

## **Influence of Parental Home Activities on Children's Learning Outcomes in Mbooni East Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya.**

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**Abstract:** This study sought to accentuate influence of parental home activities on learning outcomes amongst preschool learners in Mbooni Sub County, Makueni County, Kenya. Its purpose was to examine the parental home activities in the learning of children. This study was guided by Social Learning theory developed by Lev Vygotsky that explain the role of a more experienced peer and social-cultural factors that are indispensable for early childhood processes to develop in children's education. The study utilized a descriptive survey design that use structured interviews and questionnaire. An observation schedule for collecting data on the learning outcomes of the children was also used. The independent variable for the study was parental home activities whereas dependent variable was learning outcomes. Target population being teachers, parents and children, purposive sampling was used to select the teachers and parents whereas simple random sampling was used to select learners. Validity of the instruments was tested during piloting in two public preschools that were not used in the actual study. Reliability of the instruments was established through testing and re-testing during piloting. The data collected was edited and coded according to themes that were derived from the research objective. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the specific themes and presented in narrative forms whereas the quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and presented using tables, pie charts, and graphs in order to get the findings. Key stakeholders in the education industry may benefit from the study, for example, curriculum developers may be motivated to develop more interactive materials such as books and play materials which parents can effectively use with their children and may encourage parents to put forth extra effort to become more involved in their preschooler's education. It was established that there are no policies that explicitly outline the roles of parents and teachers to enhance partnership. Ministry of Education should develop a homework policy that is friendly to all parents irrespective of their literacy level to formally make the parents and teachers understand their roles outside the normal classroom setup

**Key Terms:** Home Learning Environment, Parental involvement, Learning outcomes, Preschool learners, Storytelling, Homework, Shared-book reading.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

From birth children begin learning from the environment around them and experiences they have in the surrounding. Therefore, home environment has to be rich in learning resources that stimulate the holistic growth and development of the child. According to Boyle (2014), concepts made by each child are individual and original as their experiences and involvements are unique. She further concludes that as a result of these ideas, when the child first begins to make learning meaningful, they do so based on their home setting. It is therefore important to note that whatever abilities the children acquire they are based on the involvement and experiences of the parents. For example, a child whose parents are literate, the child is most likely going to acquire reading and writing skills early in life. However, there could be parents who do not know how to read and write but they provide the learning materials like books, toys, pencils, crayons just to mention but a few, thus motivating the child to engage in learning activities.

The significant of the parents' involvement at home on a child's learning outcomes has a long-established history in both academic studies and practical application. Sociological studies in the 1950s and 1960s were already pinpointing the class gap in children's learning outcomes. Floud, Halsey and Martin (1956)

and Douglas (1964) used longitudinal data to document the poorer academic outcome of working class pupils and related it to many factors including health, family size, the quality of the school and, most importantly, parents' interest in education. But since not all parents realize the importance of their role in supporting and getting involved in their children's learning or have the resources or capabilities to do so, children are left to the teacher or vent for them.

Boyle (2014) continues to state that, when it comes to creating Home Learning Environment, parents need to consider their level of engagement in the literacy skills they provide, their own literacy background and experiences and learning opportunities that are available based on their home environment. Once this assessment is done, the parent will be able to provide the necessary home literacy experiences that are effective and that will expound the learning outcomes of the child. After all these, the child is believed to have unique understanding of the concepts based on the involvement and experiences which have been provided by the parents.

Goodman (2001) argues that, children who grow up in homes whereby they have well educated personalities will have a much different experience because parents are more involved than children who grow in homes where only a Bible is read and writing is done occasionally. Therefore, the learning outcomes of the children will differ depending on their practice and parental involvement at home. (Cohan 2010) has the view that parents who believe they can make a difference in their children's learning outcomes and view their role as that of a teacher at home, are more likely to become involved and engaged in stimulating activities.

Cooter (2006) found out that, in families where parent experience difficulties in reading and writing, there is danger that low literacy is passed on to the next generation for lack of or little involvement in the school work. He noted that this could be due to such children lacking strong learning examples, little child-parent interaction and lack or inadequate quality print materials. It is therefore important for parents to provide learning activities and print materials at home and for those parents who may pose different challenges because of their literacy skills; the activities they may engage the children in are pertinent to the viewpoints.

Sclafani (2012) states that, "Parents who have gone beyond a high school education are found to be more involved with their infants and their children than those who did not finish high school. Many less educated parents simply have more unmanaged stress in their lives and this stress interferes with the ability and opportunity to interact and involvement with their children's learning activities". This may mean that the parents who find it easy to assist their children with homework are those who have gone beyond high school and have endured the pressure and stress of school. On the other hand, the parents who find it difficult to assist their children with schoolwork are those who did not complete primary education and have a very low literacy level.

