

INFLUENCE OF PARENTS' GENDER ON CHILDREN'S SCHOOL READINESS

By

Mercy Kerubo Nyakundi
Department of Early Years Education
Machakos University
mercykerubo1317@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Global studies show the need for parental involvement in children's school readiness. In Kenya, studies show that students' poor performance in school is mainly caused by lack of school readiness. This study was guided by the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which regards children as the center of various layers of systems. Survey research design was used to guide the study. The location of the study was Kasarani Division in Nairobi County, Kenya. The target population of this study was parents with children aged 5 to 6 years in pre-primary schools in Kasarani Division. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to obtain data from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data. The results had revealed that several factors were influencing parents' perception on children's school readiness.

Keywords: *Influence; Parents' perception; School readiness; Gender.*

1. Introduction

The gender of a parent in a way acts as a determinant of parents' perception on children's school readiness. Raver (2003) noted that apart from resources that parents have, their beliefs, especially those of the mothers, impact the learning environments of children within the home. For example, the beliefs that a mother can have determine the number of books that are purchased for the children, as well as the time that parents spend to read to their child. Consequently, this shows that mothers, who highly value literacy and reading, focus more on implementing literacy promotional behaviors within the home. Accordingly, their children often manifest increased levels of literacy within their early years of learning and development. On the other hand, research indicates that when children have books, pictures, videos, reading activities, singing and storytelling at home, their level of school readiness increases.

Globally, parents' perceptions concerning children's school readiness is rapidly gaining recognition as a viable strategy with regard to closing the learning gap and improving equity in attaining lifelong learning, as well as full developmental prospective among young children (Cowan, 2005). Consequently, Hill (2001) studied the relationship between parenting styles, as well as school readiness of kindergarten children in Euro-America and African-American families with similar socio-economic status. The findings showed that maternal acceptance or warmth was positively associated with how the children performed on a pre-reading measure. On the other hand, lack of patience was linked to lower scores. However, the parents' perception on children's school readiness was not examined. Hence, it was significant for this study to establish how gender influences parents' perception on children's school readiness.

A study conducted by the National Early Head Start Research, as well as the Evaluation Project (EHS Study) on mothers and fathers' intrusiveness and involvement, Justice (2003), showed that the engagement of fathers in school readiness of their children has considerable effects on young children in relation to their socio-emotional and cognitive development. From this study, it is evident that fathers play a significant role when it comes to preparing their children for school. Their adequate involvement in school readiness activities can have a greater impact on the child as compared to mother's engagement, as well as family resources. In essence, both parents should refrain from gender-based stereotypes regarding the role of a father and mother when it comes to school readiness. Every

parent should strive to provide supportive, warm and less aggravated parenting which is aimed at promoting home learning experiences that are of a higher quality. Such experiences have been proven to possess a positive association in relation to children's school readiness, as well as cognitive development (Chang & Burns, 2005). Nevertheless, that study did not indicate how the gender differences affect parents in relation to their perception on children's school readiness. Therefore, through this study, the researcher investigated how gender influences parents' perception on children's school readiness.

The Government of Kenya recognizes how Early Years Education is a crucial pillar for enhancing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The ECD policy framework was enacted in 2006; it offers a coordination mechanism, clearly defining the role of communities, parents, different Government departments and ministries, development partners, including other stakeholders within the provision of EYE services (Republic of Kenya, 2006).

There are various partners who cooperate with the Government of Kenya within the delivery of early years education services. The Comprehensive Policy Framework should be used by these partners to guide them in offering enhanced services to infants and children (MoEST, 2007). In Kenya, many parents who have negative attitudes towards school readiness have caused their children to experience a wide range of transition problems once they join primary school (NACECE, 2007). Therefore, most children begin school, but are not able to adapt to the school environment and this makes them perform poorly (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Therefore, the present study investigated the influence of parents' gender on children's school readiness.

In Kasarani Division, Agik, (2012) conducted a study on the influence of reflective teaching on pre-school children's socio-emotional skills. Other studies that have been done in the area focused on the factors that influence preschool teachers' attitude towards teaching mathematics and the influence of various teaching methods on children's performance in the subject. However, in Kasarani, there was no study that had been conducted on the influence of parents' gender on children's school readiness, hence the need for the study.

