 30% were teachers in primary schools, 3% were farmers and only 7% were small scale businessmen. The type of occupation for parents is shown in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3: Parents Occupation

Parents Occupation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Unemployed	84	60
Teachers	42	30
Small scale business	10	7
Small scale farmers	4	3
TOTAL	**140**	**100**

The implications of this are far reaching. First, the unemployed parents were financially unstable thus not able to support their children in school in terms of providing materials for learning and paying fees. Second, these parents may not remunerate the ECD teachers as expected. A teacher who is extrinsically motivated in terms of good pay feels more comfortable to execute his duties thus making learning a more meaningful experience for the children. The income from such occupations is little. Such families are likely to be financially unstable. Wise (2000) established that children from socially stable families are less likely to be absent from school and perform better academically than those who do not. This was a contributing factor to why children in the ECD centres did not have high achievement levels.

The relationship between a parent's occupation and their roles showed a significant Pearson correlation (r) of .950 at 0.01 level. This implied that there was a close connection between parents occupation and their roles in their child's learning. Parents who had some form of income were more likely to play active roles in their child's cognitive development. However, it is important to note that this accounted for a coefficient of determination (r^2) of .950 expressed as 95%. Though this showed a strong relationship between parent's occupation and their roles, there was still some influence of other variables that contributed to learning.

Table 1.4: Correlation between parents occupation and their roles

		Roles	Occupation
Roles	Pearson Correlation	1	.950**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	140	140
Occup	Pearson Correlation	.950**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	140	140

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Parents' Levels of Support

Parents can be involved in their children's cognitive development through the type of support they give to their children while at school. Parents can buy school equipment, provide basic needs for the child or even help the children in doing homework. Basic needs include food, clothing and good health.

Findings from the study showed that 87% of the parents paid school fees while 35% of the parents provided basic needs which are one of the vital roles of a parent. Parents in the ECD centers were unwilling or did not want to support school trips and this is represented by only 1% of the parents. This showed that 65% of children went to school without basic needs including food, the reason why such centers prepared porridge for the children to take. Table 1.5 below shows how parents support their children at pre-school level.

Table 1.5: Levels of Parental Involvement

Level of involvement	Frequency	Percent (%)
Paying fees	87	62
Providing basic needs at school	35	25
Assisting to do homework	17	12
Supporting school trips	1	1
TOTAL	**140**	**100**

Impact of Parental Involvement on Learning

As much as parents should support their children in school, lack of the support has adverse effects on the child's achievement in school. Berger (2000) noted that parents' involvement in ECDE programmes has an enormous impact on a child's attitude, attendance and academic achievement.

Findings from the study showed that the highest impact of lack of parental support delayed achievement which was represented by 52%. This however, did not have any impact on the child's discipline at school. Some of the effects of lack of parental support in school are shown in Table 6 below.

The benefits of parental involvement to the children included fostering a positive learning attitude, improved performance, having disciplined pupils and motivated learners. results of the study indicated that 42% of parental involvement accounted for improved performance. This shows that parental involvement has a greater impact on a child's cognitive development. The results of the findings are shown in Table 1.6 below.

Table 1.6: Impact of parental involvement

Impact	Frequency	Percent (%)
Improved performance	12	42
Positive learning attitudes	10	37
Improved child discipline	4	14
Motivated learners	2	7
TOTAL	**28**	**100**

It is important to note that parents in ECDE centers need to motivate their children to learn. Motivation can be verbal or material. Parents should appreciate the effort of their children in school by commending them on improved performance or buying them small presents.

Berk (2000) established that combining high quality ECDE programmes with parent involvement leads to impressive improvements in test scores. This was later supported by Cotton and Wikelund (2001) who revealed that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement. Farquhar (2003) further adds that parental involvement has positive effects o the child's academic outcome.

The more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. Children whose parents are involved in their education demonstrate higher gains in academic achievement and develop more positive attitude towards school. According to Riggings (2003), the children are even more motivated to go to school and learn.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of parents in the cognitive development of children in early childhood centers in Chavakali Sub-county, Vihiga County. The findings revealed that parents played a vital role in provision of basic needs to their children, bought school equipment that aided learning and also helped learners to do their homework. This resulted into benefits like fostering a positive attitude in the children, which in turn enhanced cognitive development and improved test scores. This also motivated the ECDE teachers to teach. It was also established that other non-academic activities like involvement in school events, making decisions in school, and parents visiting the school to discuss their child's progress also led to improved cognitive development.

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