

**INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS ON ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE OF UNITY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN  
EMBAKASI DISTRICT, NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA** 11

By

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**A Project report submitted in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of Master of Education in Early childhood Education in the  
Department of Educational Communication and Technology, University of  
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## **DECLARATION**

**This research report is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.**



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**Winfred Wairimu Ngure**

**This project report has been submitted for examination with my approval as University supervisor.**



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## **DEDICATION**

**This research work is dedicated to my husband David, my children Adrian and Royd and my sister Purity whose prayers and encouragements never ceased.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr. Jane Gatumu senior lecturer Department of Education Communication and Technology, University of Nairobi for her advice, patience and tireless efforts without which I would not have completed this project.

Thanks to the headteacher and pupils of Unity primary school in Embakasi Division whose cooperation eased my work. I would also like to acknowledge the support provided by Stanley Simiyu in ensuring that my work was printed on time. Special thanks go to all the respondents for sacrificing their time to avail the information I needed for the study.

I also appreciate my entire family for their love and support at every stage of this work. Their encouragement helped me complete my study.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out parental characteristics and its influence on academic performance of unity preschool children in Embakasi district, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study's objectives were to determine the influence of parental marital status on academic performance of preschool children, to investigate the influence of parental occupation/employment status and income levels on children's academic performance and to establish the influence of parental level of education on preschool children's academic performance. The study employed the use of descriptive survey research design whereby the data collected was not manipulated by the researcher in any way. The researcher targeted children, teachers and parents of Unity preschool in Embakasi District. The study adopted both simple and purposive sampling techniques to sample its respondents. The sample size comprised 27 parents, 27 children and 5 teachers in Unity preschool. Documentary analysis was provided by the teachers showing preschool children academic performance in the seven activity areas. Questionnaire for the parents was used for data collection. Reliability was ensured by computing a reliability coefficient and validity was tested through pilot study. The questionnaire was adjusted appropriately. The data was analysed using SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The research utilised descriptive analysis and data was presented in form of tables, graphs and pie charts. Research findings would be valuable to the government and education policy makers as it will inform them and give them a basis of further study particularly in academic performance in preschools. Parents and teachers and all scholars interested in education and factors affecting performance of preschool children. From the data analysed, the study noted the following findings; the type of family affects the children academic performance in preschool. The preschool children that perform poorly are from single parents and polygamous families. This was because single parents have less time with their children since they are the sole bread winners for the family while those from polygamous families are unstable thus the children lack adequate academic support. Majority of the parents earn less and this affects their ability to provide for their children academic needs since the proportion of their income used on education of their children is small therefore affecting the academic performance of their children. Most of the parent's academic level is relatively low since most of them are KCSE certificate holders and hence are not capable enough to guide their children on academic matters leading to poor performance. This study concluded that there was need to improve on the poor academic performance by the preschoolers. This could be done by the government empowering the parents through provision of academic materials for example books. The government through different stakeholders should try and provide school feeding programs for preschoolers. There is also need for every school to be mandated to organize general meetings where parents meet teachers and discuss problems affecting their children's academic performance. The government should take part in initiating adult education to help those parents that are not well educated so that they can appreciate the importance of preschool education. The researcher noted issues emerging from the study and recommended other research areas for further investigation such as ways to tackle the problems faced by the preschoolers as a result of the family set ups.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

<b>ECE</b>	<b>Early Childhood Education</b>
<b>FPE</b>	<b>Free Primary Education</b>
<b>NCE</b>	<b>Nairobi City Education</b>
<b>NGOs</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organizations</b>
<b>SPSS</b>	<b>Statistical Package for Social Sciences</b>

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to the study**

According to Becker (1993) the government of Kenya recognizes the importance of investing in the educational sector bearing in mind that education and training are the most important investments in human capital. As a result, the government of Kenya, in partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, has initiated several programmes in this direction which include Free Primary Education (FPE), school feeding programme, expansion of educational facilities and staffing. Muola (2010) argues that well equipped and facilitated schools still register poor academic performance among some learners. While it is important to equip and facilitate the school institution, it is also important to study other extraneous factors at the home such as parental characteristics and how they influence academic performance. Studies have shown that the home environment (parental encouragement, parents' occupation, parents' education and family size) have a statistically positive and significant effect on academic intrinsic motivation.

Muola (2010) further observes that the home environment is rarely mentioned as a factor contributing to poor academic performance. The family is, obviously, a major socializing agent and therefore important in determining the child's motivation to achieve success in various areas. Sandven (1975) remarks that the motive to excel in academic work as an activating force, a drive or an urge to achieve good results and recognition which, to some degree, accounts to progress in school. The term "home environment" refers to all the objects, forces and conditions in the home which influence the child physically, intellectually and emotionally. Different home environments vary in many aspects such as the parents' level of education, economic status, occupational

status, religious background, attitudes, values, interests, parents' expectation for their children, and family size among others (Muola, 2010). Research on parental characteristics and how they impact on preschool children's educational matters has been lacking in Kenya (Lukalo, 2005). Parental characteristics influence their children's academic performance by determining parental involvement in learners' educational pursuits (Jeynes 2005, Muller 1995, Weiss 2003, Houtenville and Smith-Conway, 2008). The parental involvement in education vary from one parent to another, and the impact of this on academic performance needs to be studied in Unity Pre-school in Embakasi District.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Learners' academic performance in Kenya has been influenced by factors such as lack of facilities in school, lack of teachers, indiscipline, low intelligence, anxiety, and learner's motivation to achieve among others (Maundu, 1980; Bali, 1984; Ndirangu, 2007). These factors have tended to be more school-focused rather than home focused. Studies have underscored the important role parents play in determining academic outcomes of their children (Lemon, 1973). While learners are exposed to similar learning environment within the school, they come from homes with varying parental social and economic characteristics. These characteristics are more pronounced in urban areas than in rural areas. This study explores the impact of these parental characteristics on their preschool children's academic performance.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of parental characteristics on academic performance of preschool children in Unity Pre-school in Kayole Zone Embakasi District of Nairobi County.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To determine the influence of parental marital status on academic performance of preschool children.
- ii. To investigate the influence of parental occupation/employment status and income levels on children's education
- iii. To establish the influence of parental level of education on preschool children's academic performance.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study attempted to address the following research questions:

- i. What is the influence of parental marital status on academic performance of preschool children?
- ii. What is the influence of parental occupation/employment status and income levels on children's education?
- iii. To what extent does parental level of education influence preschool children's academic performance?

#### **1.6 Significance of the study**

Findings of this study will expand the spectrum of factors which influence academic performance of preschool children other than those which are found within the school setting. The results of the findings of this study will be used to advice the parents, the teachers, and school administrators accordingly concerning the effects of home factors and their influence on the learners academic performance. The study also is likely to stimulate further research in on home factors and their influence on children's academic achievement.

### **1.7 Limitation of the study**

The research aimed to conduct the study in only one school in Embakasi division of Nairobi district. The school was an urban school and the rural areas were not included. Thus the results of the study could only be generalized to be used in rural areas.

### **1.8 Delimitations of the study**

The study intended to investigate the influence of parental characteristics on the pre-school performance in Unity pre-school. The research focused on 54 respondents; 27 parents and their 27 preschool children of Unity pre-school.

