

Original Research Article

Parental level of Education and Students' Academic Ambition- A case study of Secondary Schools in Laikipia County, Kenya¹Eshphan W. Kingori; ²Dr. Isaac W. Kingori^{1,2}.School of Education, Department of Psychology, Counselling and Education Foundations Laikipia University, Kenya

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Abstract: Education is an essential human activity as it enhances the capacity of any society to fashion and model individuals to function effectively in their environment. In regard to this, it can be argued that it is one of the most effective medium through which a nation can achieve its aspirations in socio-economic realms of human development. It can thus be reasoned that for a nation to attain higher levels of development in all spheres of life its education must of necessity be capable of equipping its learners with superior literacy levels which is determined largely by their levels of academic aspiration. Data based on students' performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination in Laikipia County for the period running between 2009 and 2013 shows that more than 70% of the students could not secure entry to university based careers thus denying them a chance to pursue advanced literacy levels. There is need to mention that students' academic achievement is associated with many correlates though studies conducted in many parts of the world have severally indicated that students' academic ambition is one of the critical correlate of academic performance. In view of this fact, the study sought to establish level of academic ambition among students in public secondary schools in Laikipia County and the extent to which it could be associated with parental level of education. The study was rooted on Festinger's social comparison theory and it employed *ex post facto* research design. Data were collected through a questionnaire from 375 students in 106 public secondary schools in the County who were randomly selected from a targeted population of 11,580 Form three and four students. Nominal scale data were analyzed through percentages and frequency counts while ordinal scale data were analyzed by use of χ^2 statistic at .05 alpha level of confidence using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data showed that parental education had a positive influence on respondents' academic ambition. Nonetheless, the link between level of parental education and respondents' academic ambition was weak (Cramer's $V=.145$) and statistically insignificant ($\chi^2=21.22$; $df= 15$; $p> .05$). The study also revealed that students' academic ambition increased with increase in parents' level of formal education ($p> .05$). These findings have important lessons on enhancement of students' academic ambition which among others include the need for schools to make their guidance and counselling departments revamped with a focus on addressing children hailing from homes where parental level of education is low.

Keywords: students' academic ambition, parental level of formal education, and students

Background to the study

Education is a very important human activity in view of the fact that it enhances the capacity of any society to fashion and model individuals to function effectively in their environment Kiumi, Nganga and Mukunga (2013) thereby going a long way in eliminating social as well as economic inequality (World Bank Group, 2012). In addition, education forms the basis upon which economic, social, cultural and political development of any nation is founded on (World Bank Group, 2012). In support of this observation, Psacharopoulos (2013) avers that formal education is the most effective medium through which a nation can achieve its aspirations in socio-economic and

political realms of human development. According to Kiumi and Bosire (2012) formal schooling enhances workers productivity, social mobility, equity in distribution of resources, and individual capacity to participate effectively in the political affairs of a nation.

Owing to the fact that, the provision of quality education to its citizens is both a human right and an essential area of investment Kenya in the 21st century is faced with new challenges among them meeting the ever increasing public demand for quality education and training (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Based on this view, it follows that education that education is the most reliable predictor of a nation's economic growth. In the

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same line of exploration, there is a need to mention that formal education in Kenya needs to address both access and transition challenges as well as low academic achievement challenges for the country to attain the projected middle level economic status as stipulated in her Vision 2030 growth agenda (Republic of Kenya, 2015).

The possibility of Kenya realizing the projected middle level economic status as envisaged in its Vision 2030 development blueprint (Republic of Kenya, 2015) may turn out to be a mirage due to students' low academic achievement in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) exit examination (KNEC, 2015). This is not a far-fetched observation if we take cognizance of the fact that the proportion of candidates in Laikipia County who attained minimum university entry point (Grade C+) averaged at 28% for the period running between 2009 and 2013 while nearly 72% of candidates could not directly transit to university level of education in the aforementioned period (2009-2013).

Several studies (for instance, Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013; Bongani, 2014) have severally shown that one of the critical antecedents of students' academic achievement is their level of academic ambition. This association is grounded on the premise that, ambition sparks the desire to achieve in school in an endeavour to attain the goals set in one's life

Inferring from the foregoing studies' findings, the study sought to find out level of students' academic ambition in Laikipia County and the extent to which students' desire to achieve may be associated to parental education. It was hoped that this line of investigation will assist in responding to the question relating to why students in the study locale have been under achieving in KCSE examination.

In order to achieve the primary goal of the study the following null hypothesis was formulated and tested through χ^2 statistic at 0.05 alpha level.

