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Influence of Parental Conflict on Learners' Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Kathiani Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya

By

Mutisya Pauline Ndanu, Anyona Jared and Mwalw'a Shem

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out the influence of parental conflicts on the academic performance of pupils in public primary schools in Kathiani Sub-County in Machakos County, Kenya. The study was guided by two research questions: What influence does parental conflict have on learner's performance and behavior in public primary schools in Kathiani Sub-county? What can be done to help improve the academic performance of learners from families faced with parental conflict? The study was grounded on the Vygotsky's Social Cognitive Learning Theory of Human Cultural and Bio-Social Development, commonly referred to as cultural historical psychology or Vygotsky Circles. Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Research Design guided the study. The study used cross sectional survey design in quantitative research approach whereas in qualitative research approach, phenomenology was used. The sample size was 288 learners, 144 teachers and 72 head teachers in 72 public primary schools. Stratified random sampling techniques were used to pick the sample. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect data. The research instruments were validated through pilot testing and their reliability through test re-test techniques. The quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS version 20.0 to generate frequencies and percentages that summarized data. Qualitative data were coded and categorized into themes and presented using narrative form. Research findings indicated that children were severely damaged emotionally by bitter, long-lasting and ongoing conflict between parents. The study recommended that the head teachers call for meetings in their respective schools to sensitize the parents on the need to solve their differences without involving the children and every school needed to have a functioning guidance and counseling panel of teachers.

Key words: Kenya, Mackakos, Kathiani, Academic performance, Damage, Influence learners, Performance, Parental Conflict, Public primary schools

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Background to the Study

Primary Education is a major foundation for social-economic and political development of a nation (UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, if the quality of education is undermined, the schools may not give adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to pupils that a country needs in its citizens in order to guarantee the role of education in development (World Bank 2002). The development of the skills and knowledge of the people of a nation through the education process constitutes one of the prerequisites of national development. Ndani (2010) explains family as a group that has individuals taking up the roles of a father, mother and a child as interactionists clarify. The family is the foundation of a child's knowledge, providing for its physical as well as intellectual needs and acting as the teaching foundation for its moral development. When that foundation becomes destabilized, children deteriorate intellectually, physically and morally.

Family has no viable substitute (George, 2012). It remains an institution where a child finds love, warmth, care, acceptance, support, and personal development. A family may breakdown when children may be separated from one or both parents through conflicts, war, disaster, accident or ill health of a parent. In the case of family breakdown due to civil war and conflict, tracing parents of children and vice versa is vital. Other causes of children being brought up by only one parent are family breakdown resulting from separation or divorce, desertion, domestic violence or unwed motherhood.

Relationship conflicts occur because of the presence of strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication, or repetitive negative behaviors. Parents have different ideas, opinions, values and priorities which cause disputes among them hence affecting their children. According to Barthassat (2014), the assessment of the effects of parental disputes on the child is therefore of vital significance. Children can react differently to the divorce of their parents based on conditions, such as a child's age at the stage of divorce or level of family conflict, as Porter (2010). Conflict between parents has a profound effect on children, causing many problems, such as behavior and academic difficulties. Parental attitudes have a strong impact not only on family relationships but also on the attitudes and behavior of children.

Conflict according to Hesami, Doulatian, Shams & Alavi Majd (2010) is considered as a global issue because it causes families to collapse and threatens man's life and health. Conflict is a hidden and constant epidemic. Even increasing conflict in public places has created a lot of concern among psychiatrists, sociologists and criminologists. Family conflict affects much more than the outside conflicts because family is the essential core of the society as well as the center

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of mental health and reliability. It has an important role in the adolescent's character formation and it cannot be replaced with other connections.

