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PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING IN KENYA

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Abstract

Introduction: Studies have shown that a child's learning in school is affected by several factors, some related to the school environment, others to the home and community while others are as a result of the individual characteristics of the child. This study sought to explore parents' and teachers' perceptions of factors that affect learning of children in primary schools in a rural County in Kenya.

Methods.—This was a qualitative study that adopted the phenomenological approach. It was conducted with parents and teachers of 7 primary schools in rural and semi-rural areas of Kiambu County in Kenya. Using a researcher developed guide, data was collected using focus group discussion with parents and teachers. The discussions were conducted as follows—four were conducted in English language, two in Kiswahili language, and three were conducted in the local language and all were audio taped. Research assistants also took notes during the discussions. Results were transcribed verbatim and those that needed to be translated into English were translated. In analysis, MA, MM and MT read the transcripts and coded the major themes.

Results: Four themes perceived by both parents and teachers to affect a child's learning emerged. These were; school environment, home, community and factors within the child.

Conclusion: There is need for both teachers and parents to come together and discuss perceived factors that interfere with learning of the children. Those that form a consensus for both groups, means to address them be found for better academic success of the child.

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Keywords

Learning; School; Home; Community; Factors within the child; Pupil

Introduction

Worldwide, when parents enroll their children to schools, they have expectations (Boyle, Brock, Mace, & Sibbons, 2002). Parents expect that their children will progress from one level to another until they graduate from secondary school or even university (Lippman, Guzman, Dombrowski, Kinukawa, & Schwalb, 2008). However, several factors are associated with a child's ability to learn effectively in a school and thus meet the parental expectations.

Studies have identified certain factors that influence the capacity of children to learn. These factors are associated to home, school and individual characteristics of the child (Hanushek, 1995; Glewwe, 2002; Ammermueller, Heijke, & Wöxmann, 2005; Hanushek, Welch, Machin, & Woessmann, 2006; Glewwe, 2012; Glewwe & Kremer, 2006), with more studies emphasizing the role of families, communities and peers as being important to learning outcomes of children (Engin-Demir, 2009; Kim et al., 2012). Individual characteristics of the child include mental health problems (Mutavi, Mathai, & Obondo, 2017; Hurwitz, & Weston, 2010).

In Kenya, school factors influencing the educational outcome of pupils in primary schools include inadequate teaching and learning resources, sketchy syllabus coverage due to inappropriate instructional strategies and poor attitude amongst pupils and teachers (Ondieki, & Orodho, 2015). Bizimana and Orodho, (2014) established that there is a relationship between learners' outcome and teaching and learning, resource availability and teachers' effective classroom management. Other studies have also established a relationship between learning achievement of the students and school resources such as class size, cost of education and quality of teachers (Betts, Kim, Rueben, & Danenberg, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

There is a strong positive effect of students' socio-economic background and their academic outcome (Betts et al., 2000; Dincer & Uysal, 2010) with studies on effect of poverty on learning suggesting that poverty reduces the chances of learners doing well in school (Welch, 2013; Banerjee & Steven, 2016). This could be explained by the fact that studies have reported that poverty leads to chronic stress to children and their families and this interferes with successful adjustment to developmental tasks, including school achievement, with long term poverty leading to deficits in cognitive and socioemotional development (Engle & Black, 2008; Aber, Bennett, Conley, & Li, 1997).

The health of the individual child is important on academic performance. This health is both physical and mental. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between health and educational outcomes, with health influencing academic outcomes of students (Suhrcke, Paz Nieves, & WHO., 2011). Healthy students are better learners (La Salle, & Hagermoser, 2016) with school children experiencing medical distress being at the risk for low academic

achievement (Spernak, Schottenbauer, Ramey, & Ramey, 2006). This risk could be related to the fact that poor health impedes participation in daily school activities (Hanson, Austin, & June 2004). These children experience frequent school absenteeism, discomfort or pain, movement limitations, sleepiness, physical and psychological side effects of the medications that they are taking, all of which limit students abilities to engage in the educational process (Fowler, Davenport, & Garg, 1992).