HO₁: Parental education has no statistically significant influence on students' academic ambition in public secondary schools in Laikipia County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The study employed the Social Comparison Theory (SCT) which was advanced by Leon Festinger who was an American social psychologist. The theory

(Festinger, 2005) holds that individuals have an inner drive to gain accurate self-evaluation. In other words, people have an innate need to assess their beliefs and opinions. The theory further argues that, individuals use other people as their prime locus of comparison. However, propensity to compare oneself with others lowers when his/her abilities and opinions becomes more divergent, which implies that the tendency for an individual to compare himself/herself to others decreases if they are much more different in regard to the individuals' opinions or abilities.

The theory in addition, advances the view that there is always pressure in a group to reach uniformity of opinions or beliefs. In other words, groups are typically characterized by effort to reach agreement which is based primarily on pressure toward uniformity. This as has been averred by Collier (1994) can run counter to attempts for individual members to achieve. In other words, group members may strive to do well but only proximally better than the members of the group.

Quaglia and Cobb (1996) has observed that social comparison theory can help explain individual differences in level of aspiration. This is because, as has been explicated by the theory, the group serves as a powerful anchor that tends to limit the level of individual aspiration. Moreover, people tend to use others with similar levels of abilities as a source of social comparison. Due to the potential threat of social isolation (ostracism), the performance of those with high ability tends to be restricted since performance levels are typically anchored around the mean.

Conceptual Framework

The study was premised on the reasoning that, students' academic ambition depends on parental level of education. In this regard, the study was of the opinion that students who hailed from families where parents had acquired high level of literacy (independent variables) stood a high likelihood of being more academically ambitious (dependent variable) and vice versa. The study similarly opined that the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variables focused by the study may be moderated either positively or negatively by three extraneous variables which were favourability of the home environment in terms of parental level of education and inspiration from the significant others in the society. The conceptualized relationship between the independent, dependent and extraneous variables subsumed in the study is presented in Figure 1.

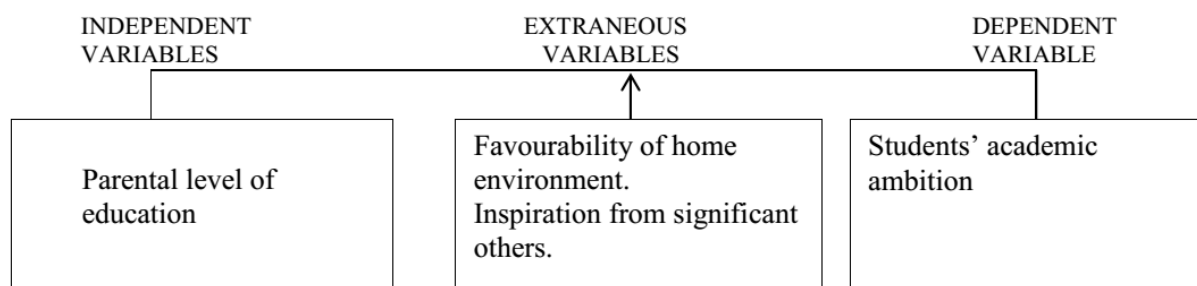


Figure 1: Interrelationship between variables subsumed in the study.

The basic idea in the conceptual framework model depicted in Figure 1 is that even in a situation where home environments are unfavourable in terms of low level of parental literacy students' academic ambition are likely to be high if the extraneous variables are favourable and vice versa.

Literature Review

Studies have been carried out on the link between students' academic aspiration and parents' level of formal education. The driving force in a majority of these studies is an attempt to find out how parental education may predict students' motivation to learn and hence aspiration to attain higher levels of educational achievement. For instance, a study carried out by Hoff (2003) in the United States of America showed that family heads who had higher levels of formal educational achievement used a variety of languages as they interacted with their children, a factor that considerably enhanced their children's motivation to achieve in school. This drive the study observed may not be the case among children raised in families where level of parents' formal education is low as such parents may not have good command of language which in most cases may deny them the ability to influence their children's language fluency. It needs to be noted that lack of language fluency may impact negatively on students' understanding of the content taught in school. This may lead to poor academic performance which may lower their motivation to excel.

Farver, Xu, Eppe and Lonigan (2006) carried out a research in Pennsylvania, in the United States of America whose goal was to establish the impact of home environment on kindergarten children's ability to learn. The study's outcomes among other findings showed that the presence of good parenthood at home was a notable precursor of pupils' motivation to learn. The study similarly observed that pupils' desire to achieve was positively linked to parents' level of education. The study attributed this finding to the fact that more educated parents are more likely to stimulate their children intellectually including the creation of a psychologically save home environment. These positive attributes are less likely to be manifested in households headed by lowly educated parents.

