



Relationship between Kinship Care Practices and the Education Participation of Lower Primary School Pupils, in Embu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Kinship care is a form of child care placement within the family also referred to as family-centred child-care. It is acknowledged globally as the first form of care that should be explored for children outside parental care. Despite the prevalence of kinship care in the world, it is poorly supported and neglected by policy makers and practitioners. It is perceived that high-quality child care keeps children safe and healthy and helps them succeed in school. This study therefore explored the relationship between kinship care practices and participation in education among lower primary school pupils from grades 1-3 in Embu County Kenya. The study was anchored on the Functionalist theory. A correlational design was embraced in this study. The population target was 1303 from the selected schools. The study applied purposive sampling to choose a sample size of 132 participants. Reliability of instruments was tested using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, where $r = 0.7$. The study utilized an adapted Kitwood's Qualitative Technique to analyze descriptive data. The study found variations in school enrolment and resource allocation among schools, but overall, school attendance was high among lower primary pupils under kinship care. The key findings showed that there was a significant negative correlation between kinship care and school attendance, indicating a potential inverse relationship ($r = -0.691$), suggesting a significant inverse relationship between these variables ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). The study established that there was a relatively strong and negative effect of kinship care on education participation among lower primary pupils in Embu West, Embu County, Kenya. The main recommendation was that the government and the county government through the Ministry of Education should prioritize equitable resource allocation among schools and provide on-going support for school attendance to pupils under kinship care to ensure their educational needs are met.

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Introduction

The convention on the Rights of the child states that children are entitled to a suitable alternative care when they are out of parental care (UNCRC, 1989) ^[15]. Kinship care is the most remarkable form of out-of-home care globally for children who cannot be able to live with their biological parents. Kinship care has been a heritage for relatively some time across cultures globally (Delap & Mann, 2019) ^[5]. On the other hand education participation is associated with children becoming actively involved in school activities. Such activities include but not limited to attending school regularly, children enrolling in primary schools and becoming positively and actively involved in the learning process. Based on learners' experiences, learner participation creates engagement and motivation for learning here and now, and for the future profession. Globally, many children live in placement care systems.

In Kenya, despite attention given by global and state recommendations that children should not be separated from households, this has been the situation. Poverty, which is at 46% in Kenya, is notably cited as a major reason for children's placement care (UNICEF, 2018) ^[17]. Likewise, other causes like child abuse, neglect, political and ethnic conflicts and family breakdown lead children to kinship care (Government of Kenya 2014) ^[9]. The state of being an orphan causes anxiety and suffering, hence, has calling for the intercession of various partners including the government in order to reduce social marginalization of children. Kenya is endorsed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990) ^[16], that ensures adoptions take place for supportive child environment. In light of this, it was imperative to find out how the situation was in Embu County, Kenya. This study therefore, focused on relationship between kinship care practices and education participation of lower primary pupils in the county, Kenya.

The study was guided by the following objective

To determine the relationship between kinship care and education participation of lower primary school grades in Embu County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The Theoretical Framework of this study was the Functionalists Theory according to Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim. In the functionalist theory, the society is like a biological organism with many interconnected parts that work together and are interdependent. Functionalists argue that each part performs its very essential role for the normal functioning of the entire body. They argue that a society has many parts that are interdependent to each other and all move hand in hand for the success of the society. Pupils play a remarkable part in the academic system since they are recipients of future social progress and therefore should attend school regularly. Therefore, schools as part of the society should ensure good education, access and confinement of children through provision of adequate learning materials and provision of a helpful learning environment that offer care, love and protection to allow pupils participate adequately in school enrolment and attendance. Then again, the role of alternative care-givers is to enrol their children to school at the right time and ensure that their children attend school regularly. Subsequently, this theory was applicable to this study because it recognized that each of the mentioned components had got a duty to play in ensuring that children had access to education and retention for societal development and social progress.

Literature Review

Kinship care refers to a form of child placement that is family-centred within the child's household or family friends as stated by Child Welfare Information Gateway United States. Education participation is widely recognized as a fundamental social determination of future progress (OECD, 2018) ^[13]. Kinship care has been a tradition for quite some time across culture globally (Delap & Mann, 2019) ^[5]. Further, Delap *et al.*, (2019) ^[5] affirm that, kinship care is a priority that is valuable despite being neglected by policymakers and practitioners. Internationally, evidence indicates that kinship care gives greater emplacement secureness than non-relative fostering (Brown, & Broadhurst, 2019) ^[3].

