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Influence of Learning Environment and Socio-Behavioural Support on Academic Performance of Refugee Children in Public Primary Schools in Ruiru Sub-County, Kenya

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Influence of Learning Environment and Socio-Behavioural Support on Academic Performance of Refugee Children in Public Primary Schools in Ruiru Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose for this study was to investigate the influence of learning environment and socio-behavioural support on academic performance of refugee children in public primary schools in Ruiru Sub-County, Kenya. The study used exploratory research design. There are thirty (30) public primary schools with refugee children in Ruiru Sub County. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 28 public primary schools. The target population for this study was 536 teachers and 30 head teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 221 teachers while purpose sampling was used to select 28 head teachers. The findings showed that learning environment and socio-behavioural support influence the academic performance of refugee children. Based on research findings, it can be concluded that learning environment influences academic performance of refugees' children in public primary schools. The school environment is of paramount importance in shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. Further, it can be concluded that socio-behavioural support influences academic performance of refugees' children in public primary schools. It is recommended that school management should ensure that a favourable learning environment is provided for refugee children. This will ensure that a supportive and favourable school environment free of abuse, name calling and discrimination is achieved. Teachers, parents and other pupils should help in promoting socio-behavioural and psychological support to refugee children.

Key words: *learning environment, socio-behavioural support, academic performance, refugee children, Kenya*

1.0 Introduction

Education for refugee children is a basic right, one that is vital in restoring hope and dignity to people driven from their countries or homelands because of civil wars, epidemics and natural disasters. It helps them to get back on their feet and build back a better future when they are repatriated (Kabui, 2016). The future security of individuals and societies is connected to the transferable skills, knowledge and capacities that are developed through education (UNHCR, 2012).

Inadequate humanitarian assistance and educational opportunities in refugee camps results to increased numbers of refugees leaving the camps and settling in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. By moving to the city, these refugees hope to improve their livelihoods and find alternative educational settings where their children can have more access and improved quality education. Indeed, the refugees view education as a source of integration an avenue to rebuilding their dignity (Dryden-Peterson, 2004).

The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have (UNESCO, 2001). Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, socio-behavioural support resource use and partnerships with their communities (Salamanca Framework for Action, 1994).

Because of this, there has been a growing emphasis on the right to and the benefits of education for refugee children (World Bank, 2004). In the process of providing better educational needs to refugee children, their academic performance is hindered by unfavourable learning environment characterized by abuse and name calling from fellow pupils, insufficient socio-behavioural support and inadequate instructional skills from tutors. Moreover, the same children are introduced to a curriculum totally different from what they are used to. The same curriculum does not also capture all aspects they require to rebuild their lives that include peace studies and reconciliations (Karanja, 2010).

Academic achievement of a student is also associated with the many components of learning environment. Learning environment includes all the external condition and influences in the school that affect the academic achievement of the student such as laboratory equipment, library facilities, qualified teachers, teacher-pupil relationship and pupil-pupil relationship (Eze, 2010). Tsavga (2011) maintains that learning environment plays a vital role in determining how students perform or respond to circumstances and situations around them. The type of learning environment is expected to have two outcomes. A favourable learning environment will have a positive effect on educational performance (Kamaruddin, Zainal, Aminuddin & Jusoff, 2009). Unfavourable learning environment will lead to negative educational performance.

The school environment is of paramount importance in shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. This is because supportive and favourable school environment enriched with enough learning facilities, and favourable climate makes students more comfortable, more concentrated on their academic activities that result in high academic performance (Usaini, Abubakar, & Bichi, 2015). The learning environment determines to a large extent how a student behaves and interacts, that is to say that the environment in which we find ourselves tend to mould our behaviour so as to meet the demands of life whether negatively or positively.