The role of parents in the learning process of their children has been identified and reported to affect the child's academic outcomes. Parental involvement has been identified as leading to success in the child's learning (Jeynes, 2011; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011) and has been reported to be even more effective than the social class of the learner (Westerlund, Gustafsson, Theorell, Janlert, & Hammarström, 2013). family and peers influence children's behavior, and child behavior problems can be impediments to learning (Baker, 2006).

This study sought to explore the perceptions of rural and peri-urban Kenyan parents and teachers on factors influencing the learning of children in public primary schools. Kenya has an estimated total number of over 8 million pupils enrolled in public primary schools according to the 2016/2017 Education Sector Report (Republic of Kenya, 2016). These schools are funded by the government and the teachers are employed by the Government. The current education system is that of 8:4:4 though this system of education has started to be phased out systematically starting from the lower grades. The pupils spend 8 years in primary school and at the end of the 8th year they undertake a National examination called the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), then 4 years in secondary schools and at the end sit a national examination called Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Those who attain a grade C+ and above proceed to the University for another 4 years. When children do not perform well academically, parents and teachers apportion blame for the poor results. This study therefore sought to explore what is perceived by parents and teachers to influence learning leading to poor academic results.

The study used phenomenological theory, which is the study of subjective experience (Schultz & Schultz, 2011), as it explored the individual perceptions of teachers and parents on what affected the learning of pupils.

Method

This qualitative study was part of a larger study that sought to find out the teachers' mental health literacy and effectiveness of teacher implemented mental health intervention. To understand parents' and teachers' perceptions on factors influencing learning, the phenomenological method was used. This method was found to be appropriate as it lets the individuals describe the situations as they experience it and therefore perceive them (Giorgi, 2000). This was done through use focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents and teachers of primary school children. All the FGDs were conducted by the first author, (AM) who was the Principal investigator.

The study was conducted in Kiambu County. The County is found in central Kenya, and borders Nairobi City County. It has several formal and informal industries in its urban

centers which provide employment. There are both large- and small-scale farms. Seven primary schools were selected through convenient sampling to include 3 schools near an urban center with multiethnic children and 4 rural schools with children predominantly from the local ethnic community. The participants were parents of children in primary schools in Kiambu County and teachers teaching in the said selected primary schools.

Selection of parents: Upon the head teacher agreement that the school could be part of the study, the researcher randomly selected 4 pupils whose names appeared frequently in the punishment book and invited their parents to participate in the study. The remainder of the parents were randomly selected from the different classes. The head teacher provided the mobile numbers of the selected parents to the researcher who communicated with them requesting them to be part of the study. The parents resided near the school.

Selection of teachers: the researcher requested the head teacher for representation of certain departments for example the Guidance and Counselling and discipline departments, Senior Teachers and class teachers. Other teachers teaching different classes and subjects could then join to make a team of about 8 to 10 teachers. A convenient time had to be selected so that the FGDs did not interfere with teaching time.

On the day of the study, the participants were given the consent document, written in either in English or Kiswahili (Kiswahili is Kenya's National language). The researcher guided the participants on the consent document and those who consented proceeded with the study participation. The participants first recorded their social demographic characteristics and participated in the focus group discussion about factors that affect children's learning in the school. Nine focus group discussions were held with 8 to 10 participants who were moderated by the researcher and an assistant. Each discussion took about 2 hours. Three FGDs were conducted in the local language (Kikuyu) as the parents from the rural schools preferred the use of the mother tongue. Two FGDs were conducted in Kiswahili as the parents from the peri urban area were from different ethnic communities and so opted the use of Kiswahili. The 4 FGDs with teachers were conducted in English. At the end of each FGD, each participant was given 500 Kenya Shillings (equivalent to 5 U.S. dollars) to cover for a cup of tea. Each FGD was audio recorded and two research assistants wrote the proceedings.

To maintain confidentiality, the participants social demographic characteristics were completed before the FGD started. This information was then kept by the PI and not shared with other participants. For further confidentiality, the participants chose a name they preferred to be addressed by during the discussions and not their real name. This ensured that they would not be identified even in the audio tapes.

Participants were asked to use chosen names when responding to the previous participant. In two of the schools, FGDs were held with teachers, 3 of the schools with parents only while in two of the schools, FGDs were held with parents and teachers but separately giving a total of 4 FGDs in those two schools.