### **1.9 Assumptions of the study**

The study assumed that all the parents in Unity pre-school had the required parental characteristics needed for the study and that these characteristics affect the pre-school children academic performance differently. The study also assumed that all the parents were involved in their preschool children education.

### **1.10 Definition of Key terms**

<b>Academic performance:</b>	Assessment and evaluation of children's academic ratings based on their scores in various disciplines.
<b>Characteristic:</b>	A feature or quality belonging typically to a person, place or thing and serving to identify it.
<b>Home environment:</b>	The term "home environment" refers to all the objects, forces and conditions in the home which influence the child physically, intellectually and emotionally.
<b>Income:</b>	This is the ability of the parent to afford the necessary learning materials for their children.



<b>Influence:</b>	The capacity to have an effect on the character development or behavior of someone or something or the effect itself.
<b>Marital status:</b>	A person's marital status often indicates whether the person is single or married and often includes divorced, widowed, widower and cohabiting.
<b>Parents:</b>	Refers to both biological and guardians who play a role in providing Physical and moral support to children.
<b>Parenting:</b>	Is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child, from infancy to childhood. It refers to the activity of raising a child rather than the biological relationship.
<b>Preschool:</b>	Learning institution in Kenya which caters for children aged between 3 and 6 years.
<b>Socio-economic status:</b>	Socio-economic status comprise of income, parental education levels, and parental occupation based on mother's education, father's education, mother's occupation, father's occupation and combined income. Occupational status for each parent ranges from unemployment, self employed and unemployed. Parental education levels range from K.C.S.E certificate holders and below to degree holders.

### **1.11 Organisation of the study**

The study comprised of five chapters. Chapter one consisted of the background to the problem, purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, basic assumptions, definitions of terms and organisation of the study. Chapter Two comprised of literature review, theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Chapter three dealt with research methodology, covering research design, sampling procedures, research instruments and the validity and reliability, procedures of data collection and methods of data analysis. Chapter four dealt with findings and discussions and Chapter five comprised of the summary, conclusions and recommendations for the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter comprises reviewed literature in the following areas: influence of parental status on their children's academic performance, influence of parental characteristics such as level of education, occupation, employment and income levels on children's academic performance. A theoretical framework on which the study is based has been presented. Further, conceptual framework to illustrate the relationship between the variables of the study is presented.

#### **2.2 Influence of parental marital status on children's academic achievement**

According to (Cummings, 2010) family units take various forms, most of which individuals live under the same roof or within the same homestead. There are various combinations of family structures in which children live with such as biological parents, step parents and also with relatives or foster parents.

Globally studies on family structure have revealed that children from single-parent households may be losing ground in the battle for academic success in a variety of ways (Zimiles and Lee, 1991; Brody and Flor, 1997; and Weitoft, Hjern, and Rosén, 2004). Zimiles and Lee examined the contrast between single parent households and that of intact, two-parent homes as well as remarried parents (1991). Studies have shown that children with the same academic abilities will achieve varying academic scores depending on whether they are from nuclear or single parent families. The reasons given for this occurrence are that single parents are: the primary and frequently sole source of financial support for the family, have less time to help children with homework, are less likely to use consistent discipline, and have less

parental control, and all of these conditions may lead to lower academic achievement.

A study by Weitoft (2004) examined the educational attainment of children who were living with the same single parent (widowed, non-custodial other parent living, non-custodial other parent deceased) and children who were living with the same two parents during the same time frame and noted that “poorer educational performance on the part of the offspring of lone parents can be explained to a large extent by socio-economic disadvantage, especially a lack of resources”. Brody and Flor (1997) examined the psychological effects of poverty on African American, single-mother families and came up with a similar revelation of family influence on children’s academic achievement. Further, children from nuclear families will have more attention from parents than children who are from an extended family. Children staying with their parents tend to receive more attention than those who are staying with relatives (Ekemwa, 2007).

The type of family also has an impact including that on home-school relationships and responsibility for learning outcomes. Home-school relationships are formal and informal connections between the family and the educational setting. Responsibility for learning is an aspect of parenting that places emphasis on activities in the home and community that promise learning skills in the young child (Connell and Prinz 2002). According to Cummings (2010) a cohesive family, in which members tend to be warm and responsive to one another, where problems are resolved, and members cope well, increases the likelihood of children doing well in school. On the contrary, Children from enmeshed families, characterized by over involvement, hostility and only moderate warmth, enter school with no more problems than their cohesive family peers, but suffer more anxiety and feelings of alienation later, Cummings

explains Young children benefit most from their school years if they enter kindergarten having received preparation from the family.

### **2.3 Influence of parental occupation, employment status and income levels on children's education**

According to Mwoma (2008) education usually entails expenses such as buying reading materials, stationery among others. This introduces the element of family economic status into question. As a result studies have noted that economic status determines the extent of parental involvement in their children's education. Parents who are illiterate and poor and cannot afford to buy supplementary learning materials are less likely to be actively involved in their children's education. They are preoccupied with different chores to fend for their families and, paradoxically, children are expected to engage in some form of child labor that can contribute towards family provisioning and sustenance.

Ogoye (2007) notes that socio-economic status is a critical issue in many African communities where illiteracy and poverty levels are high, thus limiting parental involvement in homework. In some cases learning and reference materials have to be shared among pupils, and not all parents are able to buy for their children personal subject-specific text copies. More important is the fact that some parents expect the children to help them after school, during the time the children are expected to undertake their homework assignments. Based on the traditional gender division of labor, this is the time when the boys have to look after the animals and the girls to fetch water, firewood and help in the evening to prepare the family food before they eventually clear the table and wash the dishes. This is against the children's desires to study in the evening and in a quiet place. High poverty levels lead to crowded homes where distractions and little opportunity for concentration are the norm. The

net effect of distractions and lack of concentration is that homework is not guided, poorly done, incomplete or never done at all, and therefore precipitates conflicts at school and at home.

The development of a high need for achievement can be traced to childhood training techniques in which successful parents are known to provide independent training which is likely to foster high achievement motivation (Atkinson and Feather, 1966; Heckhausen, 1967).

Child rearing practices vary with socio-economic background and parental level of education. The findings also support earlier findings by other researchers (Gottfried, 1998; Bansal, 2006). A study by (Atkinson and Feather, 1966; Muola, 2010) have revealed that the achievement motivation of children whose fathers have attained high educational level and are in high income occupations tend to be high. Achievement motivation has been shown to be higher in the working than middle class (Atkinson and Feather, 1966).

According to Slavin (2006) Motivation is crucial to a student's academic success at any age. Because learners form self-concepts, values, and beliefs about their abilities at a young age, the development of early academic motivation has significant implications for later academic careers. A great deal of research has found that learners high in academic motivation are more likely to have increased levels of academic achievement and have lower dropout rates (Blank, 1997). Other studies have reported positive relationship between motivation and academic performance and success (Gottrieb, 1990; Johnson, 1996; Kushman, Sieber, and Harold, 2000; Sandra, 2002; Broussard and Garrison, 2004; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2004; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2006).