Socio-behavioural support facilitates the development of appropriate behaviour that reduces disruptive or interfering behaviour. The program emphasizes the ability of positive feelings, thoughts, and actions to reduce negative behaviours of pupils by encouraging significant growth in academic motivation and academic performance (Bavarian *et al.*, 2013). Socio-behavioural support is not only associated with improved academic achievement, but also to be linked to improvements in related behaviours known to influence academic success.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ruiru Sub County is an area that has continuously been a home for refugees especially from Sudan. The challenge of acquiring quality basic education for the refugee children is problematic due to lack of inclusive educational opportunities for these children (Thu, 2014). These children are also vulnerable to marginalization and discrimination. Because of this, refugee children face varied learning difficulties that results to educational underperformance. In order to address these problems, governments and other international organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF emphasizes on the right to and the benefits of education for refugee children through inclusion criteria (UNESCO, 2001).

In the process of providing these educational needs to refugee children, educational performance is undermined by unfavourable learning environment and socio behavioural support to refugee children. The schools are also characterized by bullying; racial, ethnic, marginalization and tribal prejudice (Karanja, 2010). Because of these problems, pupils within these schools feel excluded and separated a situation that undermines their full concentration in class. The outcome is poor academic performance among these pupils.

Tsavga (2011) maintains that the unfavourable learning environment characterized bullying, name calling and abuse plays a critical role in determining how students perform or respond to circumstances and situations around them. Psychological disturbance as a result of harassment from fellow pupils or even teachers undermines the psychological stability of refugee children hence cannot concentrate in class (Njeri, 2015).

1.33 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i. To examine the influence of learning environment on academic performance of refugees children in public primary schools in Ruiru Sub County
- ii. To establish the influence of socio-behavioural support on academic performance of refugees children in public primary schools in Ruiru Sub County

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Learning Environment and Academic Performance

The protection role of education involves the ability of schools to provide a safe and secure space that promotes the wellbeing of learners, teachers and other education personnel. The education strategy points out that contrary to expectations schools are not always safe places for children (UNHCR, 2009). Schools can be spaces for bullying; racial, ethnic, linguistic and gender discrimination; sexual exploitation; natural and environmental hazards; corporal punishment and attacks including abduction and recruitment in to armed forces.

Shamaki (2015) conducted a study on influence of learning environment on students' academic achievement in mathematics: a case study of some selected secondary schools in Yobe State –

Nigeria. Thus the study investigated some components of learning environment and their possible influence on students' academic achievement in mathematics. The result showed that, there is significance difference between the mean performance of students taught in an ideal learning environment and that of students taught in a dull learning environment.

Ngiria (2013) conducted a study to investigate the school factors affecting inclusion of learners with disabilities among refugees in public primary schools of Ruiru District, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design. The main findings of the study were that unfavourable environmental barriers affected learners, teacher and host pupils' negative attitudes as well as lack of efficient teacher competencies in teaching affected refugees learners with disabilities.

2.2 Socio-Behavioural Support and Academic Performance

Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2016) conducted a study Policy Advisory the Law on Inclusive Education. Inclusion has been part of this requirement to provide equal educational opportunities Both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Sec. 504) requires schools and agencies to provide equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities. . Another primary source for the inclusion requirement is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. IDEA not only supports equal educational opportunities, it specifically requires schools to support inclusion of children with disabilities through the least restrictive and natural environment mandates. For preschool and school age children (ages 3-21), IDEA requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment". For infants and toddlers (ages 0-3) with disabilities, IDEA promotes the use of "natural environments" for early intervention services.

There are two specific and relevant ways in which discrimination plays out in the educational experiences of refugee children in countries of first asylum: the content of the curriculum and direct personal discrimination by peers and teachers (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). These pre-settlement experiences of discrimination in school settings may influence the ways in which refugee children perceive school and the relationships they have with peers and teachers and the instructional content to which refugee children are exposed to.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the social model of inclusive education. In this model, the problem that hinders inclusive education is located within the education system. Among the principles of social model are; collaboration between all stakeholders to develop strategy from birth throughout life, collaboration between all forms of education i.e. formal, non-formal and alternative, listen to and involve all learners and marginalized in planning and implementing, make environment accessible, safe and welcoming, develop and implement policy to respond to diversity and combat discrimination. Therefore, the society needs to change in order to adjust to the diverse needs of learners. The education requires reform and restructuring of the school as a whole with the aim of ensuring that all pupils can have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school. It therefore calls for the removal of obstacles to the participation of learners and in changing institutions, regulations and attitudes that create and maintain exclusion (Campbell & Oliver, 1996).