According to Carroll, (2012) a person's identity is defined by fundamental evaluations of what ideals should prevail in a person's life. To become a person requires the capacity to articulate one's position with the necessary depth expected to determine compatible courses of action. Resolving conflict as a result helps one become a stronger agent in shaping a desired life of one's own children. Therefore, persistent parental conflict is a situation where parents have frequently disagreed for a long time in an annoying way that cannot be stopped and keeps on repeating itself. It is common and normal for two parents to have different ideas, opinions, values and priorities, but the way they resolve conflict is what makes the difference. Basically, the wish for all children is that their parents will not argue or fight with each other and that they will be able to work out problems in a mature manner without resorting to damaging remarks and behaviors. In fact, this desire has a powerful foundation as continuing, unresolved, chronic parental conflict, whether the parents are living together or separated, has an incredibly adverse effect on their children's present and future mental health (Lindsey, 2009). This forms the basis for the current study as children are already impacted negatively from childhood hence affects their academic performance in schools.

Moreover, adolescents can be harmed, by conflicts and struggle between their parents. Domestic conflict is a public health problem, because it influences the individual's health and welfare negatively as well as breeding mentally disturbed adults (Huang, Wang & Warrenner, 2010; Vameghi, Feizzadeh, Mirabzadeh & Feizzadeh, 2010). Reviewed studies of Davies & DiLillo (2008) have shown that those children who observed domestic conflict may experience behavioral problems like stroke and truancy. They may also experience affective problems of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem; cognitional problems like poor performance at the university and physical problems of insomnia and weak motor skills.

Columbia Law School (2014) asserts that negative impact on children's mental health is very detrimental to their academic performance. What is psychologically very damaging for kids is for them to experience the ongoing, unresolved, hostile disputes of their parents. Research shows that children are generally resilient and extremely adaptive and can deal with challenging circumstances such as separation and divorce and adapt to them. What emotionally significantly harms kids is a bitter, long-lasting continuing conflict between parents, whether or not parents live together. The longer the parental clash persists and the higher the tension between the parents, the higher the probability that issues such as mental and behavioral issues such as anxiety, depression, sleep problems, low self-esteem will result for children. According to Gratz, (2006) the task of bringing up children is as beautiful as it is hard and as complicated as it is easy, since the family is the first school and the parents are the first teachers. Therefore, the pattern of behavior that a child learns and follows is in the hands of the parents. It is the duty of parents to educate their children as this is the children's right since the parent conferred life to them.

According to Ebong, (2016) parents are key partners in the education of their children. Parental encouragement is crucial for the children to do well in school since the support of a

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parent is a key to success to a learner and to the school at large. Parents are the first teachers of their children. They play a crucial role in helping their children to learn. Maina, (2010) has the same concept when he indicates that parents are crucial agents of socialization in society since they train their children on the roles of behavior, therefore setting the child's basic personality pattern from early childhood to adolescence. According to Lee (2011) it is within the family relationship that a child learns the first lesson in social living and behavior. As quoted by Mgaya, (2010) a mother-child interaction is seen as the primary influence on a child's development of academic competence, supplemented by extended family network, school and church institutions and cultural norms.

According to Kloosterman, (2011) learning is a process by which a child acquires and retains knowledge, skills, attitudes and capabilities that cannot be attributed to inherited behavior patterns or physical growth. Effective learning, according to Ebong (2016), is influenced by four factors: first the supporting inputs from parents, teachers and the community; second, learners' characteristics like health, nutritional status and motivation; third, enabling conditions like school leadership, capable teaching staff, sufficient time spent in school by educators and learners, expectations of students, teachers' attitudes, rewards and incentives for learning; and finally, teaching-learning process including time, varied teaching strategies, assignments, assessment and feedback. Children who come from family backgrounds with persistent parental conflict may be affected in their academic achievement.

In Kenya there are many cases of family breakdown and parents are finding it hard to bring up a child alone due to the numerous responsibilities involved. One of the major causes of family breakdown in Kenya is domestic violence. It has been a persistent problem in Kenya particularly in the countryside where there are strong rooted values about sex roles and marriage which have allowed domestic violence to be active. According to Chebogut and Ngeno (2010), available data shows there has been a large increase of reported cases of domestic violence from approximately 299 in 2006, to 412 in 2007, and then to over 400 in 2008. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey of 2008-2009, 39% of the women were abused by a husband or partner.