The development of high level achievement motivation is attributed to early independence training and achievement training according to Atkinson, Feather and Majoribanks (1979). Atkinson and Feather argue that successful parents tend to provide early independence training which is necessary in the development of achievement motivation. According to Majoribanks et al (1979) in independence training parents insists on the child's self-reliance and autonomy in decision making situations. While, in achievement training they insist on high achievement through imposing high standards of excellence in tasks, setting high goals for the child and expecting the child to show competence in doing tasks well. Thus, achievement motivation is among other factors dependent on child-parent interactions.

Jeyne (2005) examined five different variables including, mother's education, father's education, father's occupation, mother's occupation, and family income. Crane (1996) operationalised similar variables which included family income, mother's education, father's education, mother's occupational status, father's occupational status, household size, marital status, and the percentage of students at the mother's high school who were poor. The results of Crane's research demonstrate a clear link between mathematics test scores and income.

#### **2.4 Influence of parental level of education on children's education**

A number of studies have examined the role of parental involvement in education (Casanova, 1996; Cooper, 1989; and Levin, 1997). Increasingly, research has suggested that parents' level of education is part of a larger constellation of psychological and sociological variables influencing children's school outcomes. This stems from the fact that parent's higher levels of education may be access to resources, such as income, time, energy, and community contacts, that allow for greater parental involvement in a child's education. In addition, parental level of

education influences parents' knowledge, beliefs, values, and goals about childrearing, so that a variety of parental behaviors are indirectly related to children's school performance. For example, higher levels of education may enhance parents' facility at becoming involved in their children's education, and also enable parents to acquire and model social skills and problem-solving strategies conducive to children's school success.

The evidence about the benefits of parents being involved in their children's education in general and their literacy in activities in particular, is overwhelming. Research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's academic performance in both basic and higher education (Fan and Chen, 2001). This leads to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater school enjoyment better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems at school (Feinstein and Symons, 1999). Similar impacts have also been identified with regards to literacy practices. For instance, early reading experiences with parents prepare children for the benefit of formal literacy instruction. Indeed parental involvement in their children's reading has been found to be the most important determinant in language and emergent literacy. Although parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children's educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). For example Feinstein and Symons (1999) found that parental interest in their child's education was the single most powerful predictor of achievement at age sixteen.

According to a study conducted by Aswani (1991) there was a significant relationship between parental level of education and the pupils' education aspirations. Evidence that the largest of education casualties come from the lower



social classes is overwhelming. Poor children come from environments that are educationally impoverished and the conditions nearly affect every aspect of life. The low background status perpetuates educational deprivation. Poor families will certainly find it difficult to pay fees. Moreover, poor families on average tend to have more school-age children at home than higher income families while wealthier and better educated parents who utilize basic education and deploy resources in a manner creating preschool conditions which are conducive to a successful school performance provide initial advantages which are difficult to match among the poor, uneducated slum dwellers and rural Kenya (Prewit, 1989). Families set the lifestyle and influences life chances for the child. The life which a family attaches to school education determines the motivation with which its children pursue basic education.

A study conducted in Mombasa by Ogoye (2007) showed that illiterate parents were unable to assist their children with homework. The importance of parental involvement for children's academic success is an unquestionable assumption. Independent of the parents' type of involvement in education or schooling, in general, hundreds of studies have demonstrated a predominance of positive correlations between this variable and students' academic achievement (Muola 2010; Rivera, 1993).

In developed countries studies indicate that parents are encouraged to involve themselves in their children education such as homework in order to promote achievement. Studies by (Cooper, 1989; Roderique, 1994; and Mulhern, 1994) have indicated that parental involvement has shown positive effect on the child's school success, but in order to reach maximum effectiveness, parents and teachers take centre stage in child's educational process. Parents can be regarded as the child's

first teacher, but when the child enters school parents begin to ask themselves how they can be positively involved in their children's education.

Previous studies by Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Eccles and Harold (1993) have demonstrated that often parents would want to be involved in their children's homework because the children are still young and need concerted guidance. Sometimes parents can question the value of their involvement. A number of studies have reported a positive relationship between parental involvement in student homework and student achievement (Chen and Stevenson 1989; Delgado-Gaitan 1992; Grolnick and Slowiaczek 1994).

Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, and Welsh, 2004), but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 1991).

Closely connected to parental involvement in student homework and student achievement is a home-school relations (Chen and Stevenson, 1989). It refers to the formal and informal connections between families and their young children's school settings. Both participation in preschool activities and regular communication between families and teachers are related to young children's outcomes. Parent participation practices can include attending parent-teacher conferences, participating in extended class visits and helping with class activities. Such participation is associated with child language, self-help, social, motor, adaptive and basic school skills (Marcon, 1999).

The frequency of parent-teacher contact and involvement at the ECE centres is also associated with preschool performance (Izzo and Weissberg, 1999). Parents who

maintain direct and regular contact with the ECE settings experience fewer problems in their childrens' academic performance since their children demonstrate positive engagement with peers, adults and learning (McWayne, Hampton and Cohen, 2004). In addition, teachers' perceptions of positive parental attitudes and beliefs about preschool are associated with fewer behavior problems and higher language and math skills among children (McWayne, 2004).

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

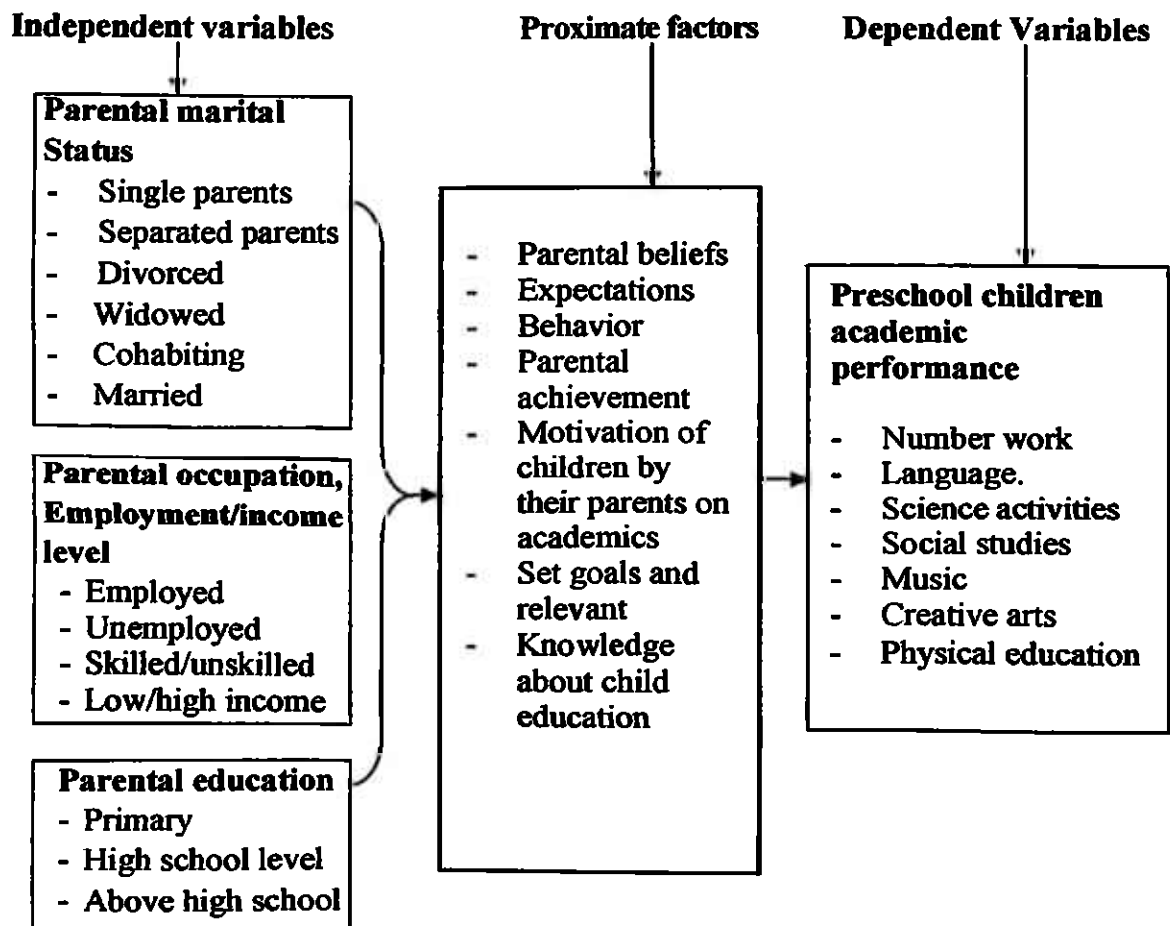
This study was guided by the Family Deficit Model by Marsh (1990) and the Risk and Protective Factor theory by Seifer (1992). According to the theories, the family deficit model views the nuclear or a two-parent family as the ideal family structure. According to this model, single-parent families have a negative impact on children simply because they do not have a nuclear family structure (Marsh, 1990). A Research using the Family Deficit Model begins with the assumption that single parenting is bad for children, and the results of these studies typically support this assumption. Indeed, some studies using the Family Deficit Model minimize or overlook the influence economics and other background factors have on academic achievement rather than alter this research model (Marsh, 1990).