2. Statement of the Problem

Parents are usually eager to take their children to school, but many children tend to experience difficulties in adjusting to the school environment. Studies reviewed shows that school readiness has been associated with behavioral and social competencies in adulthood and improved academic outcomes in primary and secondary schools, both in terms of performance and equity. They also indicated that in different countries, parents' perception of children's school readiness were influenced by several factors such as availability of time, their level of education, personality traits, and occupation among others.

Literature reviewed has also shown that in Kenya, most parents do not take school readiness seriously. The Government of Kenya has stressed on the significance of parents partnering with other stakeholders to ensure that children's holistic needs were met. However, most children join primary school unprepared for social and academic expectations. Thus, it was not clear what factors influenced parents' perceptions on children's school readiness such that some children are able to join formal schooling prepared while others join unprepared. It was in this context that this study sought to find out the influence of parents' gender on children's school readiness.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was:

- i) To determine whether parents' gender influence their perception on school readiness.

4. Research Methodology

Survey research design was used to guide this study. The independent variable was parents' gender while the dependent variable was parents' perception on children's school readiness. The study was done in Kasarani sub-county located in Nairobi City County. The target population was parents with children aged 5 to 6 years in pre-unit class enrolled in licensed pre-primary schools in Kasarani Division. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to obtain data from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness

Parents' perception level of their children's school readiness was measured using their response to items measuring perceived children's school readiness ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The participants responded to three thematic areas to indicate their perception of school readiness. The areas include cognitive development, socio-emotional development and physical development. Table 1 presents the results of parents' perception on school readiness indicators.

Table 1: Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness Indicators

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Counting beyond twenty	37	36.3	50	49	7	6.9	8	7.8	102	100
Listening and following instructions	35	34.3	51	50	3	2.9	13	12.8	102	100
Reading written words	51	50	35	34.3	10	9.8	6	5.9	102	100
Recognizing the alphabet	59	57.8	28	27.5	13	12.8	2	2	102	100
Being disciplined for misbehaving	26	25.5	51	50	23	22.6	2	2	102	100
Controlling personal emotions	26	25.5	62	60.8	7	6.9	7	6.9	102	100
Displaying confidence in development of skills	26	25.5	60	58.8	11	10.8	5	4.9	102	100
Sharing, taking turns and engaging in cooperative tasks	59	57.8	34	33.3	6	5.9	3	2.9	102	100
Running, climbing and jumping	64	62.7	23	22.6	12	11.8	3	2.9	102	100
Sorting by color or shape	25	24.5	53	52	19	18.6	5	4.9	102	100

Table 1 show that most parents had a positive perception about school readiness because they agreed with the school readiness indicators. However, some parents had negative perception on school readiness because they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the school readiness indicators.

Therefore, the level of parents' perception on children's school readiness was determined and Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Level of Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness

Perception level	Frequency	Percent
High	85	83.3
Low	17	16.7
Total	102	100.0

Table 2 shows that 85 (83.3%) parents had high perception regarding children's school readiness, while 17 (16.7%) parents had low perception on children's school readiness. Parents with high perception had greater mean scores on the above school readiness indicators that ranged between 3 and 4. For parents with low perception, their mean scores on perception regarding school readiness indicators were between 1 and 2.

Perceived children's school readiness indicators were broadly grouped as cognitive development indicators, socio-emotional development indicators and physical development indicators. Parents' perception on the different categories were determined and the results have been discussed in the following subsections.

5.1.1 Parents' Perception in Cognitive Development School Readiness Indicators

Cognitive development included school readiness indicators such as being able to count beyond twenty, ability to listen and follow instructions, read written words and recognize the alphabet. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: Parents' Perception in Cognitive Development School Readiness Indicators

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Counting beyond twenty	37	36.3	50	49	7	6.9	8	7.8	102	100
Listening and following instructions	35	34.3	51	50	3	2.9	13	12.8	102	100
Reading written words	51	50	35	34.3	10	9.8	6	5.9	102	100
Recognizing the alphabet	59	57.8	28	27.5	13	12.8	2	2	102	100

Table 3 indicates that majority of the parents confirmed that being able to count beyond twenty is a crucial school readiness indicator. The findings also demonstrated that most parents believed that being able to listen and follow instructions was important before children joined primary school.