The education system in Ruiru Sub County needs to be reviewed in order to incorporate all refugees' learners inclusively. This model encourages teachers to use 'curriculum differentiation' to modify content, activities and assessments in order to respond more flexibly to the diverse

needs of all learners. This theory is therefore relevant to this study since it outlines the practices in the attainment of inclusive education in a society where some groups of persons are marginalized.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

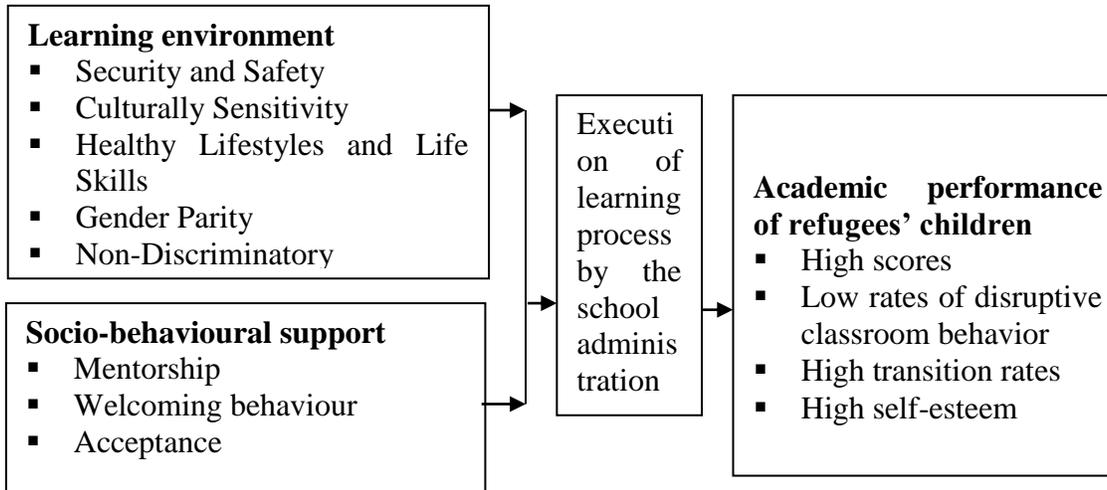


Figure 1: influence of learning environment and socio-behavioural support on academic performance of refugee

3.0 Research Methodology

The study used exploratory research design. The target population for this study was 536 teachers and 30 head teachers (Ruiru sub Sub County Education Office, 2016). To select teachers' sample size simple random sampling was used. A sample size of 221 teachers was chosen. Simple random sampling technique was also used to select a sample size of 28 head teachers. Primary data were collected through the use of semi structured questionnaires and interview guide. Validity and reliability test were conducted to ensure that research instruments are adequate and reliable. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The researchers evaluated, analyze and interpret the data. Quantitative data collected by use of questionnaires were presented in frequency tables. Chi square was used to check on the relationship between the variables. Qualitative data collected by use of interview guide was analyzed qualitatively through content analysis and presented in prose form.

4.0 Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

4.1 Instruments' Response Rate

The return rate provides a profile of respondents who participated in the study. The respondents of the study were Board of management members and principals. Response rate for the study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents category	Administered	Returned	Unreturned	Percentage returned
Teachers	221	161	60	72.9
Head teachers	28	25	3	89.3

The response rate for teachers was 72.9% while that for head teachers was 89.3%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003); Kothari (2004) a response rate of above 50 percent is adequate for a descriptive study. Based on these assertions from renowned scholars, a response rate of 72.9% for teachers and a response rate of 89.3% for head teachers were very good for the study.

4.2 Learning Environment and Academic Performance of Refugee Children

Teachers were further asked to respond on whether learning environment influenced academic performance of refugees' children. The responses were rated on a five Likert scale and presented in Table 2. The school environment is of paramount importance in shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. The learning environment determines to a large extent how a student behaves and interacts, that is to say that the environment in which we find ourselves tend to mould our behaviour so as to meet the demands of life whether negatively or positively. The protection role of education involves the ability of schools to provide a safe and secure space that promotes the well-being of learners, teachers and other education personnel.