Risk and Protective Factor theory was developed in the early 1990s, and does not regard single-parent families as irregular (Seifer, 1992) because the foundation for the model is that all families have both strengths and weaknesses. Rather than view single parenting as the cause of negative outcomes for children in these families, the Risk and Protective Factor theory describes family structure as one of many risk factors. Risk factors are either background characteristics or life events that may have a negative impact on child development. Protective factors are characteristics and events that positively influence children and help limit the impact of risk factors

(Seifer, 1992). Essentially, risk factors are the weaknesses and protective factors are the strengths of any given family. According to this model, single parenting can be both a risk factor and a protective factor for children in this type of family. The study examines parental level of education, income levels and parental status as some of the factors leading to or minimizing risks in children's education.

## 2.6 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework (figure 2.1) illustrates the perceived relationship between the independent variables of the study and the dependent variables. Independent variables consist of parental characteristics while dependent variable is the children's performance outcomes.



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework**

Figure 2.1 shows how parental characteristics (study variables), influence the intervening variables which is essentially parental goals, attitudes and goals, which

**in turn will end up affecting directly or indirectly the child's participation and subsequent achievement, in academic performance.**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter on Research Methodology outlines the following aspects of research methodology; research design, target population, sample and sampling procedure, research instruments, validity of the instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis techniques.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The research aimed to obtain information from a representative selection of the target population under investigation (Bell, 1993). It attempted to, among other issues, describe characteristics of subjects, phenomena, opinions and preferences of persons of interest to the research (Borg and Gall, 1989). This design guided the research in collecting data of varied magnitude from the stake holders at Unity primary school. In essence, the research sought to collect information about the target populations on characteristics of parents of Unity Preschool and how they impact on their children's academic performance within a relatively short period of time.

#### **3.2 Target Population**

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), the target population is a group or category of human beings, animals or objects, which have one or more characteristics in common and have been selected as a focus of the study. The selected group is also known as the universe and is the one that a researcher generalizes the results of the research. This study used Unity Preschool in Kayole Zone in Embakasi Division. The target population was 5 teachers, 90 children and 90 parents giving a target population of 185. Parents to these children was the

respondents on the extent to which parental characteristics affects preschool children's academic performance while the children academic records will reflect their performance.

### **3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure**

This study used purposive sampling technique to select the school. Kombo and Tromp (2006) assert that the researcher purposively targeted a group of people believed to be reliable for the study. Kayole zone in Embakasi Division consists of 30 City Council Pre-schools. Unity preschool is believed to be 'information rich' for in-depth data collection and analysis in the entire Kayole zone. The total population of parents in the unit was ninety (90). In identifying parents to take part in the study, the research obtained a list of the ninety preschool parents out of which thirty percent was selected using random sampling to take part in the study. Gay (1992) said that ten percent (10%) or more of a population makes a representative sample. The thirty percent culminated to a sample size of twenty seven (27) parents to tally with the 27 preschool children. The procedure for selecting the parents began with writing names of all the parents in Unity preschool on pieces of paper and putting them in a carton. After mixing the papers thoroughly, twenty seven names were picked at random which is a thirty percent representation of all the parents.

### **3.4 Research Instruments**

The researcher used the questionnaire and the documentary analysis form.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaire**

The study used one set of questionnaire for the parents. The questionnaire was used to extract in-depth information on the parental socio-economic aspects where both closed-ended and open ended questions were used to gather information from parents. The questionnaire was used because as Gay (1992) noted it enable the

researcher to gather data from the respondents and is easily administered. The questionnaire had items seeking information on general demographic data like age, gender, academic qualifications and occupation. In addition, they sought information on the family structure in endeavor to gather information on its influence on preschoolers' academic performance.

#### **3.4.2 Documentary analysis form**

The research used documentary analysis to gather information about the pre-school children academic performance. It was a vital data collecting tool as it enabled the researcher to obtain information from the preschool children progress records in the seven activity areas; Science activities, Number work, Language, Creative arts, Physical Education, Social studies and Music.

#### **3.5 Validity of the Instruments**

Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) defined validity as the accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences, which were based on the research results. In other words, validity is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represents phenomena under study. Validity, according to Borg and Gall (1996) is the degree to which a test measures what it purports to measure.

To ensure validity of the instruments, experts in the area of qualitative and quantitative research were consulted. According to Borg and Gall (1996), content validity of an instrument is improved through expert judgments. A pilot test was done to ensure that questionnaire was well structured and measured the variables. As such, the researcher sought assistance from her supervisor, in order to help improve content validity of the instruments. The researcher ensured validity by restructuring the research items in simple English and limiting the number of items while



ascertaining that they captured the targeted data after piloting. Those items that were found irrelevant were replaced (Borg, 1996).

Documentary analysis form was structured in consultation with the teachers who provided correct information on the preschool pupil's academic progress. Academic progress records were used to obtain information on the preschool pupils' academic performance in the seven activity areas.