5.1.2 Parents' Perception in Socio-emotional Development School Readiness Indicators

Socio-emotional development school readiness indicators included being disciplined for misbehaving, ability to control personal emotions, displaying confidence in development of skills and being able to share, take turns and engage in cooperative tasks. Table 4 presents the results

Table 4: Parents' Perception in Socio-emotional Development School Readiness Indicators

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Being disciplined for misbehaving	26	25.5	51	50	23	22.6	2	2	102	100
Controlling personal emotions	26	25.5	62	60.8	7	6.9	7	6.9	102	100
Displaying confidence in development of skills	26	25.5	60	58.8	11	10.8	5	4.9	102	100
Sharing, taking turns and engaging in cooperative tasks	59	57.8	34	33.3	6	5.9	3	2.9	102	100

Table 4 shows that as much as parents believed that it was necessary for children to attain discipline before they joined primary school, there were parents who considered children in preschool as very young to be disciplined. These findings also illustrated that most parents were aware of the significance of gaining the ability to control personal emotions before joining primary school. Alternatively, few parents did not consider ability to control personal emotions as vital in preschool probably because the children were still young to develop such control.

5.1.3 Parents' Perception in Physical Development School Readiness Indicators

Physical development school readiness indicators included: Ability to run, climb, and jump, as well as being able to sort by color or shape. Table 5 presents findings on parents' response to physical development school readiness indicators.

Table 5: Parents' Perception in Physical Development School Readiness Indicators

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Running, climbing and jumping	64	62.7	23	22.6	12	11.8	3	2.9	102	100
Sorting by color or shape	25	24.5	53	52	19	18.6	5	4.9	102	100

Table 5 indicates that most parents believed that being able to run, climb and jump was significant for school readiness, while the few

parents who rejected this school readiness indicator did not believe in children's physical development as part of school readiness. On the other hand, most parents believed that children should be able to sort by color or shape before joining primary school, while other parents believed that this was a more complex skill for pre-school children.

5.2 Parents' Gender and Perception on Children's School Readiness

Objective four of the study sought to establish whether there was a significant relationship between parents' perception and their gender. Chi square was utilized to determine this relationship. Table 6 presents the expected and observed counts of parents on their perception according to their gender.

Table 6 Expected and Observed Counts on Parents' Perception and Gender

		Perception levels			
		High	Low	Moderate	Total
Gender Male	Count	21	7	22	50
	Expected Count	18.6	8.3	23.0	50.0
Female	Count	17	10	25	52
	Expected Count	19.4	8.7	24.0	52.0
Total	Count	38	17	47	102
	Expected Count	38.0	17.0	47.0	102.0

Table 6 indicates that parents of both genders had similar perceptions about their children's school readiness. This implies that the gender of the parents does not influence the perception they have regarding their children's school readiness.

The relationship between parents' perception and their gender was computed using Chi-square to test the hypothesis that stated:

H04 There is no significant relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and their gender.

Table 7 presents findings on the Chi-square computation for the above hypothesis.

Table 7 Chi-Square Computation on Parents' Perception and Gender

Instrument used to measure		Calculated χ^2	Critical χ^2	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson	Chi-Square	1.103 ^a	5.991	2	.576

Table 7 indicates that the calculated Chi-square was 1.103 at 2 degrees of freedom with a significance value $p=0.576 > 0.05$ while the critical chi square value was 5.991. The calculated p value was more than the critical value 0.05. This demonstrates that there was no significant relationship between parents' perception and their gender. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted based on this finding. This shows that parents' perception is not influenced by their gender.

The findings were consistent with the findings of a study conducted by the National Early Head Start Research, as well as the Evaluation Project (EHS Study) on mothers and fathers' intrusiveness and involvement, Justice (2003), showed that the engagement of fathers in school readiness of their children has considerable effects on young children in relation to their socio-emotional and cognitive development.

