

# Parental Involvement and Children's Participation in Pre-Primary School in Mlolongo Slum of Machakos County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** - Children who access holistic, quality Early Childhood Development Education services have a better start in learning, and are better prepared for entering and staying in primary school. However, many children are missing out on the stated benefits of early childhood education since a large percentage of the pre-primary children are not attending the early childhood education programmes. The aim of this study was establish how parental involvement influences children's participation in pre-primary in Mlolongo Slum. This study adopted the culture of poverty view by Osca Lewis. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection and analysis. The study employed simple random and purposive sampling to obtain the study sample. The target population in this study was 30 head teachers, 68 pre-primary teachers and 1466 parents in the thirty schools in Mlolongo slum in Athi River Sub-county. Simple random sampling was employed to select 9 schools. The head teachers in the sampled schooled were purposively selected for the study. Simple random sampling was used to select 68 pre-primary teachers and 440 of parents who had children in the 9 pre-primary schools. The study used semi-structured questionnaires to obtain data from teachers and head-teachers, and interview schedules for parents. Piloting was carried out in two pre-primary schools within Mlolongo slum. The findings of the study revealed that most parents were either coming home late or leaving very early for work (mostly casual), meant that they did not have much time and concern for their children. The study concluded that parental involvement is linked to wide range of positive child outcomes such as school attendance, positive attitudes, social competence and good academic skills, parental engagement in children's education acts as a gel that assist to make learning for children pleasant and encourages them to work. The study recommended that parents and donors to provide school meals to children so as to attract and retain them in school.

**Keywords:** Parental Involvement, Children's Participation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The significance and focus on education has heightened over a long period of time, yet there is still a bigger achievement gap that exists in our educational system between students and their peers (Akindele, 2012). Many studies have suggested that educational accomplishment has remained inqitable for various reasons, one of which is the

lack of parental involvement in their children's education (Larocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2011). According to Bower and Griffin (2011), parental involvement can take on many forms and is perceived as an effective approach to improve children's achievement in school. In the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sub-sector, meeting the Sustainable Development Goal 4aims to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. Moreover, EFA goal number one that is, The expanding and improving of comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children' has been a priority for many countries (United Nations Education Program, 2017).

In the United States (U.S) about four million children enroll in kindergarten, elementary grades or pre-primary schools annually for early childhood education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This constitutes about 75% of all children aged 3-6 years. In Russia, the enrollment of children in early childhood education for 3-6 years stands at 85% (World Bank, 2015), while for the UK, 100% of children below four years are enrolled in school (World Bank, 2015) however, for up to six years, the enrollment is slightly lower (98%). While the three countries have a small difference, the high enrollment and participation is attributed by policies such as adequate government support and private sector participation which is 90% in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), the Children Act in the UK (European Commission, 2017), and the parents' values of early childhood education and care in Russia (Savinskaya, 2015).

In Africa today, more and more children are becoming marginalized as a result of the worsening economic, social and political conditions. The average number of children enrolled in each pre-primary range between 71 and 73% (MoE, 2016). This is below expectation and, it means that many children in Africa do not have access to pre-primary education. Despite the progress in the past decade and interventions put in place to enhance enrolment, schools in informal settlements and Arid and Semi-Arid Lands witness absenteeism, repetition and increasing dropout rates (Ongwenyi, Ruto&Mugo, 2009).

In Ghana, a study by Chowa, Ansong and Osei-Akoto (2012) revealed that parents often have engaged in their children’s learning in many ways that appear to be high in school meetings, attendance and discussing expectations with their children while others through direct homework assistance. In Nigeria, community aspects such as an increased poverty, terrorism targeting schools, and ignorance have led to low pre-primary participation (Gilsinan, 2014), same as South Africa, whose racial disparities are reflected in the quality and distribution of pre-primary schools across different races, hence affecting pre-primary participation (Davis, 2017). Further, poor integration of the indigenous knowledge and cultural practices and retrogressive cultural practices such as cattle rustling have negatively affected pre-primary participation in Ethiopia (Hawani, 2014). As revealed by Garcia and Thornton (2014), involvement of parents in learning helps to enhance the children performance, reduce absenteeism and restore parents’ confidence in their children’s education.