### **3.6 Reliability of the instruments**

Orodho (2005) defines reliability as the ability of the research instrument to measure what it is meant to measure consistently and dependably. Reliability of the instruments was done through testing and retesting. This enabled the researcher to make vague items clear. A questionnaire was administered to a sample school and pre-testing was done. Necessary changes were made to establish the clarity of the instruments. The questionnaires used had items that were to be responded to. For reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha was calculated by application of SPSS. The value of the alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors extracted from dichotomous (that is, questions with two possible answers) and/or multi-point formatted questionnaires or scales (i.e., rating scale: 1 = poor, 5 = excellent). A higher value shows more reliable generated scale. Table 3.1 illustrates the results of the reliability analysis. The coefficients were all greater than 0.7 hence a conclusion was drawn that the instruments had an acceptable reliability coefficient and were appropriate for the study.

**Table 3.1 Reliability Analysis**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>No of items</b>
To determine the influence of parental marital status on academic performance of preschool children.	.7141	13
To investigate the influence of parental occupation/employment status and income levels on children's education	.845	10
To establish the influence of parental level of education on preschool children's academic performance.	.921	7

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

To commence with, the researcher obtained a research permit from the Ministry of Education before embarking on the study. In addition, the administrators of Unity preschool were informed of the intended study in advance. The researcher then visited the preschool and administered the questionnaires to the teachers. For easy gathering of information from the selected parents, the researcher organised with the head teacher of Unity preschool to allow data collection to be done during the school's parent meeting day. The researcher then used the questionnaire to guide the respondents by reading the item and writing the responses down.

### **3.8 Data Analysis Technique**

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) data analysis includes sorting, editing, coding, cleaning and processing of data. It is the breakdown of data into constituent parts to obtain answers to the research questions. The data collected from the parents

and the teachers' questionnaires and the documentary analysis were analyzed in relation to the researchers' questions.

Quantitative data was coded and descriptive analysis done. This was done using frequencies and measures of central tendency. The data was presented in form of frequency tables and bar graphs.

### **3.9 Ethical concern**

The information gathered from parents was treated with confidentiality and for the purpose of academic use only. This was ensured by not having their personal details reviewed. The preschool children academic performance records were also treated with confidentiality.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the findings and discussion of data on parental marital status, parental occupation/ employment status and income levels, parental level of education and their influence on their preschool children academic performance.

#### 4.2 Parental marital status and academic performance

Table 4.1 shows the type of the family that the preschool children come from and its effect on the academic performance.

**Table 4.1 Type of family**

<b>Type of family</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Academic performance</b>
Nuclear	3	11%	452
Extended	4	15%	366
Polygamous	7	25%	348
Single family	10	37%	335
Foster family	3	12%	356
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>371</b>

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of the respondents 37% (n = 10) come from single parent family and their average score out of 700 marks was 335 marks. They are followed by those from polygamous families whose average marks was 348. Children from nuclear families are the best academic performers. This is probably because nuclear family is the most preferred type of family to raise a child from since both parents are involved in the children's development. In this study, majority

of the parents are single parents, which is a clear indication reflection of poor performance in Unity preschool since most of the single parents are preoccupied in fending for their children at the expense of full involvement in academic performance of their children. This might be the cause of the poor performance by the preschool going children in Embakasi. Family issues results in lack of concentration by the child in his or her school work and thus results in poor academic performance.

Documentary analysis was used to establish how the preschool children in Unity preschool fair academically. These marks were attained averagely from seven activity areas; Number work, Language, Science activities, Social studies, Music and movement, Creative arts and Physical education. From each activity area the total score was 100 and they all totaled to 700 marks.

According to (Cummings, 2010) family units take various forms, most of which individuals live under the same roof or within the same homestead. There are various combinations of family structures in which children live with such as biological parents, step parents and also with relatives or foster parents.

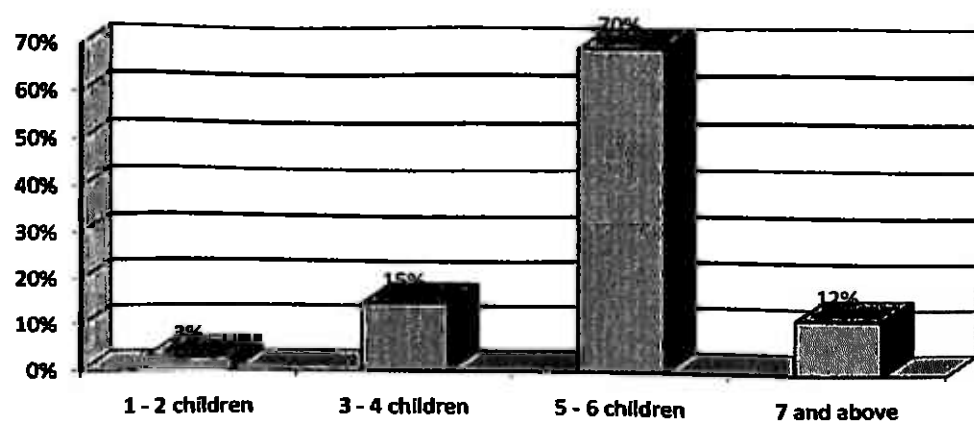
A study by Weitoft (2004) examined the educational attainment of children who were living with the same single parent (widowed, non-custodial other parent living, non-custodial other parent deceased) and children who were living with the same two parents during the same time frame and noted that “poorer educational performance on the part of the offspring of lone parents can be explained to a large extent by socio-economic disadvantage, especially lack of resources”.

Globally studies on family structure have revealed that children from single-parent households may be losing ground in the battle for academic success in a variety of

ways (Zimiles and Lee, 1991; Brody and Flor, 1997; and Weitoft, Hjern, and Rosén, 2004). Zimiles and Lee examined the contrast between single parent households and that of intact, two-parent homes as well as remarried parents (1991) and their study showed that children with the same academic abilities will achieve varying academic scores depending on whether they are from nuclear or single parents families. The reason given for this occurrence is that single parents are the primary sole source of financial support for the family and have less time to help children with homework. Children from nuclear family will have more attention from parents than those from extended and polygamous families. This will be a positive reflection in their performance since the parents will be more involved in the school activities.

Most of the children who came from polygamous family indicated poor academic performance since majority of the parents from polygamous family had more than five children, an indication that these parents had more children than they could afford to educate comfortably.

Figure 4.1 presents the number of children in the family and its effect on the preschool children academic performance.



**Figure 4.1 Number of children in the family**

Figure 4.1 shows that majority of the respondents 82% (n = 22) had more than 5 children indicating that most of the parents had more children than they could afford to educate comfortably leading to poor performance. From these findings most of the parents who had more than 5 children came from polygamous family. The academic performance of these preschool children is poor since majority had an average of 348 marks out of 700, an indication that the performance is unsatisfactory.

According to the dilution of resources hypothesis developed by Blake (1985) a large number of siblings and close spacing among siblings, dilutes the amount of parent time, attention and money available per child. This in turn tends to negatively influence several child outcomes including academic performance. Parents with more children spend less time with each of them thus making them less likely to develop tools to acquire greater academic achievement than children who receive more support.

### 4.3 Parental income and academic performance

Table 4.2 shows the occupation status of the preschool childrens' parents and its influence on academic performance.