However, the 2008 report by the Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya said that almost 75% of women they surveyed reported having been beaten by their marriage partners. Pre-primary school children cannot adequately comprehend this abuse and they think that they are the cause of the conflict. This can make them have feelings of guilt, concern and fear yet they do not have the potential to communicate their feelings orally. As a result, the projection of the problem is often seen in change of behavior whereby the child prefers being alone, and shows regressed behaviors such as tantrums. In addition, feeding and sleeping problems, attention problems in class, indiscriminate anxiety and headaches are frequent resulting in low learning outcomes and the child may find it challenging to have secure friendships.

Researchers in previous years have tried to find out the reasons behind poor performance in public primary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. The reasons given vary from low economic status due to the harsh climatic conditions of the region to understaffing and lack of enough physical facilities in the schools. It is pertinent to note that researchers in this geographical

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region have not yet looked into problems that might be emanating from the family or home environment that could be contributing to dismal performance on the part of some specific learners. The researchers have not sought to find out how and to what extent the family background contributes to a learner's general academic performance. It is on this note that the researcher was interested in investigating on influence of parental conflict on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Kathiani Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya.

II. Statement of the Problem

Globally, regionally and locally, some families are breaking down through separation and divorce. A family breaks down when a marriage fails to work. Just before a family breakdown, the likelihood of frequent fights, spouse battering and quarrels greatly increases. Mooney et.al (2009) indicate that family breakdown causes parents to be tied down with emotional issues and therefore, they may not support their children socially, emotionally and even in their education as would be expected. Many studies have been done showing how the emergence of single parent families after divorce jeopardizes a big number of children's emotional well-being leading to behavioral problems and low learning outcomes. However despite the many studies, many families continue breaking thus negatively affecting primary school children's learning outcomes.

The academic performance of a child is influenced by the parental background, social, economic and cultural practices. Parents need to play their role fully in order to promote the academic performance of their children in school. It has been established that parents who abandon their children at their early ages force them to take parental roles which they are not fully prepared for. Such children do not do well at school. In Kenya today, hardly a week goes by before it is reported in the press that as a consequence of family disputes a kid or his or her parents or both were hospitalized or murdered. Other reported instances are those where a female packs with her children and leaves her marriage home because she can no longer tolerate the conduct of her husband. There are even instances where people are moving out of their homes in search of peace elsewhere. Suicidal murders have also occurred, where the family head kills his spouse and children before committing suicide. There is also the situation of street kids, some of whom are on the streets for running away from brutal home settings (Ebong, 2016). These events occur not only in remote rural areas, but also in urban regions. Kathiani Sub-county is not outstanding as some of these occurrences have also been recorded. It impacts on kids in their physical, mental, affective and even spiritual development when families are in conflict. If they continue to be exposed to a violent setting, their lives will be shut down or jailed. For some children, such an environment means they do not have access to formal education and their cognitive and affective developments are being manipulated. Despite the commitment of the Kenya Government to provide high quality primary education, outstanding academic performance has been a challenge in public primary schools. This study, therefore, sought to try to find out what can be done to alleviate the negative impact of parental conflicts on a learner's academic performance in Kathiani Sub-county, Machakos County, Kenya.

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Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Vygotsky's Social Cognitive Learning Theory of human cultural and bio-social development, commonly referred to as cultural historical psychology or Vygotsky Circles. The main proponents of this theory are Vygotsky, a Russian at the start of the 20th century, and Bruner, an American in the second half of the twentieth century (Alan Pritchard, 2009). Vygotsky's theory originated in Russia during the late 1920's and early 1930's, and over the years, his work has been examined, debated and amended to suite different educational environments (Yeschenko, 2017). This theory states that knowledge is constructed by individuals as they interact with other people and with the environment (Kolb, 2014). With this, learners explore their knowledge and continuously refine it by putting their ideas to work in the context of solving realistic problems. This tenet supported the curbing of influence of parental conflict on learner's academic performance in primary schools which was a great concern of this study.