Jahagir and Rabia's (2014) study findings in Pakistan were consistent with the findings of Davies-Kean (2005). Using a sample size of 695 male students in the 18-35 years of age bracket across different levels of education (intermediate and masters) in the country, the study showed that students from homes where both parents had attained a minimum of bachelors degree qualification had a higher likelihood of demonstrating education aspiration related attributes such as self confidence, self reliance and limited chances of experiencing anxiety compared with their counterparts who were being brought up in families where parents had not secured university education.

Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) study sought to find out whether there is a relationship between parents' level of education and children's learning gains including other measures of success such as school attendance and respect for the rule of law. A major finding of this study was that comparatively, parents who had enriched educational experiences had a higher capacity to model positive social skills, problem solving skills, and positive moral values. These aspects of modelling, the study observed accounted for disparities in academic achievement, discipline and desire to excel between children from low educated parental backgrounds and those children who hailed from households whose parents had attained relatively higher levels of formal education, at least secondary education.

Another aspect of the impact of parents' level of formal education on children's success and ambition in school that has attracted the attention of researchers is the link between parents' education and level of concern for children progression in school. For instance, the studies undertaken by Ogunshola and Adewale (2012) and Okantey (2008) sought to find out whether parents' level of education has any differential effect on parents' interest on a child's performance in school. The two studies consistently demonstrated that parental level of formal education had a positive impact on parents' willingness to offer remedial education to their struggling children so as to enhance their performance at school. This finding seems to imply that while children from families where parents are lowly

educated may receive limited parental attention if they register undesirable performance, those brought up by educated parents have a higher likelihood of sustaining commendable performance for their parents may come in to assist any noted performance gaps. This, by implication may suggest that children from well educated parental backgrounds are more likely to achieve and aim higher compared to their counterparts from lowly educated parental backgrounds.

Research Methodology

The study employed *ex post facto* research design which is a research approach which is utilized in a situation whereby the independent and dependent variable(s) have already interacted. In consideration of this fact, the investigator cannot manipulate the independent variable so as to establish its influence on the dependent variable. As a result of this the influence of interaction between the independent and dependent variables is determined retrospectively (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The *ex post facto* research design was deemed appropriate for this study because other than describing and generating conclusions from nominal scale data, the study also undertook to determine retrospectively the extent to which parental

level of education could be influencing students' ambition to excel academically in Laikipia County.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires were administered to the students with the assistance of class teachers. The instrument sought for information from 375 randomly selected respondents from 106 public secondary schools. The questionnaire had 21 five point Likert scale items which measured students' level of academic ambition. The response options in the questionnaire ranged from strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The five ranges were allocated 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 scores respectively which meant that a high score represented a high level of academic ambition and vice versa. The expected maximum and minimum scores accruing from responses to the items were expected to be 5 and 1 respectively. Based on the expected mean scores, Students' Level of Academic Ambition (SLAA) Index was formulated which was expected to act as a guide for interpreting students' level of academic ambition. The SLAA was grouped into four quotas representing very low, low, high and very high level of academic ambition respectively as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Expected Mean Score Ranges by S LAA

Mean Score	LAA
1- 1.99	Very Low
2- 2.99	Low
3- 3.99	High
4- 5.00	Very High

Source: Field Data, 2016.

Validity of the Instrument

Expertise was sought from experts in the Department of Psychology, Counselling, and Educational Foundations in Laikipia University- Kenya and their input was used to validate the instrument for they were called upon to make comments which included suggestions which in their view would enhance the instrument's efficacy in gathering data related to students' academic ambition. Using suggestions and comments given by the experts, changes which were deemed appropriate were effected in the instrument before undertaking the main study.

Reliability of the Instrument

Two aspects of the instrument's reliability were estimated: internal and external reliability. Internal reliability which is a measure of the extent to which an instrument will measure a single idea was estimated through Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient obtained was .81 (or 81%) which implied that the 21 items were measuring students' academic ambition 81% of the time and that error may have occurred only 19% of the time. External reliability, which is the extent to which an instrument is capable of generating similar

results when used more than once to gather data from a given sample under consistent conditions, was estimated through test-retest technique. This involved administration of the revised instrument to students (n=37) in two schools in the neighbouring Baringo East Sub-County and the scores obtained from the two instrument administration phases were correlated. The correlation coefficient obtained was $r = .80$.

Data Analysis

The objective of the study was to establish the extent to which parental level of education may influence students' academic ambition. Ordinal data was analyzed using chi square statistic. The objective of data analysis was to find out whether the distribution of respondents in different subpopulations (that is those from homes where parents had no formal education or from homes where the parents had attained uncertified level of education that is those who had dropped out of primary and secondary schools, and also parents who had achieved either secondary, diploma, degree and post graduate degree levels of education) would be distributed equally or not in the four mean score ranges namely, very low, low, high and very high as outlined

in Table, and if the distribution was equal in the four score ranges was it statistically significant. To determine the strength of the relationship between parents' level of education and student's academic ambition a Cramer's V test (post-test) was conducted.