**Table 4.2 Occupational status of parents**

<b>Occupational status of parents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Academic Performance</b>
Self employed	7	27%	392
Employed	8	29%	406
Unemployed	12	44%	302
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>366</b>

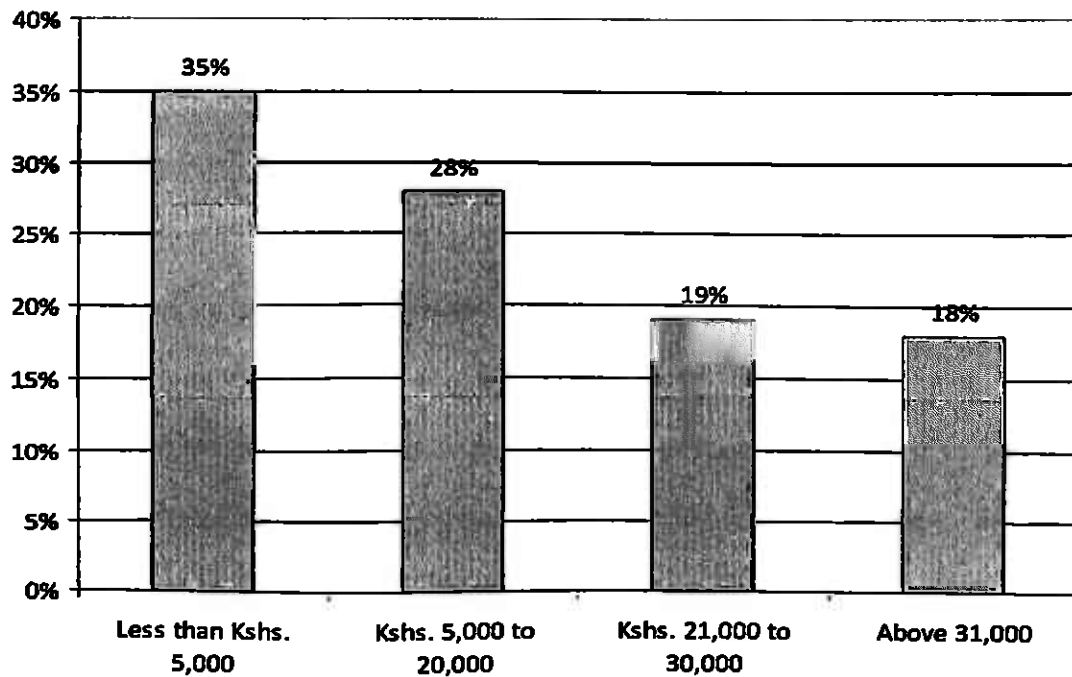
Table 4.2 shows that majority of the respondents 44% (n=12) are unemployed. They are followed by 29% (n=8) who are employed while 27% (n=7) are self employed. The preschool children from unemployed parents perform poorly than those from employed parents in all the activity areas. This is indicated by the average marks attained in the seven activity areas out of 700 marks. This explains the poor performance by the preschool children since the majority of the parents are not employed and therefore they are not very capable of providing the necessary learning materials for their preschool children leading to poor academic performance.

The low background status perpetuates education deprivation Kaspro (1999) hence the unemployed parents will definitely find it difficult to pay school fees and meet other educational expenses for their children while employed parents have higher income and therefore deploy their resources in a manner creating preschool conditions conducive to a successful school performance. (Prewit, 1989) note that family income level influence education chances for the child since this determines the motivation with which the child pursues basic education.

However the researcher cited two cases of preschool children whose performance was good and yet they came from poor family background. After investigation the researcher realized that these children get sponsorship from Feed the Children offered to some school children in this area. There were also few cases from the employed parents who performed very poorly. This can be as a result of poor parental commitment due to job occupation.

The researcher then sought to investigate the parents' average income per month in relation to academic performance. The results are shown in the figure 4.2.





**Figure 4.2 Average range of parent's income per month**

Figure 4.2 shows that majority 35% (n=9) of the parents earn less than Kshs. 5,000, 28% (n=7) earn between Kshs. 5,000 to Kshs. 20,000 while a mere 18% (n=5) earn above Kshs. 31,000 per month. This explains the poor academic performance by the children in preschool. This is as a result of inadequate income that the parents are earning and thus are not able to provide the required learning materials their children to enable them perform well academically.

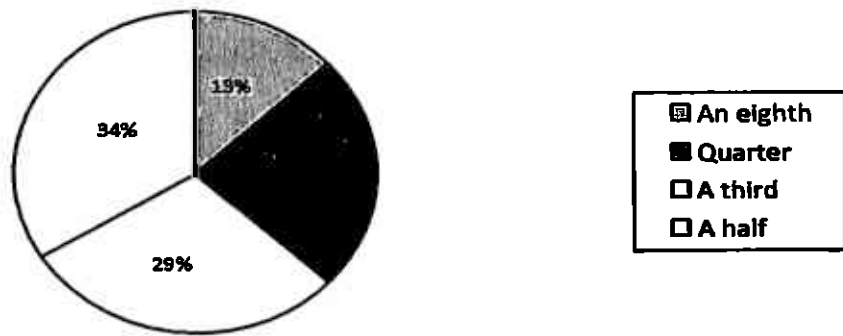
According to Mwoma (2008) education usually entails expenses such as buying reading materials, stationery among others. This introduces the element of family economic status into question. As a result studies have noted that economic status determines the extent of parental involvement in their children's education. Parents who are illiterate and poor and cannot afford to buy supplementary learning materials are less likely to be actively involved in their children's education. They are preoccupied with different chores to fend for their families and paradoxically, children are expected to engage in some form of child labour that can contribute

towards family provisioning and sustenance at the expense of their education resulting to poor academic performance.

From the literature review, the findings by the researcher support the earlier findings by other researchers (Goltfried 1998 and Bansal 2006) that reviewed that the achievement motivation of children whose parents earn a high income tend to be higher. Achievement motivation for the preschool children has been shown to be higher in the working than in the middle class parents. According to Slavin (2006) motivation is crucial to a students' academic success at any age and that development of early academic motivation has a significant implication for later academic achievement.

In this study those parents who earn higher income are able to motivate their children in school and that there is positive relationship between education and academic performance and success (Johnson, 1996). However there were a number of parents who earned more than Kshs. 20,000 per month and their preschool children recorded poor academic performance.

This necessitated investigation on the proportion of income spent on education expenses per month and the results were as shown in the figure 4.3.



**Figure 4.3 Proportion of parent's income spent on child's education per month**

Figure 4.3 shows that majority 34% (n=9) spent less than a half of their income educating their children. The previous findings on the parents' income levels showed that most of the parents earned below 5000/= per month and therefore less than a half is a very small proportion to be spend on education. This is a clear cause of poor performance by these preschoolers. In conclusion, most of the preschool children in unity come from poor background and this affects the academic performance since they are not provided with all the required learning facilities.

#### **4.4 Parental level of education and academic performance**

Table 4.3 shows the parental level of education in relation to their preschool children academic performance.

**Table 4.3 Parents level of education**

<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Academic performance</b>
Degree	5	19%	420
Diploma	2	7%	398
Certificate	8	29%	358
K.C.S.E and below	12	45%	320
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>374</b>

Table 4.3 shows that 45% (n=12) of the parents were KCSE certificate holders and below as their highest level of education. They are followed by 29% (n=8) who attained education up to certificate level while 19% (n=5) had degrees as their highest level of education. From the findings the preschool children whose parents attained degree level of education are the best performers while the children from parents who attained KCSE certificate level and below are the poorest performers. This stems from the fact that parent's level of education may be an access to resources such as income and were more involved in school activities, this allows for better parental involvement in child's education. In addition, parental level of education influences parental knowledge, beliefs, values and goals about child rearing. When all these are put into account, the children's' attitude towards education is enhanced positively hence better performance.

