

School Social Capital and Pupils' Preparedness for Upper Primary in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Primary education in Kenya is divided into two levels: lower and upper primary. Successful transition of pupils to upper primary in an education system is dependent on pupils' mastery of lower primary curriculum. Lower primary curriculum mastery gaps, therefore implies that pupils may encounter challenges in upper primary which may translate to low quality achievement of pupils in upper primary. This appears to be the case in Kenya in general and Nakuru County in particular if pupils' performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exit examination is anything to go by. Although level of pupils' preparedness is dependent on many factors, the study zeroed in on school social capital for it was construed as a critical correlate for quality learning in lower primary. Using an ex-post facto research design, data were collected from 254 class three teachers in Nakuru County through a personally delivered questionnaire and subsequently analysed using simple regression statistic at 0.05 alpha level. The analysis revealed a linear but insignificant relationship ($F= 3.491$; $df= 253$; $P>.05$) between school social capital and level of pupils' preparedness for upper primary in the study locale. The study further showed that the beta value ($\beta= -0.019$) was negative and statistically insignificant ($t= -0.310$; $P> 0.05$). This finding implied that the selected aspects of social capital had a negative effect on pupils' preparedness for upper primary although the impact was not statistically significant. The adjusted R^2 value ($R^2= 0.0031$) further indicated that the focused facets of school social capital only accounted for 0.31% of variation in pupils' preparedness for upper primary. The study offers useful insights on how schools can build social capital with a view to enhancing their capacity to effectively prepare pupils' for upper primary and thereby raise their chances of excelling in the KCPE examination.

Keywords: School social capital; Lower primary pupils; Preparedness; Upper primary.



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1. Introduction

Formal education plays a critical role in the overall development of a nation. This observation is grounded in the fact that the process of schooling enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their well being and equally participate effectively in nation building (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985). Moreover, formal education is the most effective means of narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor.

The foregoing observations have the implication that a country's pace of development is contingent upon quality learning at all levels of education. This explains the reason why the government of Kenya places a high premium on positive learning gains in the primary cycle of education since it lays the foundation upon which learners will build on when they transit to other levels of education and training. Lower primary in any given education system lays the foundation for handling the relatively challenging materials in upper primary. This has the implication that successful mastery of upper primary curriculum is dependent on the extent to which pupils are grounded in the lower primary curriculum (UNICEF, 2012). However, documented literature (Orodho and Ondieki, 2015; Rice *et al.*, 2010) indicates that cases of pupils progressing to upper primary with learning gaps are not uncommon more so in developing countries. As has been observed by Darmody (2008), such pupils may experience adjustment challenges in upper primary, a factor that has the potential to impact negatively on the motivation to learn, and other measures of school success such as regular school attendance and positive classroom behaviour. Kenya's primary education sector is divided into lower and upper primary. At the lower primary subsector, pupils are expected to be well grounded in languages (that is English and Kiswahili languages), Social Studies, Mathematics and Sciences (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2008; Republic of Kenya, 2012). Based on the reasoning that foundation in lower primary is key to mastery of upper primary curriculum, it follows that pupils may underperform in the KCPE examination if their preparation in lower primary is weak.

It is instructive to observe that while pupils' performance in KCPE examination from 2013 to 2015 averaged at 250.2 (or 50.04%) nationally out of a maximum of 500 marks, pupils' performance in Nakuru County during the period same period stood at 243.41 (or 48.7%) marks (Kenya National Examination Council, 2017). Although pupils' performance nationally during the three-year period was not impressive, it is apparent that pupils in Nakuru

County underachieved which implies that a sizeable proportion of the pupils may have experienced challenges in securing secondary school places. This brings to the fore one critical question: Is there a likelihood that primary schools in Nakuru County could be underperforming in fulfilling their role expectations of effectively preparing pupils for the learning demands in upper primary?

In an attempt to answer the question, the study addressed itself to an investigation of the extent to which, school social capital may explain the quality of pupils’ preparation for upper primary in the study locale. The focus on social capital was rooted in the fact that it is one of the most significant correlates of successful learning gains particularly in lower primary levels of formal education (Haghighat, 2005; Lindfors *et al.*, 2018; Tsang, 2010). In order to achieve this objective, the following null hypothesis was formulated and tested through simple regression analysis at 0.05 alpha level.

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between school social capital and pupils’ preparedness for upper primary in Nakuru County- Kenya.