The results of the chi square test with respect to the relationship between students' academic ambition and parental level of education is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Household Head's Level of Formal Education by Students' LAA

Level of Formal Education	Distribution of Respondents by LAA Score				Total
	1- 1.99	2- 2.99	3- 3.99	4- 5.00	
No formal Education	15 (43)	12(34)	7(20)	1(3)	35(10)
Primary and Secondary dropouts	30(25)	22(18)	22(19)	47(39)	121(36)
Secondary	26(24)	19(17)	10(9)	54(50)	109(32)
Diploma	7(23)	5(17)	4(13)	14(47)	30(9)
Bachelor's degree	3(10)	6(19)	8(26)	14(45)	31(10)
Post graduate degree	-	1(9)	2(18)	8(73)	11(3)
Total	81	65	55	138	337(100)

(Figures in parenthesis represent percentages)

N=337

$\chi^2=21.22$; df= 15; $p> .05$; Cramer's V= .145

A cursory observation of the data in Table 2 shows that 81 respondents scored in the lowest range of points (1- 1.99 mean score). It can also be observed that the proportion of the 81 respondents tended to decrease towards the more educated heads of the families.

An observation of the data outlined in Table 2 further reveals that the number of respondents who were from homes where either of the two parents or both had Bachelors and Post Graduate degree qualification increased towards the high range mean score points (specifically, 4 and 5). The opposite appeared to be the case with regard to students who hailed from homes where both parents had not attained graduate level of education. The emerging picture from the data seems to indicate that level of students' academic ambition increased with increase in parents' level of education. This seems to point out that parental level of education had a bearing in their children desire to succeed in school. Nevertheless, the influence between parental level of formal education and students' academic ambition was weak as shown by a low value of Cramer's V which was 0.145. The influence between parental education and students' ambition to excel in school was statistically insignificant ($p> .05$). In this regard, H_{O1} was retained and conclusion made that parental level of education and students' ambition to succeed academically were statistically independent.

The finding that parental level of education has a statistically insignificant influence on students' ambition to excel is inconsistent with earlier studies both outside and within Kenya. For instance, Stevenson, Lee and Stigler (1986) study on Chinese, Japanese and

American children revealed that children from homes where parents had attained high levels of formal education were more likely to aspire to achieve in school compared with their counterparts whose parents had lower levels of educational achievement. The study had observed that educated parents are more likely to be more involved in their children's education thereby motivating them to achieve in comparison with lowly educated parents. Another study whose findings were in concurrence with this study's finding is Khan, Iqbal and Tasneen (2015) which had observed that parental willingness to partner with teachers and hence increase their children's ambition to study was considerably influenced by their (parents') level of education.

In Kenya, the study by Ngware, Kosimbei, Muthaka and Onsumu (2006) on financing of secondary education in the country found that children from homes where parents were had attained either a bachelor degree or a post graduate degree tended to emulate their parents, a factor the study observed motivated the children to not only be active in school but also to ambitiously achieve higher academic related goals. Similarly, a study conducted by Ollatunde and Wanjohi (2011) in Kenya showed that children from homes where parents had progressed beyond secondary level of education had a favourable attitude towards school and hence their desire to attain high levels of education achievement.

Differing findings on the beneficial influence of head of household level of education on children's academic aspiration, have however been observed in some studies. For example, a study done in Australia by James (2001) did not establish substantial correlation

between parents' level of education and children's educational aspiration. The study, among other findings noted that children from families headed by both low and high educated parents display similar levels of academic aspiration depending on their personal desires.

Conclusion of the Study

The study concluded that students' level of ambition to achieve academically increased with increase in parental level of formal education. This implies that students from families where both or one of the parent had attained high levels of literacy were more likely to be more ambitious in their desire to achieve higher levels of academic achievement during their secondary level education and in subsequent levels of education compared with students hailing from homes where parental level of education was low.

Recommendation

In view of the fact that, students' ambition to excel academically increased with increase in parental level education there is a need for school administrators (for instance, principals, Board of Management, and Parents Association) to identify and collate information regarding parents' level of education and try to mitigate low levels of education through sensitization fora. This would go a long way in creating awareness on their role expectations in motivating their children to achieve in school.

Additionally, stakeholders in the education sector need to rethink on diversified ways of motivating children especially those hailing from families where home environments are not conducive for learning by virtue of low level of parental education.

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