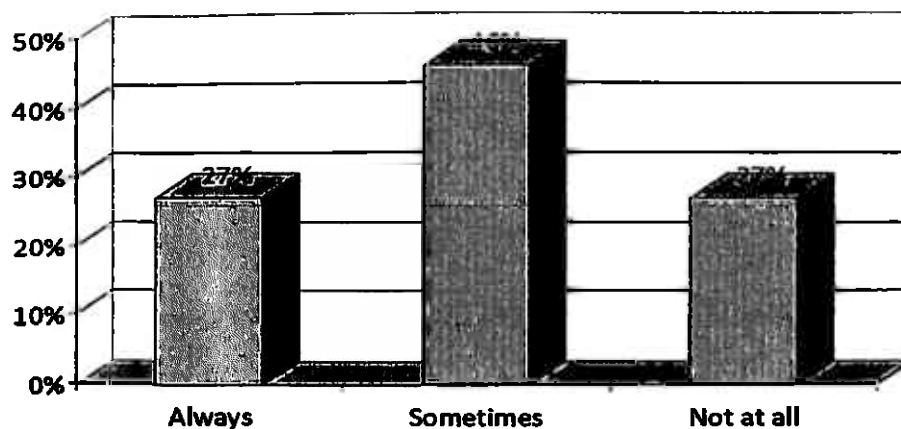
From the literature review, the researcher noted that parent's level of education is part of a larger constellation of psychological and sociological variables influencing children's academic outcome. Poole (2007) sees parent's attitude towards their children's' schooling expressed in the following ways; first parental expectation are expressed to the child. These include the careers the parents expect their children to take. The expectations of the parent regarding the child's academic performance in terms of academic grade are also expressed to the child. The said parent spells out the activities that the parent wishes to see the child engaged in. The parents also monitor the progress of the child in school. Parental monitoring means that the parent notes areas where the child does not meet parental expectations carefully. Necessary corrections are done on the said areas. The child learns to do what the parents regard as right and this boosts the academic performance of the child

From the results findings, parents who have attained a higher level of education are more involved in their children's academic progress and this enables their preschool children to acquire and model social skills and problem solving strategies conducive to children's school success. The evidence about the parents being involved in their children education in general and there literacy in school activities is reflected in their children's academic performance (Fan and Chen, 2001).

A study conducted in Mombasa by Ogoye (2007) showed that illiterate parents were unable to assist their children with homework. The importance of parental involvement for children's academic success is an unquestionable assumption.

Parents are encouraged to involve themselves in their children's education such as assisting them in doing homework in order to promote academic achievement.

Figure 4.4 shows parents involvement on their preschool children homework.



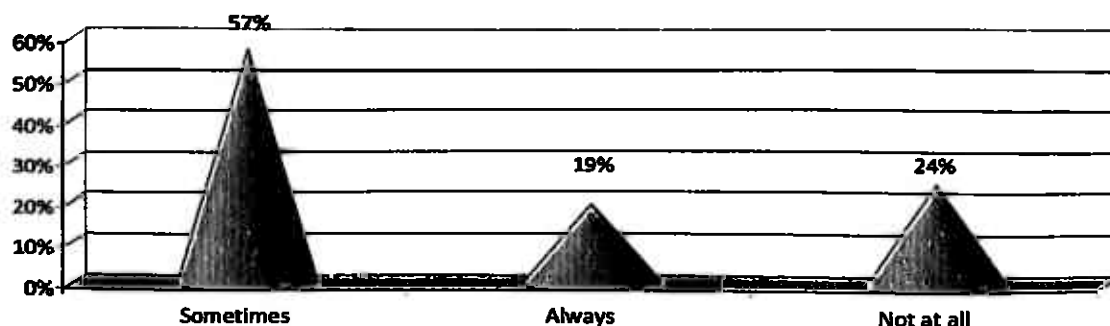
**Figure 4.4 Parents assisting children do their homework**

Figure 4.4 shows that majority 46% (n=12) of the parents sometimes help their children with their homework. The other 27% (n=7) do not help them while the remaining 27% (n=7) always help them. Most of the parents whose level of education is higher are motivated to assist their children in doing their homework since they have a positive attitude towards education and would want to assist their

children to perform better academically. Most of the parents who are not well educated have a negative attitude towards education and hence they do not get so much involved with their children's homework and this contributes to the poor academic performance by their preschool children. Studies by Cooper (1989) found that parents can be regarded as the child's first teacher, but when the child enters school parents begin to ask themselves how they can be positively involved in their children's education. Therefore in this study, parental involvement with homework at home is significant positive influence on academic performance.

Closely connected to parental involvement in the pupils homework and academic achievement, is the home school relations (Chen and Stevenson 1989) this refers to the formal and informal connections between families and their young school settings. Both participation in school activities and regular communication between families and teachers are related to young children's school outcome. Parents' participation practices can include attending parents – teachers meetings, participating in extended class visits and helping with class activities. Such participations is associated with child language, self help, social, motor adaptive and basic school skills (Marcon, 1999).

Figure 4.5 shows parents involvement with the school activities.



**Figure 4.5 Parents involvement with school activities**

Figure 4.5 shows that majority of the parents do not involve themselves with the school activities fully. This is shown by 57% (n=15) of the respondents saying that they sometimes involve themselves, while 24% (n=6) said not at all. Only 19% (n=5) of the total always involves themselves with the school's activities. This might be due to lack of positive attitude towards education since most of the parents have attained low level of education to appreciate the importance of visiting their children's school, or rather lack of commitment. This affects the performance of the children since their progress in school is not well followed.

The evidence about the benefits of parents being involved in their children's education in general and their literacy in activities in particular, is overwhelming. Research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's academic performance in both basic and higher education (Fan and Chen, 2001). This leads to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater school enjoyment better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems at school (Feinstein and Symons, 1999).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the study and makes conclusions based on the results. The implications from the findings and areas for further research are also presented.

#### **5.2 Summary of the findings**

The study aimed to find out the influence of parental characteristics on academic performance of Unity preschool children in Embakasi district, Nairobi County, Kenya. The researcher singled out three parental characteristics that she deemed are the ones influencing the academic performance of Unity preschool children. From the data analyzed the researcher was able to come up with the following findings;

Majority of the parents 37% (n=10) come from single parents family followed by 18% (n=5) from polygamous families. Majority of the respondents have 5 to 6 children. These numbers of children are quite many at this time when the living standard is high causing the parents to strain economically in educating their children. Majority of the parents 54% (n=15) come from unstable families mostly polygamous. This definitely affects the academic performance of the preschool children. In conclusion, the family marital status greatly affects the academic performance of the preschool children since it is the family which provides academic materials and emotional support needed for a child to perform well academically.