Proponents of this theory believed that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. It focused on connections between people and the socio cultural context in which they act and interact and share experiences (Yeschenko, 2017). A major focus of this theory in this study is therefore to understand the ways in which teachers interact with learners and are able to understand problems that they encounter while learning at school (Wadende, Oburu & Morara, 2016). The current study sought to assess the influence of parental conflict on learner's academic performance in primary schools which advocates for collaborative interaction with learners to understand their problems, teaching and learning therefore enhancing innovation, interaction and critical thinking – key components of the vision 2030 and the big 4 development agenda items championed by the current Kenyan government.

In the current study, the focus was in the Vygotskian approach to classroom and outdoor instruction, which has strong theoretical implications for pedagogical practices to support student interaction with peers, parents, and the wider community as a contributing factor (Martinez, 2006, p. 698 as quoted in Yeschenko, 2017). The current study sought to assess the influence of parental conflict on learners' academic performance in public primary schools of Kathiani Sub-County.

In a Vygotskian framework, a key aspect of learning is often the “guide by others” approach (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). This Vygotskian approach to teaching and learning is supported in that learners from families with conflicts will be seen to be withdrawn hence creating room for an effective practice in guidance and counselling programmes (Bredenkamp, 2014). The current study deliberately chose the Vygotskian classroom as a natural theoretical framework because this approach is a key component enshrined in the guidance and counselling curriculum which was aimed at ensuring that children are given a firm foundation on which each child's competency is nurtured.

Vygotsky in this theory proposed the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to him, the ZPD is a theoretical space of understanding which is just above the level of understanding of a given individual. It is the area of understanding into which a learner will move next with support from a more knowledgeable peer or adult. In the zone of proximal development, a learner is able to work effectively, but only with support of a more competent

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partner or facilitator (Yeschenko, 2017). The attainment of this level of development is facilitated through mediated learning which involves collaboration between 'more knowledgeable people' and various tools available within the socio-cultural setting of the learner (Gordon & Browne, 2011; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). The classroom depiction of ZPD used to guide the current study is one of the learners actively constructing knowledge through social interaction and support from peers, facilitators, parents and other role models in the society as they interact and connect using ICT so as to creatively come up with innovations that should be founded in indigenous knowledge.

The concept of scaffolding as proposed by Vygotsky and Bruner refers to the supports provided to learners so as to assist them in making cognitive growth just beyond their reach (Bell, 2010). The support and guidance a learner receives was based on their needs to gain knowledge that they could not otherwise get independently. Teachers would therefore play specific roles within scaffolding so as to contribute to the guidance of children from conflict backgrounds. This scaffolding process will lead to self-confidence and capability in the young learners. The focus for this study was, therefore, to assess influence of parental conflict on learner's academic performance in primary schools of Kathiani Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya.

Four principles are applied in any Vygotskian classroom; that learning and development is a social and collaborative activity; Zone of Proximal Development can serve as a guide for curricular and lesson planning; learning should occur in a meaningful context and not separate from "real world." Those out of-school experiences should be related to the child's school experiences (Daniels, 2016). In the light and spirit of healing family conflicts towards learning potentials of children, the four principals were well positioned to guide the current study in critically assessing the influence of parental conflict on learner's academic performance in primary schools of Kathiani Sub-County.

Research Design and Methodology

This study used mixed method research approach, specifically a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Research Design that combined both quantitative and qualitative designs to guide the study. In quantitative paradigm, the cross sectional design was used to obtain information from principals, teachers and pupils at one point in time. In qualitative paradigm, Phenomenology design was used to obtain information from people with lived experiences concerning parental conflict and their interpretations. The study targeted all head teachers, teachers and pupils in public primary schools in Kathiani Sub-County, Machakos, Kenya. Stratified random sampling was used to select schools and students to participate in the study.