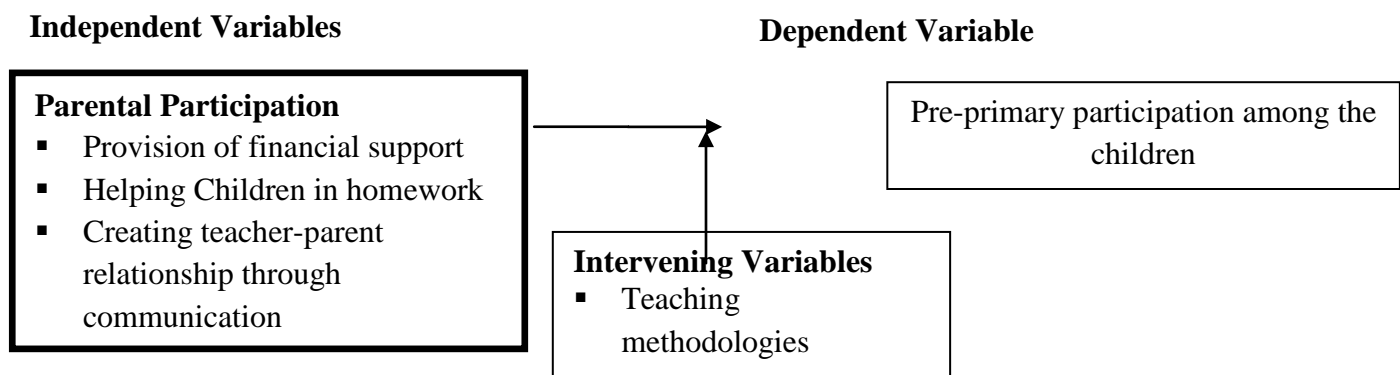
In Kenya the issue of low enrollment is noted to start at pre-primary level as many children are out of school (Ogenga,

2010). Despite the government’s improvements and introduction of major reforms and innovations in education with expansion of ECDE, recent studies indicate that ECDE is facing many drawbacks. In spite of increased enrollment, many children are out of school and the issue of low enrollment is noted to start at pre-primary level and the most affected are children from marginalized areas like slums. According to the Machakos County Integrated Development Plan, Mlolongo Slum has one of the lowest pre-primary school enrolments in Machakos County. It is against this study to establish how parental involvement influences children’s participation in pre-primary in Mlolongo Slum of Machakos County, Kenya.

*1.1 Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to establish how parental involvement influences children’s participation in pre-primary in Mlolongo Slum of Machakos County, Kenya.

*1.2 Conceptual Framework*



**II. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION**

Parental involvement in children’s education serves the critical purpose of preparing young children for primary education and the latter success. Multiple studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of parental involvement in pre-primary participation. In one of the studies, Nagasawa (2018) investigated what constitutes an ideal early childhood education system, focusing on the case of Arizona. Kamerman and Gatenio-Gabel (2015) supported these findings, indicating that an inclusive policy is responsible for the strong early childhood education and care in the U.S. however, the study only used secondary data, and hence the findings might not be current.

Chen (2016) investigated Chinese parents’ perspective on parenting in relation to education and future prospects and revealed that parents were responsible for enrollment through their involvement in policy decisions. This was further supported by Huang (2017) who explained that parental support was essential for enrollment and participation of

children in pre-primary schools. However, the study used parents as the only respondents, yet teachers and other stakeholders could have enriched the findings of the study.

According to Dube (2016), parental involvement programs in ECD centers increased participation of children in centers of Masiphumelele, Cape Town. This was further echoed by Page (2016), whose study explained that parental involvement through home-based or school-based increased participation of children in pre-primary. However, the study used only 19 respondents, which was quite a small sample. Importantly, parental-children involvement towards academic performance may include but not limited to supervising homework, helping in reading or availing learning activities to their children at home. According to (Shamaki, 2015) successful and effective schools operate in all neighbourhood regardless of the socioeconomic factors in these areas.

According to Ganimian, and Murnane, (2016), school and family partnerships in countries such as United States are a national educational goal aimed at not only improving students’ performance but also children behaviour. On the

other hand, family goal towards their children's education involvement remains improving ways of strengthening their student learning and developmental processes (Ganimian, & Murnane, 2016). Parents can also engage in children's education by means of follow-ups with their children in order to establish areas where the children are facing challenges (Clinton & Hattie, 2013). Parents who go to an extent of contacting teachers consequently build and strengthen the teacher and parent relationship which would demonstrate their commitment towards their children's leaning.

