



## Correlation between Institutional Child Care Practices and the Education Participation of Lower Primary School Pupils, Kenya

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### Abstract

Institutional child care refers to a group living-setting for more than ten children, having no biological or surrogate mother in which care is provided by paid care-givers (Browne, 2019). It is a structured form of care offered to vulnerable children in settings such as residential institutions, or orphanages (OECD, 2021). The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between institutional child care practices and participation in education of lower primary school pupils from grades 1-3 in, Embu County. The study was grounded on Bronfenbrenner Ecological System theory that purports that human development is influenced by a dynamic interplay between the individual and their surrounding systems. A correlational design was embraced in this study. The population target was 1303 from the selected schools. The sample size was 132 participants comprising of institutional caregivers, learners, lower primary teachers, and head-teachers. The study found variations in school enrolment and resource allocation among schools, but overall, school attendance was low among lower primary pupils under institutional care. Institutional care showed a strong negative correlation with school completion, suggesting a detrimental effect on completing school among lower primary pupils ( $p=-0.836$ ). However, the influence on school attendance appeared to be less pronounced and statistically insignificant ( $p=.356>0.05$ ). The study therefore, recommends that the Ministry of Social Services conducts thorough review of institutional care policies and practices in Embu County to improve conditions within the institutions to support education participation for children. Further, enhancing educational facilities within institutions and ensuring that children's educational needs are prioritized alongside their care needs.

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Study Background

According to the 1989 UNCRC, children are regarded as legal subjects who are entitled to care and protection. Young children are entitled to live with their biological parents but where it is not possible arrangements are done. Globally, children have been placed in institutional care centres despite the negative consequences associated with those institutions. Moreover, children have a right to free and compulsory education. Education participation encompasses an individual's engagement in formal, non-formal, or informal learning activities, fostering personal and societal growth. Early years of a child's life in education participation, builds the basis for life-long growth (UNICEF, 2022) <sup>[16]</sup>. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development draws attention to the importance of early child education as a lifelong learning foundation that enhances cognitive, social and emotional development (OECD, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. On the contrary, children who miss early years of education may not catch up with their peers and they may probably withdraw from school failing to develop their full potential.

In Kenya, institutional care practices continue to face challenges such as inadequate service delivery, demanding policy change to maintain progress (Better Care Network, 2023) <sup>[3]</sup>. A descriptive study was carried out in Kibera exploring the link between resources and customer satisfaction on residential centres (Kilio *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>. The findings of Kilio's study revealed that, residential care centres in these slums had inadequate infrastructure to offer quality care for children. Further, this study indicated that the institutions lacked enough accommodation facilities and had scarce play grounds for extra-classroom activities for scholars (Kilio *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>. Moreover, Embu is not exceptional since it provides safe places for children's rescue. St Stephen is a children's home at Embu established in 1989 (Mercy, 2020). The home is tasked with caring for needy and endangered children in the community. Mercy (2020) indicates that, this home faced challenges on funding as it relied on donations from well-wishers as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. However, study by Mercy was limited to mentioning how institutional care of children in this centre influences education participation of children in lower primary. This study however, took a look at relationship between institutional care practices and education participation of lower primary pupils in Embu County, Kenya.

## 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between institutional care practices and participation in education of lower primary pupils in grades 1-3 on school enrolment, learners' attendance and their school retention in Embu County, Kenya.

## 1.3. Study Objective

The study was guided by the following objective:

To establish the relationship between institutional care practices and the education participation of lower primary pupils in Embu County, Kenya.

## 1.4. Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The Ecological Systems Theory introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 <sup>[5]</sup>, explains how a child's development is influenced by different environmental systems that interact with one another and with the child to shape their growth and behaviour. There are five layers organized into ecological systems which include the microsystem, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system, and chrono-system.

The microsystem represents the immediate settings and relationships that directly impact an individual, such as family, school, and peers. The mesosystem involves the interactions between these immediate environments, such as how parental involvement in schooling influences a child's education. The ecosystem includes systems that indirectly affect the individual, like a parent's workplace policies or community services. The macro-system encompasses broader societal and cultural influences, including norms, laws, and economic systems. Finally, the chrono-system adds the dimension of time, considering how life transitions and historical or socio-economic changes impact development.

This theoretical framework was particularly relevant to this study on institutional child care setting and its relationship to educational participation among lower primary school pupils.

The nature of these relationship can significantly influence the child's educational participation and success.