The study ethical approval was granted by the Kenyatta National Hospital-University of Nairobi Ethical Review Committee, protocol Number P8/01/2017. Additionally, the

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation gave the researcher permit to carry the study out.

Data Analysis

Focus group discussions recordings were transcribed verbatim and then those held in Kiswahili and Kikuyu were then translated into English. Data analysis made use of the Colaizzi's seven-step method (Morrow, Rodriguez & King 2015). In this study it involved-1. Reading and re-reading each transcript in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content; 2. Extraction of the significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study for each transcript; 3. Formulating meanings from the significant statements; 4. Formulating meanings and sorting them into themes which were coded; 5. We integrated the findings into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon 6. We described the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; 7. We did not go back to the participants to validate the findings as suggested but to ensure credibility, MA, MM and MT coded the same scripts separately and then met and compared results. Where differences arose, discussions were done until consensus was arrived at. In the discussion translations were listened to and made use of the notes made by the research during the FGD discussion.

Software for qualitative analysis was not used. Each theme was then summarized. Some themes had subtheme emerging. Anchoring citation or citations were selected to support the theme or subtheme.

RESULTS

A total of 50 parents and 37 teachers participated in the study, with most participants in the two groups being females (N=41) for parents and 31 for teachers. Most of the parents attained 7 to 8 years of school and about 1/5 had attained 12 years of school equivalent to 8 years primary education and four of high school education. The parents were mainly small-scale farmers or small-scale business people. The mean age of the parents was 29 years. Out of the total, 9 parent participants were aged between 50 and 70 years, 8 were grandparents who were the children's guardians. All the teachers had attained a certificate qualification for teaching and were employed by the Teacher Service Commission; a government body that employs public schools' teachers in the country.

The perception of parents and teachers on what affected learning of children is summarized in table 1.

Theme 1: School Environment

a. Teachers—Parents' had the following perceptions on how learning of their children was affected by teachers. Parents felt that some teachers discriminated and rejected their children, and this made the affected children not want to go to school as expressed by this parent: *"I would like to contribute and say that a child's learning is affected when the teacher rejects or discriminates a child they (teacher) think is not clever in class. This makes the child refuse to attend school". (FGD 2, P2).*

Parents also felt that teachers sometimes punished the children for unreasonable reasons, and this made the children hate school as expressed by this parent: *“it is not fair for a child to be beaten by a teacher for not carrying food for lunch. It is the child who will be hungry and not the teacher. The teacher does not know the reason the child did not carry the food”*. (FGD 4, P3).

Some parents felt that some teachers were not interested in the academic performance of the children. This is expressed by this parent: *“Some teachers are not concerned whether the pupils pass or fail, the teacher doesn’t mark the book of a child and does not bother to find out if the homework has been done. This child losses interest in that subject and therefore will not perform well and can even think of dropping out of school”*. (FGD 2,P4).

Parents also felt that some teachers verbally and emotionally abuse the children. According to the parents, it is common for teachers to be in one school for a long time and therefore teach children of their former pupils, who when they get married and get children take these children to the schools that they (parents) attended. If the parent did not perform well academically while in school, some teachers will make negative comments to the children in relation to how their parent was while in school and this is emotional abuse. Such children will not pay attention in class: *‘It is common for some of us parents to bring our children to the schools we attended as children and some teachers who taught us are still teaching in that school. Some of these teachers make nasty remarks to our children in relation to how we parents behaved while we were in school. For example, “yon are as stupid as your mother or father”. This child believes they are stupid and therefore will not learn”*. (FGD 1, P7).

Parents also perceived that some teachers had personal problems which interfered with teaching. They felt that teachers are normal human beings and experience problems which other members of the community experience. This is expressed by this parent: *“Another problem would be from the teacher who has stress and projects the stress to the learners. The teacher might be too harsh on the children and the children will therefore not pay attention and the teacher’s subject will not be performed well in school”*. (FGD 1, P6).