According to Llamas and Tuazon (2016) parents become comfortable when the education system requires their involvement in school activities. The strong collaboration of parents with school authorities can lead to increased improvement in both physical and academic performance of the school. Hence, school administrators have to encourage parents to get involved and make contribution towards helping the school achieve its missions and goals (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Henceforth, learners whose parents are involved are active and ready to learn, they learn to be punctual from young age (Makhalemele, 2015). However, it worth noting that several schools now implement efforts to bring parents on board through parents' association, these organizations have performed fairly minimal or below their expectation and are usually active only during school crisis (Shamaki, 2015). Therefore, this study focused on slum areas in order to establish the uniqueness of parental effect on participation of children in school.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Target Population

The study employed a descriptive survey design involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A survey study gathers data at a particular point and time with the intention of describing the nature of the existing conditions, identifying the standards against which existing conditions can be compared as well as determining the relationship between specific events (Orodho, 2004). Survey techniques are very useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. The target population of this study was thirty (30) head teachers, sixty eight (68) pre-primary teachers and 1,466 parents who had pre-primary children attending schools in Mlolongo slums. Therefore, the total target population was 1,564.

#### 3.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study employed purposive and simple random sampling techniques. After purposively sampling the 30 registered pre-primary schools, simple random sampling was employed to get 30% of the schools which was 9 schools that were included in the study. The head teachers in the sampled schools were purposively selected for the study. Simple random sampling was used to select 20 pre-primary teachers in the 9 schools and 440 parents who had children in the 9 pre-primary centres. The sample size comprised of 9 head

teachers, 20 teachers and 440 parents. Thus, the total number of respondents was 469.

#### 3.3 Research Instruments

Questionnaires for head teachers and teachers were designed and used for data collection. Interview schedules for parents were also used to obtain the data required to meet the specific objectives of the study (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). Interview schedules were administered to the parents/guardians. There were ten questions in the interview schedules. Interviews were conducted orally, and answers to the questions were recorded on a piece of paper by the researcher.

#### 3.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in two schools in Mlolongo slum. The pilot study helped the researcher to discover any weaknesses in the instruments, check for clarity of the questions and modify the research instruments before the actual study. The schools were not included in the main study. Content validity was enhanced by seeking for experts in the area of Early Childhood Studies including lecturers in the Early Childhood Studies department at Kenyatta University who scrutinized the questionnaires and interview schedule. Test-retest method was used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaires. A Spearman rank order correlation was applied to compute the correlation coefficient and reliability level was 0.6.

#### 3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to the main study, the researcher visited the selected schools and made orientations and also notified the school administrators of their selection for study. During the visit, arrangements were made regarding when collection of data was to be done. Primary data was obtained from head teachers, teachers and parents from the sampled schools using questionnaires and interview schedules. Parents were invited by the head teachers for a meeting, where interviews were administered to sampled parents. Teachers and head teachers selected for the study were given questionnaires to fill, which were collected immediately after completion. The respondents were given adequate explanation before responding to the items. The researcher made all possible attempts to ensure that the data to be attained from questionnaires and interview schedules were valid and reliable. To ensure this, the researcher established a good rapport with respondents and assured them that the information they gave would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

#### 3.6 Data Processing and Analysis

The researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data and this was analyzed accordingly. Data collected from questionnaires and the interview schedules was organized into themes. Qualitative data was thematically presented in narrative form and where possible in tabular form. Descriptive statistics formed the basis of this analysis. The data was analyzed using thematic approach. Quantitative data was

entered into a computer and then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)Version 22. The information was then presented using tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

#### IV. STUDY RESULTS

This section presents the data collected from the field and its analysis based on the achievement of the study objective. The study sought to find out from parents whether their children went to school every day. The result was presented in Figure 1.

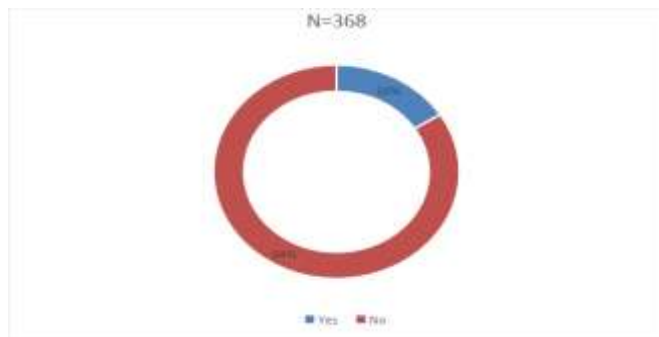


Figure 1: Parents’ response of Pre-primary Daily Participation

The data presented in Figure 1 shows that 84% of school going age children were not attending school daily and therefore did not participate in school activities, while 16% attended school and participated daily in school activities. This is an indication that school participation of pre-primary children in Mlolongo slum was very low. The fact that parents themselves confessed that their children were not going to school daily is an indication that participation of children in school was actually a big problem in the region. Parents who admitted that their children were not attending school daily were therefore asked to indicate the reasons behind this. This data is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Parents’ reasons for children failure to attend school regularly