The strata was based on type of school. The researcher categorized the schools into boarding and day schools. The schools were placed into sub groups for instance, boys boarding, girls boarding, day/boarding mixed schools and day mixed schools. From each strata the researcher selected 30% of the schools using simple random sampling. In total 72 primary schools were sampled to participate in the study as advocated by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) that 30% target population is representative. The researcher also stratified pupils into class 7 and

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8, then used simple random sampling technique to sample 30 % of pupils from each stratum, totaling to 288 pupils. Classes 7 and 8 were considered mature enough to know the conflicts they experience in their families and were in a better position to assess the effects of family conflicts on their academic performance and inter personal relationships. Purposive sampling technique was employed to sample head teachers whose schools were selected for study. The same technique was employed to class teachers handling class seven and eight. The teachers were considered key in providing needed information as these classes experienced more challenges in parental conflict with their children.

Data collection instruments were questionnaires and interviews guides and were subjected to both content and face validity. Reliability for research instruments was determined through the test retest technique. Quantitative data from closed ended items in a questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20 to generate frequencies and percentages that summarized data and were presented in tables. Qualitative data extracted from the close-ended questionnaires and interview guides were categorized into themes and presented in narratives and direct quotes.

Analysis Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

Challenges caused by Parental conflict on learners' academic performance

The first research question requested pupils to point out whether parental conflict influences the learners' academic performance. The pupils were to tick the appropriate option using the following scale; SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NS=Not Sure, A=Agree SA=Strongly Agree. Their responses are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1: Learner's response on the challenges of parental conflict on the academic performance of learners

| Statement | SD | | D | | NS | | A | | SA | |
|--|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| I perform poorly when I see my parents infected by HIV/Aids | 8 | (10.0%) | 14 | (17.5%) | 7 | (8.8%) | 20 | (25.0%) | 31 | (38.8%) |
| Most parents get severely injured during the fight | 9 | (11.9%) | 11 | (13.8%) | 6 | (7.5%) | 20 | (25%) | 34 | (42.5%) |
| Parents conflicts make me lack basic needs | 8 | (10.0%) | 11 | (13.8%) | 2 | (2.5%) | 22 | (27.5%) | 35 | (43.8%) |
| Due to parents conflicts I don't always go to school | 11 | (13.8%) | 13 | (16.3%) | 0 | (0.0%) | 31 | (38.8%) | 25 | (31.3%) |
| Most pupils drop out of school due to their parents conflict | 10 | (12.5%) | 9 | (11.3%) | 8 | (10.0%) | 22 | (27.5%) | 31 | (38.8%) |
| Parents conflicts make me score low grades | 9 | (11.3%) | 9 | (11.3%) | 2 | (2.2%) | 28 | (35.0%) | 32 | (40.0%) |

Source: Field Data 2019

As shown in Table 1, 31(38.8%) of learners strongly agreed and 20(25%) agreed that a child performs poorly when they see their parents infected by HIV/Aids while 14 (17.5%) disagreed, 8(10.0%) strongly disagreed and 7(8.8%) were not sure. A majority of learners (63.8%) agreed that they perform poorly when they see their parents infected with HIV/Aids. The findings concur with those of Ebong (2016) in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Akwa Itom State in Nigeria that each child is born with certain vulnerabilities like bad temperaments. The child is also born with some protective factors like high intelligence and good coordination, which makes her resilient in the face of stress. These vulnerabilities and protective factors then interact with the child's environment and thus the environment can have quite different effects depending on the qualities the child brings to the interaction. The quality of parental relationship spill-over has an effect on the level of support they offer toward their children. Those whose marriage is full of discord have more negative relationships with their children according to Lee (2012) who studied the impact of marital discord of parents on Taiwanese adolescents' academic achievement. Their children show a high level of anxiety, depression and delinquent behavior.