The teachers also perceived that certain factors made them not perform their work of teaching to their optimum. They pointed out that as human beings, they had problems just as other members of the community and this affected their teaching and hence learning of the children. Two teachers noted the following: *“When teachers are stressed, they can project their stress to the pupils in different negative ways which makes the children either scared or not pay attention.”* (FGD 5, T1). They were also able to realize some of their colleagues experience problems which need outside intervention: *“There is this teacher whose mother had been summoned by the headteacher because of alcohol problem. The headteacher wanted the mother to support him to a rehabilitation. He had been transferred from various schools because of his drinking problem. He is a chronic absentee”*. (FGD 1, T2)

b. Physical Resources.—Parents and teachers felt that schools had few physical resources which hampered proper teaching and, hence learning. The parents felt that schools had few physical resources which hampered proper learning. For example, few text books

and congestions in class. This parent points out this regarding shortage of text books: *“There is a revision book called Mentor. There is only one book in the class and as a parent I must look for that book because I cannot afford to buy one. Some children even stay late at night just finding the one book to do the homework”*. FGD 3, P8. Few classrooms available led to congestions in classes: *“Another hindrance to learning is congestion. One class has 60 children and so the teacher does not have enough contact time with every pupil”*. FGD 3, P8. *“In another class. 5 children could be sitting in one desk meant for three pupils and this makes them uncomfortable and all they do is look forward to break time”*, FGD 1, P9. Just like parents, the teachers noted that there are few text books, classes are congested, and the teachers are few in a school and therefore overworked as pointed out by this teacher: *“We teachers sometimes miss important resources to teach effectively. If provided teaching can be better.”* (FGD 3, T2)

Theme 2: Home environment

Parents and teachers agreed that the home environment influenced learning of the children. From their discussions, two subthemes emerged: poverty and parenting.

a. Poverty

Even though primary school education in Kenya is free, poverty still interferes with learning. Poverty affects the children in different ways according to these parents: *“I would say poverty prevents children from doing well in schools. Poverty prevents parents from providing for their child or provide less. For example, if the child has a torn uniform, the other children will laugh at him/her. This child becomes uncomfortable and develops low self-esteem and can even drop out of school due to the ridicule he/she is getting in school”*. FGD 4, P10.

When parents are not able to provide lunch or food for their children these children do not concentrate in class as they are hungry.as pointed out by these two parents: *“I would say the issue of poverty affects learning because some pupils are too hungry to pay attention during the afternoon classes while some others who cannot afford to carry food do not want to continue with school”*. FGD 3, P11. *“Lack of food and poverty has been a big problem. In this school many children do not afford lunch and we would urge the government to give food”* FGD 3, P8.

Teachers also felt that poverty affected learning of the children as pointed out by the following teachers regarding poverty: *“Sometimes, we teachers contribute some money to assist some children whose parents are very poor and the child who has problems. For example, we contribute to a buy a uniform or pay for their lunch or buy a snack incase the child is very hungry and is just sleeping in class”*. FGD 4, T1 *“Some children do not carry food because at home there is no food or just carry carbohydrates for example white rice only and this affects their nutritional levels and also learning negatively”*. (FGD 4, T7)

b. Parenting—Parents and teachers pointed out the following parental practices as affecting learning of children in the parenting sub theme.

Conflicts at home: According to parents, conflicts at home affect the learning of the child: *“The fights at home affects the child psychologically until he/she cannot concentrate in class”. FGD 4, P3.* Another parent notes: *“ When we parents fight in front of the children, the children lose respect for us and do not pay attention in class” FGD 2, P2.*

Teachers also perceived conflicts at home affected the learning of the children. They said that parents quarrel for different reasons and when quarrels are done in the open and the children are exposed to them it affects learning. This teacher says: *“ Sometimes parents fight, and the husband locks the wife and the children out of the house the whole night. The school going child will not concentrate in class the next day or might miss school altogether the following day”. FGD 2, T 4.*

Prevailing family dynamics: At times certain family situations or dynamics affects the child and makes learning very difficult for such a child. This parent says: *“In a family, if a child is of a different biological parent and there happens to be a domestic strife, this child becomes disturbed and fails to concentrate in school resulting to poor academic performance. FGD 2, P11.*