In exploring the Home Learning Environment, De Jong and Leseman (1998) concludes that there are four facets which ought to be considered: opportunity for the child to be exposed to the learning, the quality of learning instructions by parents, cooperation between parent and child and socio-emotional quality of the parent-child relation. In a nutshell, the parents should create time to guide the child and their relationship should be appealing. Delgado-Galtan (2002) claims that there has been little attention paid to parent's role in Home Learning Environment. She believes that there exists a wealth of literacy activities for parental input to children's learning through socio-cultural process. This means that the way children are socialized at home influences their learning outcomes.

Parental storytelling at home is key to children's learning. While there is tremendous energy being invested in conceptualizing and operationalizing emergent literacy and identifying evidence base on which to build recommendations for best practices as claimed by Michael (2010), the ultimate goal is clear. How can parents help children grow into excellent readers (Ryan 2000)? One of the strongest literacy strategies which parents can engage their children in for literacy development is oral storytelling. This is a creative alternative to print based literacy development that is shared between parents and children in a home setting. It is a social experience with oral narratives and incorporating linguistic features that display a sophistication that goes beyond the level of conversation according to Malan (1991).

Parents' conversational storytelling with their children about past events conducted at home can be a good strategy for literacy skills. This can be boosted by use of picture books and children asking questions about the pictures. According to UNESCO (2010), Hamburg in Germany, fly curriculum emphasizes language development, listening and comprehension through storytelling. The objective of this program is to improve children's literacy and language skills development by training and empowering parents to take an active role in children's psychological and learning development, promoting home-based learning through provision of reading materials.

Phillips (1999) claims that storytelling is an effective building block easing the journey from oracy to literacy. According to Haward (1991), children ask parents endless questions and at the end attempt to get story that will give them a context and a culture in form that makes the answers that make sense to them. Therefore, children need to be surrounded by dialogue. Storytelling can be started by a good morning song or questions for example, what the child dreamt of the previous night.

Ryan (2000) has expounded on building a good foundation of motivation in storytelling. He insists that the story should be fun and enjoyable or the child will lose interest. He further stipulates that storytelling should follow the child's interests, be stopped when the child is bored and be presented with other literacy strategies like shared book reading.

Maiers (2001) suggests that there are many literacy activities that parents can involve themselves in as they interact with their children such as storytelling. Storytelling by parents in a meaningful setting will aim at teaching specific skills that will help the child develop holistically and especially in language, cognitive and physical development. Retelling the story and question session after the story will help the parent determine acquisition of intended knowledge and skills. Parents with limited literacy skills may still be instrumental in facilitating reading and literacy skills in their children with mentorship from teachers though this may require considerable resources in terms of time and manpower but with educational effort such parents can and should be empowered to participate in the education of their children.

Shared book reading is another home activity that parents can engage their children in. It includes an adult reading a book to a single child or small group of children without requiring much interaction, whereas interactive shared reading involves an adult reading a book and using a variety of techniques, including systematic dialogic strategies of asking children questions to engage them in the book (Dunst, and Trivette 2008). Dialogic reading is a specific form of interactive shared reading in which the adult serves as a guide and active listener and helps the child become the storyteller. If parents are directly involved in the shared-book reading at home, it is evident that they are actively involved in their children's learning activities.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of parental home activities on learning outcomes amongst preschool learners in in Mbooni East Sub-county, Makueni County.

### **The study was guided by the following objective: -**

1. Establish the influence of parental home activities on children's learning outcomes in Mbooni East Sub-county, Makueni County.

### **Research methodology**

A research design is a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer a research question and a flexible strategic plan to be followed by researchers when conducting their research (Creswell, 2009). The research design for the study was descriptive survey design. Lecompte and Preissle (1993) presents three types of survey research namely, participant-construct, confirmatory and projective. This study used confirmatory survey because it usually involves the use of structured interviews and questionnaire that intended to verify information, perceptions, opinions or views as the two explain. Likewise, it gives a picture of the state of affairs as it exists (Kothari 2004). It is recommended for studies that strive to describe opinions, characteristics and perceptions of respondents. The study was based on interviewing parents on the strategies they employ, their involvement in school activities and how they organize the Home Learning Environment for improved learning outcomes for their children.