On whether parents get severely injured during the fight, 34(42.5%) of learners strongly agreed and 20(25%) agreed while 11(13.8%) disagreed, 9(11.9%) strongly disagreed with 6(7.5%) were not sure. Pupils who have experienced parental conflict tend to have a negative attitude towards education at some point in life. This is because they lack peace of mind since there is no peace at home between the parents. The lack of peace diminishes their concentration and active participation in class since they are not interested any more. The finding agrees with that of Bulelwa (2014) that some kids are flexible and well adapted to change due mainly to efficient coping strategies being implemented while other kids might not see the separation or divorce of their parents in a complex manner.

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On whether parental conflicts make children lack basic needs, 35(43.8%) of learners strongly agreed, 22(27.5%) agreed while 11(13.8%) disagreed, 8(10%) strongly disagreed, 2(2.5%) were not sure. Most learners 71.3% agreed with the statement. This finding is similar to that of Kamau (2013) who found out that parental marital status, family size, parent's educational level and family financial status had a part to play in the academic performance of learners in Siakiago, Mbeere North District in Kenya. Kamau's findings showed however that while the marital status of the parents was not significant in explaining the academic performance of learners, the type of family- either cohesive or conflictive, had an effect in a learner's academic performance. The findings therefore signal to the effect of conflict in marriage on the academic performance of children since the mind, behavior and environment all play an important role in the learning process, according to LeClaire and Rushi, (2010). For Staddon (2014), learners usually model their parents, peers, siblings, authority figures, teachers and others whom they admire and trust. Therefore the environment in which learners grow up in shapes their future. Those who grow up in an environment full of marital conflicts between parents will exhibit different behaviors as compared to those who grow up in peaceful environments.

When learners were asked whether findings in table 1 show that, 31(38.8%) of learners agreed, 25(31.3%) strongly agreed, while 13(16.3%) strongly disagreed, 1 (13.8%) disagreed that due to parents conflicts they don't always go to school. According to the findings, the majority (70.1%) of learners were in agreement that as children they do not go to school when their parents are in conflict; indicating that family fabric is an important tool to academic success. The finding concurs with that of Allan (2011) study on perceived legitimacy of parental control over academic behaviors and adolescent students' academic adjustment on Filipino pupils in the Philippines. That gender influences the child's emotions and processing style due to different socialization experiences, but not their behavior. On the other side, proximal contextual variables include expectations based on past experiences and present situation features. A positive mood can decrease stress; on the other hand, a stressor is viewed in a negative mood as being more adverse and past harmful experiences are better remembered than in a positive mood.

On whether most pupils dropped out of school due to their parents conflict, 31(38.8%) of learners strongly agreed, 22(27.5%) agreed, 8 (10.0%) were not sure while 10(12.5%) strongly disagreed and 9 (11.3%) disagreed. In total a majority (66.3%) of learners agreed that children drop out of school due to parental conflicts. The more the prevalence of family conflict the more the dropout rates of children from schools hence were lowering academic standards.

On the statement whether, parents conflicts make children score low grades in academics 32(40.0%) of learners strongly agreed and 28(35.0%) agreed that while 9 (11.3%) disagreed, 9 (11.3%) strongly disagreed, with 2(2.2%) not being sure. Pupils who are disturbed do not concentrate in studies hence cannot perform well in any of the subjects taught in schools. The findings are similar to those of Yongmin (2011) who examined effects of family structure, type and stability on children's academic performance trajectories. He examined data from more than 8,000 children to compare academic growth from kindergarten to fifth grade among three types of traditional families and three alternative forms. Key findings in Yongmin's study showed that

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a combination of factors involving family structure, transitions, family financial and social resources and child outcomes affected children's performance.