Teachers also perceived that there are certain family dynamics that affect learning of children as noted by this teacher: *“I have this very bright and responsible girl in my class. Recently she started fainting in class and she was not participating actively as is norm. I called the mother to check what was happening. The mother said that the girl was being bullied in school, but it was not true as she was the prefect. When I talked to the girl, it turned out that during the recent registration as required by the Ministry of Education, the mother refused to enter the name of the girl’s father (the mother of the girl and the father had separated). The girl was upset by this as she knew her father and this made her start having fainting spells. So, I had to ask the mother to let her be meeting the father and when this started, the girl stopped fainting.”. FGD 7, T12.*

Parental Neglect: Certain actions of parents were pointed by other parents as neglectful making the child feel rejected contributing to academic failure of their children: *“I would say that some children are rejected by the parents and are brought up by the parents of the mother [maternal grandparents]. This child feels rejected by the mother because uncles and aunties constantly tell him/her that she/he does not belong in that home. This rejection becomes internalized in the child and the child grows feeling unloved thus has a void in her life. This child does not pay attention in class”. FGD 4, P13*

Children are sometimes taken out of school to engage in family employment opportunities and this makes them miss school as noted by this parent: *“When some mothers with very young babies go for casual labour, they take their school going child with them to act as the babysitter as the mother works. This child misses school and does not catch on what was taught on that day”. FGD 5, P4*

Some parents give children too many tasks at home which interferes with reading or doing homework at home as parent P4 in FGD 5 continues: *“When the a child comes from school, instead of the child being left to do homework, the child is given domestic chores, for example, washing dishes and/or the house, cooking*

among others. At the end of the evening the homework is not done because there was no time to do it. The next day in school, child will find the rest of the pupils have done the work. For this child there will be conflict with the teacher in school. It will get to a point that the child will feel the school is not the place for her because at home she is not getting the support required to be a good pupil. I would say the parent is to blame on this one” FGD 5, P4.

Failure to attend school functions: Parents pointed out that some parents do not cooperate when called to schools to discuss issues relating to their children, and in most cases, they fail to attend or respond to the parent-teacher conference. Such parents felt they were being burdened by the school. This parent notes: *“Some parents fail to attend school functions, or he/she does not go to school when called by the teachers”. FGD 5, P12.*

Teachers also pointed out that there are parents who never have time to attend school functions or find out how the child is doing academically. *“Even when you call the parent, they do not cooperate. When you want to work with parents, they are not available. Some children are left with a grandmother who may not understand much about the school. Sometimes the parents think you hate their child- ‘unaonea mtoto wangu’. FGD 1, T2.* Kiswahili way of expressing that somebody is against their child.

Abusive parents: Some parents physically abuse their children, and this affects the child’s learning. *“Some parents are always beating their children which creates fear in them. Such children look lost in thoughts in class suggesting they are not paying attention to what is being taught”. FGD 5, P13.*

Permissive parents: Some parents felt that other parents did not have rules at home and left the children to their own devices as pointed out by this parent: *Some parents do not have control at home, for example not controlling TV watching. This TV becomes a major distractor for the children thus not able to read.”. FGD 4, P14.*

Under age parents: Teachers observed that some parents (mothers) are very young and therefore not sure of their roles or duties and lack resources to take care of their children including schooling. *“When girls who did not proceed to high school after grade 8 get pregnant they have problems in bringing up their children as they are still young and have no vocational training to utilize to earn a living. They generally do not know how to be parent as they are children themselves”. FGD 4, T4.*

Theme 3: Community Factors

Parents felt that the happenings in the community affect the children in school. Some parents felt that at times the future looks bleak. This parent says: *“There are those of our children who have completed university and are not getting jobs, and this is a deterrent to those in schools because they wonder why they are working so hard for and there is no job opportunity”. FGD 5, P15.*

Teachers pointed out that availability of drugs of abuse in the community affected learning of children. Teachers in the urban school setting noted that their pupils are targeted by drug peddlers. Two teachers voice the following: *“In this town, drug use is very high, and drug*

peddlers sell to anybody including school going children and this makes them drop out of school". FGD 5, P14. "There are people who sell drugs and they force the school boys to sell them and take the money to them (peddlers). This affects the children learning as they fear going to school since they are threatened, or when they attend school, they do not pay attention in class". FGD 7 T6.