## **II. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In this study, questionnaires were administered to preschool teachers and at the same time, the researcher also carried out an interview among parents. In addition, the researcher carried out an observation among during live lessons. This yielded responses that are summarized and results indicated in the table 1 below:

### **III. PARENTAL HOME ACTIVITIES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES AMONGST PRESCHOOL LEARNERS**

**Table 1:** Views of Preschool Teachers on the Influence of Parents Home Activities on Learning Outcomes amongst Preschool Learners

| <b>Summary of Test Items</b>  | <b>VF</b> | <b>O</b> | <b>S</b> | <b>R</b> | <b>N</b> |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|   | <b>%</b>  | <b>%</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>%</b> |
| I advise parents on creating conducive learning environment at home   | 58.8      | 21.6     | 4.1      | 10.4     | 5.1      |
| I give advice to parents on how to engage their children during weekends and school holidays to enhance learning outcomes | 59.9      | 19.8     | 2.5      | 12.2     | 5.6      |

|   |      |      |      |      |     |
|---|------|------|------|------|-----|
| I encourage parents to create time to guide children with their school work | 65.9 | 13.4 | 3.7  | 10.3 | 6.7 |
| I assign homework to learners   | 50.8 | 21.6 | 12.1 | 10.4 | 5.1 |

**Source: field data(2019)**

Table 1 reveals that slightly more than half (58.8%) of the preschool teachers agreed with the view that, creating a conducive home environment enhance learning outcomes amongst learners thus they very frequently asked parents to provide a comfortable and rich learning environment. At the same time, 21.6% often talked to them about provision of conducive home learning environment. On the contrary, only a small proportion of 4.1% of the preschool teachers did this sometimes, 10.4% rarely whereas 5.1% never talked to parents about home learning environment. This showed that home learning environment cannot at all cost be compromised since it is the foundation of child's learning throughout life. The findings of Kok and Rambiyana (2002) agreed with the study that parents who involve themselves in preparing home learning environment for their children help assist their learning. These findings also corroborated the findings of a longitudinal study conducted in United States amongst 111 respondents about parent-child partnerships by Stacy and Annie (2010) indicated that when parents work collaboratively with children and teachers to address the academic, behavioral, and social needs of a child. Such collaboration promotes a partnership by focusing on the interactions between the child and primary systems in his or her life and building skills and competencies within families and educators. Stacy and Annie (2010) further indicated that ECDE children whose parents had healthy and cordial relations with children registered remarkably improved discipline and impressive academic grades.

Majority (59.9% and 19.8%) of the preschool teachers agreed with the view that engaging children in learning activities during holidays and weekends enhances learning outcomes amongst learners and therefore these teachers advised parents to engage children in learning activities very frequently and often respectively. However, 2.5% of the preschool teachers sometimes advised parents to engage children in learning activities, 12.2% rarely whereas 5.6% never talked to parents about how to make use of school holidays and weekends. These findings were consistent with the findings of a longitudinal study conducted in Gucha District by Mwoma (2008) who established that when parents are supportive to their children, the children have fewer problems at school such as excessive absence or poor learning outcomes.

Similarly, slightly more than half (65.9%) of the preschool teachers agreed that when parents create time to assist children in school work enhanced learning outcomes and thus teachers encouraged parents very frequently to create meaningful time to assist children in their school work as did 13.4% of the teachers who encouraged parents often. However, 3.7% of the preschool teachers encouraged sometimes, 10.3% rarely whereas 6.7% never encouraged parents to guide children with their school work. These findings are in concurrence with the findings of a longitudinal study conducted in Mexico by Delgado-Gaitan (2002) in which he asserted that parents who often create school-like structures, support homework success, for instance by arranging the environment and establishing schedules for time use at home. Harper and McLanahan (2003) further asserted that the importance of an involved parent continues into the school years as well. These findings thus affirm the fact that children whose parents spend time with children inspired them to learn. Such children have well developed cognitive and intellectual abilities attributed to the presence of role models who are important for their development.

Slightly more than half (50.8%) of the preschool teachers agreed they very frequently assign children homework to enhance learning outcomes, at the same time, 21.6% did this often. On the contrary, only a small proportion of 12.1% of the preschool teachers sometimes assigned children homework, 10.4% rarely whereas 5.1% never send children with work to be done at home. These views supported the assertions of Delgado-Gaitan (2002) who indicated that homework is often presented as a school requirement for successful child learning. The respondents also indicated that parent-teacher partnership ensures proper arrangement of conducive environment for doing homework. These findings affirm the fact that parents' role in ECDE children's homework cannot be overemphasized and that such involvement is important in corroborating the input by parents.