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) ^[1], carried out a research and identified that family-centred care placements are more widespread than foster care. According to Holtan and Batchelder (2018) ^[18], evidence shows that young ones under kinship in Australia, who stayed in placement longer, had better general health and specifically better mental health outcomes than those who stayed for a shorter time. However, this study failed to focus on education participation of children under kinship care, which this current study sought to establish.

In Zambia, kinship care practices are widely preferred to alternative care for children who need protection and care (Benjamin *et al.*, 2019) ^[2]. This study asserts that children who put up with a sister or close grandmother, were found to fair well than those who lived with a relative they were not close. Another study in Zimbabwe affirmed that children maintained stronger and better connections with their care-givers than birth parents (Mann & Delap, 2020) ^[6]. Similarly, according to Abdullah, Cudjoe and Manful children reported that care-givers were more reassuring and caring than parents. However, this study did not address the issue on kinship care in relation to education participation of lower primary pupils in grades 1-3, a study which the researcher explored in Embu County, Kenya.

A study carried out in Tanzania indicated that, most of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) who lived with their kin experienced more problems as compared to those living in orphanages. Despite the advancement of basic education provision in Tanzania, Loisiiki affirmed that acquiring academics among OVC was affected by little and unreliable financial sources to meet their essentials. Furthermore, deprivation of education was high among OVC, hence experiencing learning challenges contrary to non-orphans (NBS & UNICEF, 2018) ^[17].

In Kenya, as in many other countries in the South of Sahara, number of children who require protection is high (UNICEF, 2018) ^[17]. A study conducted in Mwingi, Kitui County revealed that members of the community favored more community-based child care and protection than formal child-care (Kithome, 2021) ^[11]. However, little has been studied on kinship care in Kenya. This study therefore, carried out a research to establish the relationship between kinship care and education participation of lower primary pupils, grades 1-3 in Embu County, Kenya.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design and Variables

This study utilized a correlation research design which helped to establish relationship between kinship care and the education participation of grade 1-3 pupils in the study. The design helped to draw attention to the relationship between variables and asserted if the relationship was strong, weak, or no relationship occurred between them.

Data Collection Tools

Instruments of data collection were: questionnaires, interview guides, and observation schedule to collect data from the respondents.

Variables

The study variable of investigation was the children living with extended members of the family. The focus was to explore how well these children were enrolled and attended school and how their needs were met in relation to food,

clothing, and shelter. The variable was measured by using an ordinal scale whereby words e.g. 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', and 'always' were used and assigned with corresponding scores as 1 never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 always.

Data collection Methods

Questionnaires were directed to the head-teachers and teachers who gave their responses in writing. Questionnaires were directed to the head-teachers and teachers in lower primary school grades. The questions were categorised on school attendance, adequacy of school instructional materials and children under kinship care in lower primary school. The respondents scrutinized the questions, clarified what was anticipated and gave their responses in writing. The respondents were required to give a straightforward answer either to tick or give YES or NO answer and also give the rating on their views in the closed-ended questionnaires while in open-ended they were expected to give out their views and provide in-depth information.

The scheduled interview was administered to lower primary pupils from kinship care and the kinship care-givers. The interview schedule was appropriate for use for those respondents as the researcher was enabled to gather information to join up with what was collected using questionnaires. The researcher used this kind of instrument because it gave chances for both the researcher and the respondents to discuss and bring clarity on the ambiguous issues. This was based on the provision of basic needs, support, care and protection and frequency of school attendance.

The Observation schedule was applied to pupils from kinship care. The researcher observed their school attendance using the class attendance register and the learners class enrolment. The results were recorded down through coding.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. In quantitative analysis, an excel spread sheet was made ready for recording of data that was gathered through questionnaires. Every data was coded where required and keyed in the worksheet. Pivot table was used to organize and analyze data interpretatively and given inform of frequencies, percentages, and means of the correlation linking the objective was established. Pearson Correlation analysis was utilized to try-out the hypothesis to establish and determine whether there was significant correlation between kinship care practices and education participation of lower primary pupils in the study.

Qualitative data collected through interviews and observations was analysed by employing Kitwood's Qualitative Technique

of analysis to make evident emerging trends and themes. Open-ended questionnaires and interviews were transcribed through recording and categorizing into themes. Each theme was organized into sub-themes which were of primary focus in the study objective. Correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between the kinship care practices and education participation of lower primary learners. T-tests were used which helped to determine if there was statistically relationship between the two variables.