Theme 4: Factors within the child

Parents and teachers perceived that factors within the child affects their learning. Several of these factors were mentioned as follows. *"Children get stresses when pressured by parent to get high marks to go to schools like the Alliances High School (two secondary schools known for their academic prowess) and the child's academic strength is not that of getting marks to take her or him to the Alliances". FGD 3, P16.*

Teachers also pointed out that children get stressed from home. A teacher reports: *"A certain parent complained that the daughter got married for two weeks over the holiday. The teacher talked to the girl and she confided in the teacher and said that she was not married but she ran away from the mother because of her (mother) behaviour. My mother works in a bar and sometimes when she comes home drunk, she comes with a man and they get intimate. Our house is one roomed. I had to get away as I was too embarrassed by what my mother was doing. The girl's academic performance has really declined". FGD 2, T1.*

Behaviour problems were pointed out by the parents as affecting the academic performance of the children. A parent says the following regarding her child: *"My child is ten years and is a real truant. He leaves home in uniform only for me to be told he was seen out of school and its school time. He was influenced by another boy whose mother does not care. The headteacher is sympathetic. What can I do to him?" FGD 5, P18.*

According to the parents, a child can be a problem even when the parents does their best. *"The parent ensures that she is doing everything possible to ensure that the child grows up into a responsible person, but this particular child lacks the will to do the right thing. As a parent you give him/her school materials like books and pens, but the child loses them on daily basis. This parent is left with the burden of buying these things every day. And you notice that this is an acquired behavior because as the child grows up it gets worse". FGD 4, P10.*

Drug abuse can influence a child to perform poorly academically and even drop out of school. *"There was a boy of this school, young and small bodied. I saw that boy smoking cigarette when he was about 10 years old. He dropped out of school and now is a 'boda boda' motorbike rider". FGD 5 P20.*

Some children are reported to have learning difficulties in class. This parent expresses: *"My child is in grade 7. She has spelling and pronunciation problems. She does not know how to differentiate words and is unable to write a composition. I must help her all the time. The problem is from both the teacher and the child". FGD 3 P21.*

Teachers also pointed out that there are children with learning difficulties in their schools. *“We experience slow learners, who do not understand very simple concepts or recognizing numbers”. FGD 2, T8. “One may have some cases of children who cannot copy something from the blackboard to their exercise books yet they do not have eye problems”. FGD4 T9. “I have been in contact with some pupils who are very good in mathematics but have a problem in languages. Others can do languages well but cannot do mathematics”. FGD 4 T10.*

Discussion.

In the current study, parents and teachers gave their views on factors that they felt affected learning of the children in their respective schools. What was important to note was that there was agreement in themes and subtheme between the parents and teachers' perceptions. However, parents and teachers apportioned blame on each other. Parents and teachers identified the following factors that they perceived affected learning of the children: School environment, Home environment, Community environment and factors within the child .

School Environment

Both parents and teachers perceived that few resources in schools and congestion in classes affected learning. These findings are similar to those found by other researchers in other studies (Bizimana & Orodtho, 2014). The introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2002 saw an influx in enrolment and this led to congestions in classes especially where new ones were not constructed (Waita, Mulei, & Kalai, 2015). The same study pointed out the pupil-teacher ratio became higher than the recommended. A study by Nasongo, Majanga and Sylvia, (2011) reported that Free Primary Education led to increased enrolments in schools which created increased class sizes and Pupil-Teacher Ratios. According Waita et al., (2015), there is a relationship between class size and ratio of teachers, where high teacher-student ratio leads to lower academic performance in the national exam in a study carried out in Kenya. According to Schanzenbach, (2014) class size matters especially in the lower grades. This is the time the children are learning how to read, write and do arithmetic and therefore will require individual attention. Teachers are not comfortable teaching large classes. This is because it is difficult to engage students in practical work, students concentrate less and teaching becomes teacher centered with level of student participation being low (Gobena, 2014). In this study, both teachers and parents agreed that schools experienced shortage of physical and human (teachers) resources. It possible that when teachers are overworked, they become less productive in schools.