Reason	Frequency*	Percentage (N=228)
Family issues	39	17.12%
Financial problems	14	6.05%
Floods/bad weather	41	18.16%
Saying with grandmother	7	3.03%
Refuses to go to school	16	7.06%
Oversleeping	14	6.05%
Insecurity	9	4.04%
Lack of uniform	12	5.04%
Sickness	51	22.19%
Long distance to school	32	14.12%
Lack food	12	5.04%
Helping with work	5	2.02%
Lack of Fees	148	40.22%

\*Multiple responses

From the results, it can be observed that there were a myriad of reasons that parents gave as reasons for failure to take their children to school on a daily basis. For instance, most of the parents (22.19%) attributed failure of their children to attend school daily to sickness. Another 18.16% attributed it to floods, 14.12% mentioned distance from school while 40.22% attributed it to lack of school fees. In fact, 17.12% of the parents also said their children were attending family issues such as babysitting hence they could not attend school regularly. This is an indication that some of the children were engaged in child labour. One head teacher also reported that:

*“The biggest challenge that parents with pre-primary children face in this area, is to afford money to pay the school fees. The teacher can spend some months without being paid and when it happens, the unpaid months are ignored. Parents are totally unable to consistently afford sufficient funds to pay this and other crucial expenses such as taking the children for health check-up.”*

A parent said,

*“Many of us are dependent on small businesses that do not have constant incomes, sometimes we don’t earn anything. We do not generate enough to meet all needs with the little income we get and therefore child’s education is not the first priority though we desire a bright future for our children”*

This might mean that some children do not participate effectively in school activities because parents cannot afford school fees. The head teachers’ responses illustrated the parents’ inability to fully support their children. One of the head teachers stated:

*“Many parents still do not give priority to pre-primary education since their awareness of its importance is still low. There are parents who strongly believe that education starts at primary school level.”*

This also gives a picture of the economic status of the parents. Generally, it is the pride of every parent to educate his/her child to the highest-level possible beginning with pre-primary. However, inability to pay school fees was mentioned most frequently by parents as the reason why children were not able to attend school on a regular basis. This meant that their children were not participating effectively in pre-primary activities. The study sought to find out the basic requirements the parents provided so that their children could attend school. Towards that end, the parents were asked to state the basic requirements which they provided. Their responses are presented in Table 2.



Table 2: Support Given by Parents for Education of Their Children

Support	Frequency*	Percentage
Buy Food	132	35.87%
Pay fees	66	17.93%
Buy uniform	88	23.91%
Stationery	22	5.98%
Take child to school	44	11.96%
Reward child	22	5.98%
Do homework with the child	66	17.93%

\*Multiple responses

Majority of the parents (36%) indicated that they supported their children with food. The findings of the study indicate that, 24% buy uniform, 18% do homework with their children while 18% pay fees. Another 12% take children to school while 6% reward children and buy stationery. The findings showed clearly that some of the parents were not giving adequate support to their children to ensure effective educational participation.

One of the parents said:

*"The situation is worse since we consider food more important than anything you may give children. You cannot provide clothes or toys while they go hungry. Most parents who are casual labourers and peasant farmers don't earn much to enable them adequately feed their children."*

One of the head teachers wrote the following in the questionnaire:

*"If school fees is not paid and the child has no school uniform and writing materials, the child will not participate fully in pre-primary education. The child also may not enjoy the company of other children in school because he is not in uniform like them".*

These findings are in line with those from a study conducted by Achoka, Odebero, Maiyo and Mualuko (2005) who revealed that children whose parents fail to provide them with basic necessities are pre-disposed to disadvantaged access to ECD right from conception to primary school age. This is line with Llamas and Tuazon (2016) who opined that parents become comfortable when the education system requires their involvement in school activities. The strong collaboration of parents with school authorities can lead to increased improvement in both physical and academic performance of the school

## V. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that parental involvement is linked to wide range of positive child outcomes such as school attendance, positive attitudes, social competence and good academic skills, parental engagement in children's education

acts as a gel that assist to make learning for children pleasant and encourages them to work. The fact that most parents were either coming home late or leaving very early for work (mostly casual), meant that they did not have much time and concern for their children.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the study findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made: The parents and donors to provide school meals to children so as to attract and retain them in school
2. The national government of Kenya should promote education (including adult education) in slum areas.
3. The Boards of Management to ensure the schools are well managed, well-funded and well-staffed.
4. The Boards of Management through County Government should introduce Free Preschool Education.

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