Ways of Improving Academic Performance of Learners for Parental Conflict Homes

The second research question asked teachers to point out ways of assisting learners' stricken by parental conflict improve their academic performance. The teachers were to tick the appropriate option using the scale; SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NS=Not Sure, A=Agree SA=Strongly Agree. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' response on improving the academic performance of learners from parental conflict n=40

| Statement | SD | D | NS | A | SA |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| | F % | F % | F % | F % | F % |
| There is a counselor in my school I seek assistance | 1(2.5%) | 5(12.5%) | 0 (0.0%) | 15(37.5%) | 19(47.5%) |
| Teachers call parents when they notice there is a problem with the pupil. | 3(7.5%) | 3(7.5%) | 0(0.0%) | 14(35.0%) | 20(50.0%) |
| The school has academic clinics & parents engaged in performance of their pupils. | 4(10.0%) | 5(12.5%) | 1(2.5%) | 11(27.5%) | 19(47.5%) |
| Teachers teach life skills to empower our feelings | 10(25.0%) | 13(32.5%) | 1(2.5%) | 7(17.5%) | 9(22.5%) |
| Head teachers call parents meetings and talk freely about family conflict | 4(10.0%) | 3(7.5%) | 2(5.0%) | 12(30%) | 19(47.5%) |

Source: Field Data 2019

For the teachers, table 2 indicates that 19(47.5%) strongly agreed, 15(37.5%) agreed that there was a counselor in schools pupils sought assistance from while 5(12.5%) disagreed and 1(2.5%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Majority 85% teachers were in agreement that there were counselors in schools to help learners, however lack of a room providing enough privacy for effective guidance and counseling to take place is one factor contributing to low academic achievement among pupils. The learners value the guidance and counseling sessions at school since their conflicting parents do not guide and counsel them at home. They would therefore prefer to meet their guidance and counseling teachers either in the library or in a separate room set aside for the sole purpose of guiding and counseling pupils faced with either personal or family related problems.

The transition to healthy adulthood is dependent on the social environment in which adolescents live, learn and earn. Parents and families are a crucial part of this environment as well as communities, schools and peers. Nduku, Onyancha, & Ayiembra, (2016) argues that

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education with a holistic perspective is concerned with the development of learners since it helps them to grow in all aspects of life: spiritually, physically and emotionally. It seeks to engage students in their teaching or learning process and encourages personal and collective responsibility. Ogundipe & Ojo (2015) add that parents are the first group of people who set moral standards for their children by acting as role models.

When teacher participants were asked to state whether they involve parents on matters affecting their children, 20(50.0%) strongly agreed and 14(35.0%) agreed while 3(7.5%) strongly disagreed and 3(7.5%) disagreed that they call parents when they notice a problem with a pupil. Most pupils in classes seven and eight are in their puberty stage, where they experience identity crisis. Both parents and teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to assist the pupils to pass these stages correctly. Hamm et al (2011) agrees that helping teachers to understand multiple dimensions of adolescent development and strategies for promoting positive development can translate into improved developmental outcomes for learners across multiple domains of adjustment. Guidance and counseling helps learners understand themselves better and cope with different challenges in life hence be able to perform well academically.

About 19(47.5%) participating teachers strongly agreed and 11(27.5%) agreed that the schools with academic clinics & parents were engaged in performance of their pupils. Only a few teachers of 5(12.5%) disagreed, 4(10.0%) strongly disagreed with 1(2.5) not being sure. Sharon (2008) studies on inter parental conflict and academic achievement found that educators are often the first to notice a pupil's change in behavior when a family heading to breakdown. Since teachers play a vital role in curriculum implementation, they need appropriate relevant training to be able to handle a new programme including life skills education. Just as teachers, students must accept a curriculum for it to be effective (Orodho, 2013). It is when students react to the experiences they encounter in the curriculum with the cooperation, that a successful implementation of a curriculum can be achieved at classroom level. If these students see little relevance in the curriculum activities taught, they are not going to be motivated to participate to learn. It is the teacher who finally decides the arrangement of learning experiences and the methods of content presentation and he/she does most of the evaluation. It is the teacher therefore, who initiates, develops and directs students learning.