In the Mesosystem, interactions between key environments, such as the collaboration between caregivers and schools, are part of the mesosystem. For example, how well a foster parent communicates with teachers can impact the child's educational outcomes. Likewise, in the Ecosystem, policies governing institutional care, as well as community support systems like access to counselling or extracurricular activities, indirectly influence the child's educational opportunities.

On the other hand, in the macro-system, cultural attitudes toward institutional child care, the societal stigma associated with institutional care, and the broader educational policies in the country shape the educational experiences of children in this setting. Finally, in the chrono-system, over time, transitions such as moving from one institutional center to another, changes in institutional policies, or shifts in societal attitudes toward institutional care can have long-term effects on a child's educational participation and outcomes.

By using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a framework, the study can holistically examine how institutional care system can influence the educational participation of children. Children under this care can often have disrupted family relationships and may rely on care-givers and educators for support. A nurturing ecosystem with positive care-giver relationships can enhance children's educational participation. This theory applied to this study because it helped the researcher to establish how institutional care influences education participation of lower primary school pupils in Embu County that ensured access and consistency of schooling.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Institutional Care Practices and the Education Participation

Globally, institutional care for children remains a critical issue, with significant disparities in how care is provided and its long effects on children. In recent findings, over 450,000 children are living in residential care in Europe and Asia. Many of these children face challenges such as neglect, abuse and psychological trauma (UNICEF, 2024) <sup>[17]</sup>. In recent years, it has been observed that the family has been losing some of its roles and obligations on the care of children. This has brought about out-of-school children and greatly impacts on their education participation (UNICEF, 2021) <sup>[15]</sup>.

In Latin America and Caribbean, approximately 187,124 children have been placed in residential institutions (Cudjoe *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[7]</sup>. Cudjoe *et al.* affirmed that, Beyond Institutional Care has come into being to support government across the two regions to advance child defense and deinstitutionalization process. In Sub-Saharan Africa, a study was conducted in South Africa on Covid-19 aftermath on residential care (Fallon *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[8]</sup>. The findings indicated that, lockdown restrictions placed extra pressure on vulnerable children under residential home. Similarly, another study asserted that adapting to new modalities on education and other essential services posed major problems to children in orphanages in South Africa (Better Care Network, 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>. Further, (Bega, Smillie & Ajam, 2020) <sup>[1]</sup> affirmed that approximately 27 abandoned babies in this country during the pandemic were taken to residential homes in Johannesburg. In Tanzania, OVC have experienced serious neglect, abuse, discrimination and stigmatization (Makuu, 2019) <sup>[10]</sup>. These findings were a case study carried out in

Ubungo Residential Centres in Dar-es-Salaam on psychological issues affecting orphan children and care-givers. Additionally, another study carried out in Tanzania on disability and inclusive education indicated several gaps in access to education (World Bank, 2023) <sup>[18]</sup>. Further, World Bank findings indicated that only 50% of children with disabilities in the institutional attended school due to inadequate teacher training. In Kenya, a descriptive study was carried out in Kibera exploring the link between resources and customer satisfaction on residential centres (Kilio *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>. The results of this revealed that, residential care centres in these slums had inadequate infrastructure to offer quality care for children. Further, this study indicated that the institutions lacked enough accommodation facilities and had scarce play grounds for extra-classroom activities for scholars (Kilio *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[9]</sup>. Despite the study being conducted in residential care centres on the link between resources and customer satisfaction on residential care centres, it did not indicate how the children in those centres participated in education. There was therefore, a necessity to participate a similar study to prove the relationship between institutional care practices and education participation of lower primary pupils, in grades 1-3 in Embu County, Kenya.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study applied a correlation research design. Creswell (2023) <sup>[6]</sup>, posited that correlation design is a qualitative research method used to examine correlation between two variables and to determine their relationship without manipulating them. The aforesaid was helpful to the researcher to ascertain whether there was a relationship between institutional care and the education participation of grade 1-3 pupils in the study. The design aided to draw attention to the relationship between variables and assert if there was any relationship between them. This would denote whether the relationship was strong, weak, or no relationship occurred between them.

#### 3.2. Study Variable

The independent variable was institutional care. This variable was measured on a four-point Likert scale of preferences namely 'exceedingly prefer', 'moderately prefer', 'lowly prefer', and 'not at all prefer to be in institutional care'. The dependent variable was education participation. The measurable indicators were school enrollment and school daily attendance obtained from total number of pupils enrolled attained from daily school attendance register.

