

ABSTRACT

This is a study on early childhood, focusing on the development of pre-school education, the related child evaluations of the parents and the social relationships that govern the interaction between children and their caretakers. Although there are many aspects of pre-school education, the patterns of distribution of child enrolment provide the best insight into the problem. Specifically, the aim is to establish the relationships between these aspects of childhood with the social structure.

A central assumption in this study is that pre-school enrolment, the related aspects of child evaluations by the parents and the parent-child relationships are influenced by the general inequalities found among the social backgrounds of the children. Survey data from parents in pastoral, agricultural and urban backgrounds in Kenya are used to determine whether the same relationships which have been found between educational attainment and social classes in other societies also exist in Kenya.

Conceptually, the expansion of pre-school education is explained within the human development and modernization theories. The general argument is that pre-school education is part of the education systems in Kenya. Consequently, its development is equally influenced by some of the strong forces of nation-building and modernization. Although the social class perspective provides a general theoretical background, determination of the composition of pre-school enrolment is explained by the sociological theories of value and socioeconomic position.

The major findings emerging from the data show that preschool enrolment is greatly influenced by the socio-economic factors of family income, level of education and occupation. The relationship between each of these variables with pre-school enrolment is statistically significant. The unexpected high enrolment among the poor may be explained by the age of children, low costs and the net gain of both the children and parents from pre-school attendance. It was also found that among the poor parents, those with none or negligible exposure to schooling are more likely to enroll their children in nursery schools than those with primary or some secondary level education. Probably, the parents who are victims of early school withdrawal have either lost faith in the power of the school as a means of access to desired employment opportunities for their children or are aware of the repetition in educational content between pre-school and the early years of primary education.

The occupational status of the head of the household is equally useful in explaining enrolment. As expected, virtually all the parents in the professional category had their

children enrolled while the labourer category had the lowest percentage. What was not expected however was the very high enrolment of children from the low income group among the pastoralists although the low income group as a whole had a high percentage of pre-school enrolment.

There is also strong evidence that other factors, particularly those related to various aspects of social structure such as family, ethnicity and also ecological variations equally affect child enrolment. Surprisingly one of the most important findings is that the two parent family is as influential as the income variable in explaining enrolment. In line with the theory, this could mean that the two parent family, being more integrated into the society is more responsive to the education value.

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Another finding of theoretical significance is the influence ethnicity has on enrolment. However, the interethnic differences in enrolment among the intra-ethnic income categories suggest that pre-school enrolment has acquired a social class dimension in some ethnic communities but not in others.

similarly, there is strong evidence suggesting that the key attributes of the socialization process reflect the socioeconomic differences found in the family background. It was found that the values attached to children are closely related with educational attainment of the parents. For instance, the better educated parents preferred fewer children and engaged children in domestic work only. In contrast, the poorly educated parents prefer large families and have strong instrumental value of children. These differences reflect the physical environment and the class ideology of the two social groups. However, the majority of the parents were eager to assist their children with learning, irrespective of the social class background. Although the social class factors are important in understanding the development of pre-school education, this study has established the influence of other social ecological, determinations in pre-school education.....