The researcher studied the parent's occupation/employment/income level and how it affects the academic performance of their children in preschool. Majority 63% (n=17) of the parents earn less than Kshs. 20,000. This affects their ability to provide for the children's academic needs like the learning materials and the school fees. The



proportion which the parents spend on education is also small. Majority of them spend less than a half of their income on education of their children. Basing on what they earn, this is a very small amount that must be affecting the academic performance of the preschool children. 50% of the parents said they are not able to provide for their family. The government should therefore provide incentives to the parents to support them in educating their children.

The parent's level of education was put into perspective as a factor affecting the academic performance of the preschool children. Majority of the parents are KCSE holders and below. This is a low qualification and hence most of the parents are not capable enough to guide their children on academic matters. 46% (n=12) of the parents said they sometimes assist their children with their homework. This shows that the parents find it difficult to assist the preschool with their homework since they are not well educated. Majority of the parents do not get involved with the school activities hence they do not see the importance of taking a keen eye on their children performance since they themselves did not get adequate education.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The following conclusions were drawn from the research questions and the findings of the study; the type of family affects the academic performance of the preschool children. This is because different types of families have different characteristics that either support or disadvantage the child's hence affecting his or her performance in school. The number of children in a family also influences the family's ability to cater for them. Most parents in Unity preschool have more children than they can handle comfortably. They earn little yet their expenses are more and hence they cannot handle their preschool children academic requirements comfortably since majority of them are economically unstable.

Parent's occupation/employment/income level is a factor that affects the academic performance of their children in preschool. Majority of the parents earn less and this affects their ability to provide for the children's academic needs. The proportion which the parents spend on education is also small. Majority of them spend only a half. Basing on what they earn, this is a very small amount that must be affecting the academic performance of the children. Parents said they are not able to provide for their family.

Parent's level of education is a factor affecting the academic performance of the preschool children. Majority of the parents are KCSE holders and below. This is relatively low qualification and hence they are not capable enough to guide their children on academic matters. The parents said they sometimes assist their children with their homework. This is an indication that the parents find it difficult to assist their preschool children with their homework since they themselves are not well conversant with academic matters. Majority of the parents do not get involved with the school activities because they do not see the importance of taking a keen interest on their children academic performance since their level of education is low.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Having carried out a descriptive survey design on parental characteristics and how it impact on preschool children academic performance in Unity preschool. The government through different stakeholders should empower parents by provision of school feeding programs for preschoolers and provision of academic materials like books. The government should also provide bursary to needy preschool children to cater for their academic requirements.

The government should also take part in initiating free preschool education to motivate the preschool children to realise their academic dreams since most of the

parents in this school are not able to meet basic requirements for their children academic needs.

Every school should be mandated to organize general parent meetings to enable the parents to meet teachers and discuss problem affecting their childrens' academic performance. During the parents – teacher meetings, the parents are able to get advice from teachers about their childrens' academic performance and the areas to improve on.

The government should be advised to enforce protective laws to preschool children to protect the children from the problems faced due to marital status of their families. For example, the parents should be held responsible by the law to educate their children and provide the necessary requirement for their children education. Once this is done, the preschool children's academic performance is improved.

Adult education should be initiated by the government to help those parents that are not well educated to get motivated to appreciate the importance of preschool education and hence encourage them to get fully involved in their children's academic matters.

The government should enforce protective laws to protect the children from the problems faced in marital status of their family. There should also be enhancement of children rights education being one of the child rights.

#### **5.5 Recommendations for further research**

- i. From this study, I recommend further research to be done on the problems faced by preschool children as a result of parental marital status and how these problems affects their academic performance.

- ii. **Further research should be done on parental level of income and how it affects preschool children academic performance.**

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix I: Letter of Introduction**

Department of Educational Communication and Technology,  
University of Nairobi  
P. o. Box 30197,

Nairobi.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Respondents,

#### **RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY**

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Nairobi. As part of my course, I am carrying out a research on the influence of parental characteristics on academic performance of unity preschool children in Embakasi district Nairobi County.

To enable me achieve this goal you are kindly requested to complete the attached questionnaire.

Kindly be assured that the information collected will be used for no other purpose other than the above mentioned. This will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thank you in advance.

Yours faithfully,

Sign \_\_\_\_\_

**Ngure Winfred**



## APPENDIX II: Questionnaire for the Parents

This questionnaire is designed to gather information on the **Influence of parental characteristics on academic performance of unity preschool children in Embakasi district Nairobi County.**

All the information given in this questionnaire will be treated with confidentiality.

Please mark the correct choice/ answer with a tick.

### Section A: Demographic Information

1.1 Please indicate your gender.

Male [ ] Female [ ]

1.2 What is your age bracket?

18 to 25 [ ]

26 to 30 [ ]

31 to 35 [ ]

36 to 40 [ ]

41 and above [ ]

1.3 What is your highest academic level?

i. Degree [ ]

ii. Diploma [ ]

iii. Certificate [ ]

iv. KCSE [ ]

v. Others, specify .....

1.4 What is your occupational status?

Self-employed [ ]

Employed [ ]

Unemployed [ ]

**Section B: Parental marital status**

**2.1 Please indicate the type of your family.**

- (i) Nuclear family [ ]
- (ii) Extended family [ ]
- (iii) Polygamous family [ ]
- (iv) Single family [ ]
- (v) Foster family [ ]
- (vi) Any other, please specify .....

**2.2 How many children do you have?**

- (i) 1-2 [ ]
- (ii) 3-4 [ ]
- (iii) 5-6 [ ]
- (iv) 7+ [ ]

**2.3 How many are in preschool? .....**

**2.4 Do you have children who are supposed to be in preschool but are not?**

- Yes [ ]
- No [ ]

**2.5 How does the family environment affect academic performance?**

.....  
.....

**2.6 How do you help the children with their school work, give two ways.**

- i.....
- ii.....

**Section C: Parents' occupation/ Employment/ Income Levels**

**3.1 What is the average range of your income per month?**

- Less than ksh. 5,000 [    ]
- Ksh. 5, 000 to 20,000 [    ]
- Ksh 21,000-30,000 [    ]
- Above 31,000 [    ]

**3.2 What proportion of your income do you spend on education expenses of your child(ren) per month.**

- 1/8 [    ]
- 1/4 [    ]
- 1/3 [    ]
- 1/2 [    ]

**3.3 Are you able to provide for the children you have in preschool?**

- Yes [    ]
- No [    ]
- Sometime [    ]

**3.4 Are the children able to do their homework after school?**

- Yes [    ]
- No [    ]
- Sometimes [    ]

**3.5 How often do you visit the school to inquire about your child academic progress?**

.....  
.....

**Section D: Parental level of education**

**4.1 Do you buy learning materials for your children?**

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

**4.2 If the answer is No, please explain briefly.**

.....  
.....

**4.3 How often do you assist your children in doing homework?**

Always [ ] Not at all [ ]

Sometimes [ ]

**4.4 Explain whether you get involved in school activities**

.....

**4.5 How often do you visit the school to inquire about your child academic progress?**

.....  
.....

**4.6 Does your child attend school regularly?**

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

**4.7 If your answer is No explain briefly.**

.....  
.....

**Thank you**

**APPENDIX III: DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS FORM**

Name of the child	Test scores out of 100							Average	Parental involvement
	Number work	Language	Science activities	Social studies	Music and movement	Creative arts	Physical education		