On the statement whether teachers teach life skills lessons to empower pupils feelings, 13(32.5%) disagreed and 10(25.0%) strongly disagreed while 9(22.5%) strongly Agreed, and 7(17.5%) Agreed while 1(2.5%) not being sure. According to UNICEF (2002) Life skills include cognitive skills, practical skills, person's positive behavior that enable persons to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life Skills are psycho-social skills including problem-solving and critical thinking skills, personal skills such as self-awareness, and interpersonal skills. Possessing life skills means having qualities such as high self-esteem, sociability, tolerance, action competencies to generate change, capabilities to have the freedom to decide what to do and who to be (UNICEF, 1999). The lack of consensus on the concept of life skills notwithstanding, Education for All (EFA) goal three (3) stresses the need to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate

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learning and life skills (Republic of Kenya, 2012). This is what our teenagers need when parents are deeply embroiled in family conflicts.

The findings concur with that of Maina (2010) on the impact of family conflicts on the academic performance and interpersonal relationships of pupils in public primary school in Nakuru, Kenya. Maina argues that although separation may seem like the only option, people are slowly becoming a society that believes in divorce and separation rather than in marriage for life. She laments that if people make effort in their marriages; that can sustain other areas of life. When recruiting new employees most employers look for people with superior skills in communication, analysis and public relations. They want team players who are culturally sensitive, able to handle multiple tasks, ready to work long hours, willing to learn new ways of doing things among others. She asserts that if they could apply these same skills when handling their family life, things would be much better.

On whether head teachers call parents meetings to talk freely about family conflict, 19(47.5%) strongly agreed and 12(30.0%) agreed while 4(10.0%) strongly disagreed, 3(7.5%) disagreed with 2(5.0%) not being sure. This showed that schools could help to bridge family misunderstanding that might hinder a child's academic excellence. The head teachers interviewed concurred with teachers' sentiments that persistent parental conflict negatively influenced a learners' academic performance, resulting in low grades. One of the head teachers commented:

Parents involved in persistent parental conflict between them have no time to think about the wellbeing of their children, let alone thinking about how they perform academically. All they think about is how to win in their constant fights with each other. When I call for parents' meetings to discuss about the pupils' academic performance, they do not show up for a number of reasons. One would be that they might be nursing a black eye (especially the female parent, scars of drunkenness for the father) and does not want other parents to see them, who might be their neighbors and know exactly what is happening. Another reason would be that they are too ashamed to come and face the low grades of the child since they are fully aware of why their children are not performing well academically.

The observation of the head teachers concurred with Maina, Irene Wanjiku (2010) that family stress can have a devastating effect on children's academic performance. However, Kloosterman (2011) study in Netherlands contradicted those of Maina et al and opined that it is common and normal for two parents to have different ideas, opinions, values and priorities Part of being effective in a relationship with another individual is being able to use adequate communication abilities to enable views and thoughts to be expressed and received with regard and differences of perception to be developed using good conflict resolution approaches.

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Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that parental conflicts affect their children's academic performance. This is because when the pupil is emotionally, physically, psychologically and mentally disturbed, he/she cannot concentrate well in studies and triggers poor academic performance. The absent-minded in class and behave aggressively towards fellow learners and even the teachers. Such learners are branded as rude and arrogant by both learners and teachers, but the learner is only trying to fight the turmoil caused by conflicting emotions inside of self. In addition, schools should have active guidance and counseling panels in place, along with a room that provides privacy to the learners when they want to confide to their teachers. The school administration should call for parent meetings to sensitize parents on their role as parents and their duty to provide for their children adequately- emotionally, morally and materially in order to bring up all round children.

Recommendations

This study recommended that, head teachers to call for meetings in their respective schools to sensitize the parents on the need to solve their differences amicably without involving the children. Parents' differences are not reason for refusing to provide children with their basic needs and school requirements. Every school needs to have a functioning guidance and counseling panel. This can address learners' needs privately and in confidence. It will enable teachers identify and deal with learners' personal needs early enough and help them before things get out of hand. The church can organize workshops and seminars for both the youth and the parents, separately. Motivational and inspirational speakers can be invited to talk to the youth on the effects of drug and substance abuse.

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