Home environment

Within the home environment, parenting was agreed upon as really having a negative effect on learning by both parents and teachers. Inter-parental relationship was reported by parents as affecting a child's school learning. These findings are similar to those of which have shown that children and adolescents who have experienced inter-parental conflict to attain lower academic success (Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2008; Parsa, Nor Yaacob, Redzuan, Parsa, & Esmaeili, 2014). These children also suffer from several social and emotional problems including aggressive behavior, depression, anxiety, decreased social competence, and

diminished academic performance (Edleson, 1999; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Koenen, Moffitt, Caspi, Taylor, & Purcell, 2003)

Not listening to the needs of the child were pointed as leading to academic failure. According to research, parental behaviors such as warmth, acceptance, support and involvement and parent-child relationships where the parents portrays openness, closeness and warmth have been pointed as powerful tools to promote a positive socio-emotional, behavioural, and academic development (Garthe, Sullivan, & Kliewer, 2015; Ginevra, Nota, & Ferrari, 2015; Shumow & Lomax, 2002; Suijadi, Lorenz, Wickrama, & Conger, 2011; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Wilder, 2014).

Child abuse, practiced by both parents and teachers and identified by parents and teachers as leading to low academic achievement, is consistent with other researches. The perception by parents that teachers abuse children (physically and emotionally) are reported in other studies (Theoklitou, Kabitsis, & Kabitsi, 2012; Chianu, 2000; Dupper & Dingus, 2008; Shumba, 2002). Studies report that children are punished by teachers in different ways while in schools with corporal punishments being more prevalent in primary schools (Clacherty, Donald, 2005b; Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998). Abuse of children is also done by their parents. A UNICEF report of 2010 regarding the status of child abuse by parents in 33 countries, children are abused including physically by their parents (UNICEF, 2010). Abuse of children leads to poor academic outcomes (Sherr et al., 2015). Its interesting to note that parents can identify abuse as being different from the normal disciplining process carried out by parents. Beating children in Kenya is a common method of disciplining children but inflicting injury and constant beating is felt to be abuse.

Child neglect perceived by parents as also affecting the child's learning has been reported by other researchers. A study by Sattar, Rizwan and Shabbir (2012), reported that school absenteeism was due to parents engaging their children in household work and not sending them to school (Sattar, Rizwan, & Shabbir, 2012). Similar findings on relationship between child neglect and lower academic achievement of the students have been reported (Kendall-Tackett & Eckenrode, 1996). It has been shown that younger parents are at a higher risk of abusing their children compared to the older parents (Al Dosari, Ferwana, Abdulmajeed, Aldossari, & Al-Zahrani, 2017). In the current study, teachers pointed out that the younger parents had more problems with child neglect. Parents in our study reported that when a parent neglects his/her duty over the child, the child has discipline issues. This negligence was also related to those parents who fail to attend teacher-parent conferences leading to low academic outcomes. Such activities of the parents show lack of parental involvement in the child's education. Among the six forms of parental involvement identified by Epstein, (1995), establishing home environments that support learning, learning at home, and participating in school decision-making processes seem to have been violated by some of the parents in the study. Parents are expected to be involved in both home based and school based school activities (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Therefore, there are signs that some parents fail in both activities, thereby affecting the learning of the children negatively. Low parental involvement in schools has also been reported in other studies (Bæck, 2010; Gross, & Pochop, 2007).

As pointed out by parents and teachers in this study, poverty interferes with the ability to send children to and sustain them in school with evidence showing that pupils from poor families do not perform as well academically as fellow pupils from richer families (Reardon, 2011; Steele, 1998; Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). The Kenya Government introduced free primary education (FPE) in 2003 to ensure access to education by all children. Despite this, there are several costs associated with going to school, top among them being able to buy school uniform as also reported. Kainuwa and Yusuf, (2013) point out that poverty not only affects school attendance but also affects a child's psychological well-being making such a child not concentrate in class. This is supported by Evans, Kremer and Ngatia, (2013) who in their research point out that though many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have eliminated school fees, other significant costs remain, which include the cost of providing a school uniform for a child. A child without uniform cannot attend school as all children are expected to go to school in uniform. When money is scarce, the child stays home and thereby significantly misses out on several days of school and this influences the final grades of the child. A study in rural schools in Kenya found that giving a school uniform significantly reduced school absenteeism by 38% with effects being much larger for poorer pupils who did not previously own a uniform where a 64% reduction in school absenteeism was observed (Evans et al., 2013).