Research Findings

Relationship between kinship care and Education participation of Lower Primary Pupils

The objective of the study sought to determine the relationship between kinship care and education participation of lower primary school grades in Embu County, Kenya. The respondents were asked to give the number of pupils under kinship care as reported and the findings are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Pupils under Kinship Care

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Number of pupils under kinship care	None	20.0%
	<6	40.0%
	6-10	0.0%
	10-15	40.0%
	>15	0.0%
	10	100.0%

Source: Researcher, 2024

From Table above, the findings indicated that head-teachers reported the distribution of pupils under kinship care, revealing that 40% of pupils fell into the category of having less than six individuals under kinship care, while another 40% fell into the 10-15 category, as shown in Table 4.6, it aligns with studies indicating challenges faced by children in kinship care, such as limited access to resources and services (Dziro & Mhlanga, 2018) ^[7]. The rejection of the null hypothesis in the paired t-test supports the assertion that kinship care influences education participation negatively, suggesting the need for further investigation into mitigating factors.

Further, correlation between kinship care and education participation of lower primary school grades using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) for linear relationships. The Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was to determine the strength and direction of the relationship and the results are as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Bayes Factor Inference on Pairwise Correlations between Kinship care and education participation

		Kinship care	School completion	School attendance
Kinship care	Pearson Correlation	1	-.371	-.691
	Bayes Factor		2.429	.365
	N	10	10	10
School completion	Pearson Correlation	-.371	1	.527
	Bayes Factor	2.429		1.238
	N	10	10	10
School attendance	Pearson Correlation	-.691	.527	1
	Bayes Factor	.365	1.238	
	N	10	10	10

a. Bayes factor: Null versus alternative hypothesis.

The results, outlined in Table above, indicated a negative correlation between kinship care and school attendance (-0.691), suggesting a potential inverse relationship between these variables. This implies a unit change in kinship care reduces participation in education among pupils in lower primary schools by 69.1%. These findings corroborate the negative correlations observed in Table 4.6, indicating consistent evidence that higher levels of kinship care are associated with lower levels of education participation among

lower primary school pupils. This is contrary to assertions that kinship care provides a more stable and supportive environment for children compared to non-relative foster care (Brown & Broadhurst, 2019) [3].

Further, paired t-test was used to test for the hypothesis:

Ha2 There is a significant relationship between kinship care and education participation of lower primary school pupils.

The Calculated t-value was compared with the Critical t-value as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Paired Sample t-test Correlations between kinship care and school attendance

Sampled pair-test		t	DF	Correlation	Mean	Std. Dev	95% CI		Sig.
							Lower	Upper	
Pair 2	Completion rates of lower primary pupils and kinship care	2.623	9	-.371	1.300	1.567	.179	2.421	.001*

The results, as presented in Table 4.8, revealed a calculated t-value of 2.623, which surpassed the critical t-value. This suggests a significant difference between the means of completion rates and kinship care, indicating a potential relationship between these variables. The findings indicated a negative correlation between kinship care and school attendance, suggesting a potential inverse relationship between these variables. The significant t-test result underscores the need for targeted interventions to support school completion among children in kinship care, potentially addressing factors such as access to educational resources and stability in care environments.

Summary of the Findings

Findings revealed that variations in enrolment numbers were observed among schools and grade levels. This indicated differences in school sizes and possibly resource allocation among schools. Both, teacher-rated and observed school attendance were high among pupils under kinship care. Teachers generally had a positive outlook on school completion among lower primary pupils under kinship care. Approximately two-thirds of teachers reported that instructional materials were adequate. There was a negative correlation between kinship care and school attendance (-0.691). This suggested a potential inverse relationship between these variables. There was a significant difference between the means of completion rates and kinship care. This implied a potential relationship between these variables. Bayes factor inference showed that there was a strong and negative direction of the relationship between kinship care and participation in education among pupils in lower primary schools.

Conclusions

It can therefore be concluded that, there is a relationship between kinship care practices and participation in education of lower primary pupils in grades 1-3. However, there was variation in enrolment numbers and resource allocation among schools. The study therefore, established that there was a significant negative relationship between kinship care and education participation among lower primary pupils in Embu County, Kenya.

Recommendations

The variation in enrolment numbers is attributed to limited resource allocation among schools under study. The study thus recommended that the Ministry of Education should prioritize efforts to ensure equitable resource allocation

among schools, provide ongoing support for school attendance, and enhance teacher training and support programs to address the unique needs of pupils under kinship care. Additionally, collaboration with families, caregivers, and community stakeholders should be promoted to create a supportive educational environment for vulnerable children. The negative correlation (-0.691) between kinship care and school attendance suggests challenges or barriers that children under kinship care might face in consistently attending school. It recommended that the Ministry of Education should develop support mechanisms specifically targeting children under kinship care. This may include mentorship programmes, counseling services, or financial support to guardians. Regular monitoring and evaluation of attendance and educational outcomes among children under kinship care are also recommended to identify and address any barriers promptly.

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