The findings were also consistent with findings established by Raver (2003) who noted that apart from resources that parents have, their beliefs, especially those of the mothers, impact the learning environments of children within the home.

In essence, the findings show that both parents should refrain from gender-based stereotypes regarding the role of a father and mother when it comes to school readiness. This is because studies done in the United Kingdom revealed there are low levels of parental participation in their children's education. Welsh et al., (2012) conducted a study that involved fathers from 26 families within Britain. They found out that parental participation in their children's reading, as well as support in homework tasks were ranked least among other parental involvement aspects.

Similarly, a study that involved 21 parents in South Africa reported extremely low levels of parental, including community involvement (Msila, 2012). It showed that parents perceived teachers as having the requisite skills to handle education matters without parental support. Nonetheless, the school principals believed that parental participation would enhance learners' performance including general school success.

Moreover, Wanjohi (2011) found out that parents are required to provide play and learning materials. They also have a primary role of socializing their children, as well as inculcating life principles, including moral and spiritual values for character development. The contact between children and parents that is essential in a child's early development has vanished; parents depend on schools to nurture their children. Therefore, every parent should strive to provide supportive, warm and less aggravated parenting which is aimed at promoting home learning experiences that are of a higher quality.

6. Conclusion

Parents' perception regarding their children's school readiness was found to influence how they perceive school readiness. This suggested that parents tend to be more concerned with their children's school readiness when they know what school readiness entails and consider it significant for their children's formal schooling. Parents' perception on children's school readiness was not found to be significantly related to their gender. This implies that regardless of the gender of a parent, it does not influence their perception on children's school readiness.

7. Recommendations

Various recommendations were drawn from the study findings for various stake holders.

7.1 Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers should assist in enhancing both parents' perceptions on school readiness by inviting them to school during open days for discussions about their children's preparedness for primary school. They should also encourage fathers and mothers to buy learning materials for their children and assist them in their areas of weakness. Apart from improved academic performance, this will help the children to develop positive behavioral and social competencies as they grow.

7.2 Recommendations for School Board of Management

There is need for the board of management to initiate programs where once in a term or in a year they have a special day for both parents and their children to educate them on the important role they play regarding their children's school readiness. These roles include providing their children with educational, financial, emotional and moral support. Both parents are also expected to act as good role models to their children.

7.3 Recommendations for Parents

There is need for all parents regardless of their gender to perceive school readiness as significant in their children's lives. This will enable them to become actively involved in preparing their children for school in all aspects of development such as emotionally, cognitively, physically and socially.

8. References

- Agik, J. A. (2012). Influence of reflective teaching on pre-school children's socio- emotional skills in Kasarani district, Nairobi County. Unpublished M.E.D. Thesis: Kenyatta University.
- Chang, Florence & Burns, Barbara M. (2005). Attention in preschoolers: Associations with effortful control and motivation. *Child Development*, 76, 247-263.
- Cowan, P. (2005). *The family context of parenting in children's adaptation to elementary school*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Hill, Nancy E. (2001). Parenting and academic socialization as they relate to school readiness: The roles of ethnicity and family income. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(4), 686-697.
- MoES&T, (2007). *Support Grant Early Childhood Centre Community Management Handbook*. Kenya Education Sector Support Program. Nairobi.
- Msila, V. (2012). Black parental involvement in South African rural schools: Will parents ever help in enhancing effective school management? *Journal of Educational and Social Research* Vol. 2 (2).
- NACECE. (2007). *A Manual for Preschool Teachers and Community*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Republic of Kenya (2006). *Early Childhood Development Service Standard Guidelines for Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Printer.

Wanjohi, A.M. (2011). *Factors Contributing to the Expansion of Early Childhood Education in Kenya*. KENPRO Online Papers Portal. Available online at www.kenpro.org/papers

Welsh, E., Buchanan, A., Flouri, E. (2012). *Parenting in Practice: Involved Fathering and Child Well-being: Fathers' Involvement with Secondary School age Children*. London: National Children's Bureau