As reported in this study, other studies have shown an association between food insecurity, poor nutrition, poor academic performance. Children and teenagers with insufficient food are more likely to miss school and to repeat a grade than food sufficient children and teenagers, and poor nutrition leads to poor cognitive development of children leading to poor academic performance (Alaimo, Olson, Frongillo, Briefel, & Briefel, 2001; Rausch, 2013). The parents pointed out that when the family lacks food, the child is not able to go to school while teachers pointed that such children do not pay attention in class. A longitudinal study following children over three years reports that children who come from homes with persistent food insufficiency showed a smaller increase in both reading and mathematics performance compared to their peers from more food secure homes over the three years (Zhang, Hebert, & Muldoon, 2005). Kristjansson et al., (2007) concluded that school feeding can benefit weight gain, school attendance and math achievement though the effect is small.

Community factors were described by the parents as influencing the child's academic performance. Neighborhood poverty identified by parents and teachers in this study as affecting learning outcomes of children was also identified by other researches which have shown that neighborhood effects such neighborhood poverty, negatively influences children's achievement and behavior (Anderson, Leventhal, & Dupéré, 2014). Current unemployment rates in Kenya is about 7.4 with unemployment rate of the age group 20-24 years old being 19.2%. This means that many youths completing universities and colleges are not getting jobs (KNBS, 2018). This affects youth in school as they do not feel the need to complete education as they are not likely to get employment as was pointed out by the parents.

Finally, factors within the child affects their academic performance. Parents and teachers pointed out that children with learning problems do not perform well academically. Different

studies have pointed out that there is a familial relationship in learning disabilities, therefore pointing out the role of genetics (Snowling & Melby-Lervåg, 2016; Scerri & Schulte-Köme, 2010; Grigorenko, 2005; Olson, Keenan, Byrne, & Samuelsson, 2014). Research points out that children with learning deficits have their academic skills interfered with, therefore their grades are low or experience academic failures. Such children have low self-esteem, are demoralized, have social skills deficits, and are likely to drop out of school (Kohli, Malhotra, Mohanty, Khehra, & Kaur, 2005). Parents also perceived that children with behavior problems do not perform well academically. Conduct problems are prevalent in school going youth (Mbwayo & Mathai, 2016).

Limitation: This study was conducted in only seven Kenyan primary schools. Since the study was a qualitative study, we cannot make a generalization to other parents with children in primary schools or teachers teaching in primary schools. However, the study forms a basis for other similar studies in the other Counties of Kenya.

Policy Implication: This study has several policy implications. While it is commendable for the government to have all the school age children enrolled in schools, the government needs to ensure that resources both human and physical are enough, otherwise the children will be in schools but do not achieve the good academic grade. The heads of schools need to work hard and improve teacher - parents' relationships. This would lead to feelings of trust by the two groups for better academic outcomes of the pupils. There is need for community engagement to address some of the vices in the community that interfere with learning for example drug peddling. Parenting can also be improved from the different forums for example the media, church or experts to help parents with parenting challenges.

Conclusion

The study has pointed out factors that parents and teachers perceive to affect the learning of children in primary schools and these findings are consistent with other local and international findings. This study being exploitive in nature, lays foundation for other studies to be carried out in other Counties in Kenya. The findings can also form the basis of likely interventions in any one chosen area in order to improve learning of pupils in schools.

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Table 1:

Main themes and subthemes

Main Theme	Sub themes
School Environment	Teachers: 1.Discriminating and rejecting their children, 2.Unreasonable reasons for punishing the pupils; 3. Teachers not being interested in the academic performance of the pupils; 4.Emotional abuse of the pupils by the teachers; 5. Teachers having personal problems
	Physical resources 1.Lack of books 2.Congestion in classes (teacher -child ratio)
Home Environment	Poverty
	Parenting: 1.Conflicts at home 2. Prevailing family dynamics 3. Parental Neglect 4. Failure to attend school functions 5. Abusive parents 6. Permissive parents 7. Very young parents-underage parents
Community environment	1.Lack of employment for those young people who have cleared school 2. Presence of drug of abuse in the community
Factors within the child	Stressed child Children with behaviour problems Children abusing drugs Children with Learning problems