### **Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Findings on the Influence of Parents Home Activities on Learning Outcomes amongst Preschool Learners**

The researcher also conducted interviews to establish parental home activities and the study revealed that parents engage in activities like encouraging children to read and supervise homework, but has not really enhanced their learning outcomes. Just like in quantitative findings, these observations are also consistent with the views expressed by Aina (2009) that parental participation in children's academic activities has a significant relationship on how they perform at school. The researcher also observed,

*“Preschool learners engage in telling animal, repetitive, cumulative and adventurous tales. However, this has not contributed much to the enhancement of preschool learners' learning outcomes”.*

Just like in quantitative findings, these observations lend credence to the qualitative findings of a study conducted in the United States in which Fiona (2006) asserted socio-emotional development among can be influenced by animal stories and fables which are very popular among children; children like animals especially as the characters that can talk and behave like human being; in fact, they identify themselves with them and then imitate their behaviors and actions. Hence, these observations further attest to the fact that when parents are involved, they assist children in retelling or remembering the plot of a story, matching and ordering, sorting and grouping can foster learners cognitive and social skills; cognitive activities such as identifying story characters, comparing their behaviors and reactions during story and defining concepts, lead to develop concrete thinking, and cognitive activities such as: reasoning, finding solutions, and creative ending lead to develop abstract thinking. In other words, adventures and romantic stories contain prime examples such as: heroes and heroines who are good and kind and their enemies who are bad, ugly and nasty, and finally the victory of positive powers over negative ones. Likewise, these observations further point to the fact that storytelling develops learners' motivation and interests in learning. However, one parent said,

*“I don't tell my child stories because I am always busy in the evening but I usually send her to her grandmother though I don't know whether the stories told have any relationship with what is learned at school”*

Similarly, parents agreed to the fact that they were involved in supervision of children's homework because this leads to improved homework completion rate. These findings are in consistent with the findings of Tizzard (1995) that learners whose parents were involved in supervising homework showed higher achievement than those whose parents were not involved. He further pointed out that when parents and children work together, assignments will be completed successful and this helps children develop attitudes thus helping parents learn about their children education. However, one of the parents remarked,

*“I am not able to guide my child in doing homework because I don't understand what is required by the teacher, I ask older siblings to guide my child”.*

The researcher also observed that, some parents were ignorant about supervision of homework and they preferred that children are not given any assignment at all. These findings corroborated the assertion of Campbell (1992) that, did parents know how and what they can do to ensure their children succeed and do they understand how the school and home can support child's learning? This study established that parents need to be made aware of their role in children's education at home and school and the significance of their involvement by offering instructions and support to equip them with skills to support their children's literacy development and education.

At the same time children were observed during live lesson. It was observed that preschool learner's language skills: picture reading, storytelling and reciting were fairly developed. These observations lend credence to the views expressed by Uwezo (2011) that Kenyan Preschool and primary schools are poorly grounded in language skills. The researcher also observed that preschool learners participate in pretended, hide and seek, socio-dramatic and storytelling play activities. Just like in quantitative findings, these observations further confirmed the views expressed by Abu-Akel and Bailey (2001) that toddlers can experiment with their environment while older children can manipulate and control their environment. Furthermore, the researcher observed,

*“Preschool learners engage in doll house, play shop activities, play kitchen activities, doctor-patient play activities and act parental role activities, though did not like sharing books which may hinder their letter naming, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary skills”.*

*“Teachers never involved preschool children in creative activities like potato printing and crayon etching; however, they mostly involved them in basic numeracy skill and language skills.”*

In pretending to be someone or something else in a dramatic way, pretend play can help develop a child's gross and fine motor skills. From putting their character's costume on to putting the props away when the game has finished, role play builds hand-eye coordination as well as developing visual discrimination. Hence, these observations further attest to the fact that preschool learners constantly involved in pretend play with peers manifest fairly developed reading, writing and oral skills.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- i. The study established that parents do not create time for their children to guide them on school work. It is recommended that should create interest with children's school work even if they do not understand the concept in the homework, they should ensure of provision of time and supervision of the completion of homework. They should as well provide play materials that enhance exploration as children role play. This will go a long way in helping the ECDE children develop a behavior of hard work, commitment and discipline. It is also recommended that County Government through ECE officials mobilize the community and create awareness on the specialized roles of parents for children's improved learning outcomes.
- ii. Results showed that teachers did not embrace child centered approach of teaching and learning. Teachers to embrace creativity by engaging children in creative activities that motivate children to engage in exploration and discovery.
- iii. Results confirmed that parents have no time to communicate to their children about schooling due to lack of skills on what is require of them, commitments and the notion that it's the role of teachers to teach the child. The County Government should organize meetings for all the ECCE stakeholders including the entire community to talk to them on the essence of communication between themselves and the children.
- iv. It was established that there are no policies that explicitly outline the roles of parents and teachers to enhance partnership. Ministry of Education should develop a homework policy that is friendly to all parents irrespective of their literacy level to formally make the parents and teachers understand their roles outside the normal classroom setup

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