Table 2: Learning Environment and Performance of Refugee Children

Learning environment	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
refugee pupils are oriented to the new environment	39.1%	28.0%	9.3%	13.7%	9.9%	2.3	1.4
Adapting to the new environment is a challenge to refugee pupils	9.9%	8.7%	8.7%	29.8%	42.9%	3.9	1.3
Learning environment affects refugee pupils psychological development	11.8%	8.1%	4.3%	36.0%	39.8%	3.8	1.3
Good learning environment is a challenge to most schools	7.5%	10.6%	5.6%	26.1%	50.3%	4.0	1.3

Results in Table 2 revealed that majority of the teachers who were 67.1 percent disagreed that refugee pupils are oriented to the new environment. The results also showed that majority of the teachers 72.7 percent agreed that adapting to the new environment is a challenge to refugee

pupils. The results also showed that majority of the teachers who were 75.8 percent of the teachers agreed that learning environment affects refugee pupils’ psychological development. The results also show that 76.4 percent of the teachers agreed that good learning environment is a challenge to most schools. The results agree with Samaki (2015) that there is significance difference between the mean performance of students taught in an ideal learning environment and that of students taught in a dull learning environment. They also agree with Ngiria (2013) that unfavourable environmental barriers affected learners, teacher and host pupils’ negative attitudes as well as lack of efficient teacher competencies in teaching affected refugees learners with disabilities. The results contrast with that of Karanja (2010) that the community school provides many Sudanese children in Nairobi with an opportunity to access education, and a welcoming and secure learning environment.

Further, a cross tabulation table of learning environment and academic performance of refugee children was computed. Learning environment was categorized into unfavourable and favourable learning environment. This was tabulated against academic performance that was categorized into high academic performance and low academic performance. Table 3 shows how academic performance was evaluated against learning environment.

Table 3: Cross Tabulation of Learning Environment and Academic Performance

Learning environment	Academic performance		Chi-square (p value)
	Low academic performance	High academic performance	
Unfavourable	108	3	125.545(0.000)
Favourable	5	45	

Schools where learning environment was unfavourable lead to poor academic performance than those schools with favourable learning. Result findings indicated that, academic performance was low when learning environment was rated unfavourable by 108 teachers as compared to 5 teachers who rated it favourable. Further, academic performance was high when learning environment was rated favourable by 45 teachers as compared to only 3 teachers who rated it unfavourable. The study findings were statistically significant supported by a chi square of ($\lambda=125.545$, $p=0.000$) and. Chi square test was meant to show whether there existed any significant association between learning environment and academic performance of refugee children.

During an interview session with head teachers on the influence of learning environment on academic performance of refugee children, it was established that learning environment affects performance of refugee pupils. The school environment is of paramount importance in shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. This is because supportive and favourable school environment enriched with enough learning facilities, and favourable climate makes students more comfortable, more concentrated on their academic activities that result in high academic performance.

4.3 Socio-Behavioral Support and Academic Performance of Refugee Children

The study sought to establish the influence of socio-behavioural support on the performance of refugee children. Socio-behavioural support facilitates the development of appropriate behaviour that reduces disruptive behaviour. Teachers were further asked to respond on whether socio-behavioural support influenced academic performance of refugees' children. The responses were rated on a five Likert scale and presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Socio-Behavioral Support and Performance of Refugee Children

Socio-behavioral support	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Guiding a refugee pupil stabilizes their minds	13.7%	12.4%	10.6%	21.1%	42.2%	3.7	1.5
Socio behavioral supports psychological growth of a pupil	3.7%	3.7%	5.0%	31.7%	55.9%	4.3	1.0
A refugee pupil accepted by fellow pupils tend to have high esteem	6.2%	7.5%	5.0%	34.8%	46.6%	4.1	1.2
Harassment of any form affects cause depression	7.5%	9.3%	6.8%	34.2%	42.2%	3.9	1.2
Average						4.0	1.2

Results in Table 4 revealed that majority of the teachers who were 63.3 percent agreed that guiding a refugee pupil stabilizes their minds. The results also showed that majority of the teachers 87.6 percent agreed socio behavioral supports psychological growth of a pupil. The results also showed that majority of the teachers who were 81.4 percent of the teachers agreed that refugee pupil accepted by fellow pupils tend to have high esteem.