#### 3.3. Data collection Methods

##### 3.3.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to collect data from the head-teachers and teachers who gave their responses in writing. The questions were indexed on school attendance, adequacy of school instructional materials and children under institutional care in lower primary school. The respondents examined the questions carefully, 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 to gather quantitative data.

##### 3.3.2. Interview Guides

The scheduled interviews were directed to lower primary pupils from Institutional care and the institutional care-givers. This allowed in-depth expedition of the learner's school participation on enrollment and frequency of school attendance. 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.

##### 3.3.3. Observation Schedule

The observation schedules were drawn on to pupils from institutional care. The researcher checked on their school attendance using the class attendance register and the learners class enrolment and the results were recorded down through coding.

#### 3.4. 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 objective and correlation linking the objective were established. Pearson Correlation analysis was utilized to try-out the hypothesis to establish and determine whether there was significant correlation between institutional 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 thematically. 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 typically precedes t-tests in statistical analysis. Correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between two continuous variables.

### 4. Research Findings and Discussion

#### 4.1. Relationship between Institutional Care and Education Participation of Lower Primary Pupils

The study objective sought to establish the relationship between institutional care and education participation of lower primary school grades in Embu County. Table 4.9 reports the number of pupils under institutional care as reported and the findings are as shown.

**Table 1:** Number of Pupils under Institutional Care

Item		Frequency	Percentage
Number of pupils under institutional care	None	8	80.0%
	<6	0	0.0%
	6-10	0	0.0%
	10-15	0	0.0%
	>15	2	20.0%
		10	100.0%

Source: Researcher, 2024

According to head teachers' reports in Table 4.9, 80% of lower primary pupils were not under institutional care. Only 20% of lower primary pupils in Embu County are under institutional care, with more than 15 individuals reported in this category. This finding aligns with World Bank report that indicated that only 50% of children with disabilities in institutional care attended school due to inadequate teacher training (World Bank, 2023) [18]. According to World Bank, institutional care is often associated with challenges such as inadequate individualized attention and reduced educational opportunities, which could negatively impact children's

educational participation. Therefore, the low prevalence of institutional care in Embu County suggests a potentially positive influence on education participation among this group.

Further, correlation between institutional 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 used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship and the results are as presented in Table 4.10.

**Table 2:** Bayes Factor Inference on Pairwise Correlations between Institutional Care and Education Participation

		Institutional care	School completion	School attendance
Institutional care	Pearson Correlation	1	-.836	-.327
	Bayes Factor		.048	2.780
	N	10	10	10
School completion	Pearson Correlation	-.836	1	.527
	Bayes Factor	.048		1.238
	N	10	10	10
School attendance pupils in lower primary	Pearson Correlation	-.327	.527	1
	Bayes Factor	2.780	1.238	
	N	10	10	10
a. Bayes factor: Null versus alternative hypothesis.				

Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to analyze the relationship between institutional care and education participation. The results showed a strong negative correlation between institutional care and school completion ( $-0.836$ ), indicating a potentially adverse effect of institutional care on completing school. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.836$ ) indicates a strong negative correlation between institutional care and school completion rates among lower primary pupils in Embu West. This finding contradicts the assumption that institutional care provides adequate support and resources for children's educational needs (Fallon *et al.*, 2020) [8]. Fallon *et al.* argue that institutional care settings may lack the personalized attention and familial support necessary for children to complete their early years of schooling successfully. Thus, the strong negative correlation observed in this study suggests that institutional care may hinder lower primary pupils' ability to complete their education.

## 5. Study Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusion

The study can be concluded that there was variation in enrolment numbers of pupils in institutional care on school attendance and resource allocation among schools. The strong negative correlation observed in this study suggests that institutional care may hinder lower primary pupils' ability to complete their education. Additionally, the influence on school attendance appeared to be less pronounced and statistically insignificant.

### 5.2. General Recommendations

The strong negative correlation between institutional care and school completion indicates a potential detrimental effect of institutional care on educational outcomes for lower primary pupils. The study therefore recommended that the Ministry of Social Services conduct a thorough review of institutional care policies and practices in Embu County. The aim should be to improve conditions within institutions to support educational participation and completion for children in institutional care. This could involve enhancing educational facilities within institutions, providing educational support programs, and ensuring that children's educational needs are prioritized alongside their care needs.

### 5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

This study only covered Embu County, there is therefore a need to extend the research scope to include comparative analyses across different counties in Kenya to examine variations in institutional care practices and their impact on the education participation of lower primary school pupils. By comparing findings across counties with different socio-economic contexts and cultural norms, researchers can identify contextual factors influencing educational outcomes and inform targeted interventions.

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