The results also show that 80.6 percent of the teachers agreed that the board should motivate teachers through rewards. Results also showed that 76.4 percent of the teachers agreed that harassment of any form affects cause depression. On a five point scale, the average mean of the responses was 4.0 which means that majority of the teachers were agreeing to the statements in the questionnaire. The standard deviation was 1.2 meaning that the responses were clustered around the mean response. Therefore majority cited very often. This is in line with Wettstein, (2011) That Zimbabwe urban refugee secondary school students in South Africa had problems to with financing their education. The benefits include physical and cognitive protection as well as the promotion of a sense or of normally and feelings of hope (INEE, 2015).

This is because un-addressed emotional and psychosocial problems that may impede success in all aspects of their lives including schooling. Socio-behavioural support is not only associated with improved academic achievement, but also to be linked to improvements in related

behaviours known to influence academic success. The results agree with those of Dryden-Peterson (2015) that pre-resettlement experiences of discrimination in school settings may influence the ways in which refugee children perceive school and the relationships they have with peers and teachers and the instructional content to which refugee children are exposed to.

Further, a cross tabulation table of socio behavioural support and academic performance of refugee children was computed. Socio behavioural support was categorized into low and high socio behavioural support. This was tabulated against academic performance that was categorized into high academic performance and low academic performance. Table 5 shows how academic performance was evaluated against socio behavioural support.

Table 5: Cross Tabulation of Socio Behavioral Support and Academic Performance

Socio-behavioural support	Academic performance		Chi-square (p value)
	Low academic performance	High academic performance	
Low Socio-behavioural support	107	6	
High Socio-behavioural support	6	42	105.189(0.000)

Schools where socio behavioural support was low lead to poor academic performance than those schools with high socio behavioural support. Result findings indicated that, academic performance was low when socio behavioural support was rated low by 107 teachers as compared to 6 teachers who rated it high. Further, academic performance was high when socio behavioural support was rated high by 42 teachers as compared to only 6 teachers who rated it low. The study findings were statistically significant supported by a chi square of ($\lambda=105.189$, $p=0.000$). Chi square test was meant to show whether there existed any significant association between socio behavioural support and academic performance of refugee children.

During an interview session with head teachers on the influence of socio-behavioural support on academic performance, majority said that socio-behavioural support affects the psychological well-being of the refugee children. Socio-behavioural support facilitates the development of appropriate behaviour that reduces disruptive or interfering behaviour. The program emphasizes the ability of positive feelings, thoughts, and actions to reduce negative behaviours of pupils by encouraging significant growth in academic motivation and academic performance.

5.0 Conclusions

Based on research finding it can be concluded that learning environment influences academic performance of refugees' children in public primary schools in Ruiru Sub County. The school environment is of paramount importance in shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. This is because supportive and favourable school environment enriched with enough learning facilities, and favourable climate makes students more comfortable, more concentrated on their academic activities that result in high academic performance.

Further, it can be concluded that socio-behavioural support influences academic performance of refugees' children in public primary schools in Ruiru Sub County. Socio-behavioural support

facilitates the development of appropriate behaviour that reduces disruptive or interfering behaviour. The program emphasizes the ability of positive feelings, thoughts, and actions to reduce negative behaviours of pupils by encouraging significant growth in academic motivation and academic performance.

6.0 Recommendations for Study

The following recommendations were made; that Board of Managements provides a favourable learning environment for refugee children. This will ensure that a supportive and favourable school environment free of abuse, name calling and discrimination is achieved. Refugee children will feel free and accepted and in doing so can concentrate in class hence improved academic performance.

Teachers and parents need to provide socio-behavioural and psychological support to refugee children. Socio-behavioural support will help in facilitating the development of appropriate behaviour that reduces disruptive or interfering behaviour. The refugee children can now feel at home and in doing so can perform well in class.

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