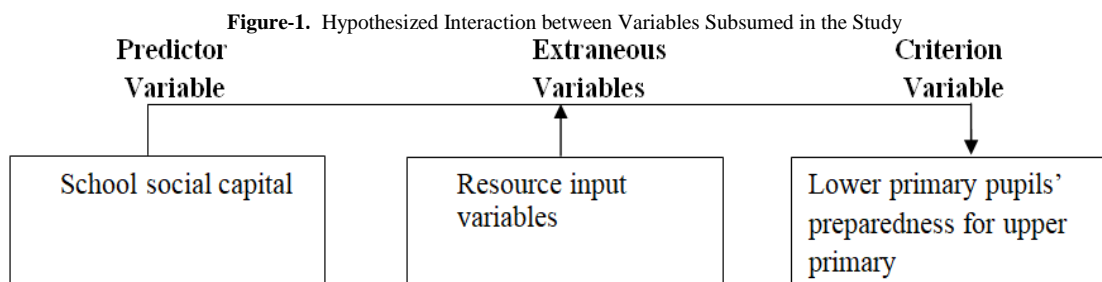
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the theory of social capital. According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital is conceived as those resources inherent in social relations which facilitate collective action. Drawing on this conception of social capital Coleman (1988) has expressed the view that the level of a group’s social capital (including its sustainability and goal achievement) is contingent upon the degree to which members uphold norms and values of reciprocity and trustworthiness. Putnam (2000) has further observed that the source of social capital is not the individual but the group he or she relates with. This in turn implies that the individual must adhere to the group’s norms and values including the ability to be trusted in order to motivate others to make the social capital resources available to him or her. Zaid (1997) has for instance observed that trust relationships facilitate co-operation, openness, group cohesiveness and goal achievement.

Inferring from the foregoing explication on social capital, the study followed Lindfors *et al.* (2018) line of thought which holds that school social capital are the resources embedded in the various combinations of relationships between teachers, parents and learners. It follows, therefore, that a school that is characterized by positive relationships, a culture of trust and collective efficacy beliefs is highly likely to have more social capital which is typically manifested in school harmony and increased student achievement scores (Hoy and Miskel, 2008). The converse is highly likely to be the case if such social cultural properties are weak. This is primarily because, while a high social capital school may enjoy parental support including teacher commitment and learners’ motivation to achieve, the contrary will be the case in a low social capital school. Such a scenario may harm pupils’ achievement gains and consequently their capacity to adjust to the academic demands in subsequent levels of education (Gelata, 2017).

With regard to conceptual framework, the study was grounded in the reasoning that pupils’ performance in upper primary is highly dependent on their quality of preparation in lower primary. This linkage is rooted in the fact that it is in lower primary where learners are given the requisite foundation which they build on when they transit to upper primary. The study additionally presumed that school social capital (predictor variable) is a reliable predictor of the quality of lower primary pupils’ preparation (criterion variable) and by implication their successful progression through upper primary. Furthermore, the study conjectured that the effect of social capital on lower primary pupils’ preparation may be moderated by resource input variables (or extraneous variable for that matter) such as pupil-teacher ratio, infrastructural quality, and availability of curriculum support materials. For instance, even in a situation where the amount of social capital is high, its impact on lower primary pupils’ preparation may be low if the resource input variables are insufficient.

Marczyk *et al.* (2005) have observed that the extraneous variables have the potential to generate rival or competing hypotheses that might explain the results of a study and consequently confound its internal validity. In order to minimize this possibility, the likely effect of the extraneous variable was controlled through randomization (Cristensen, 2004). Specifically, the schools whose teachers participated in the study were selected through simple random sampling design. This ensured that all input variables therein had a non-zero probability of being included in the study. This went a long way in reducing the error effect associated with extraneous variables. The conceptualized relationship between the predictor, criterion and extraneous variables is presented in figure 1.



3. Literature Review

In terms of learning and achievement, the school is the primary context with regard to educational outcomes. This is primarily because, it is within the school that children are exposed to the learning realities implied in the

curriculum (Wang and Eccles, 2013). Hanson (2002) has further observed that schools are social entities whose principal participants are teachers, school managers, parents and learners. This has the implication that school effectiveness as measured in terms of learning outcomes is dependent on the extent to which schools build social capital which is the key to children's learning achievement (Durfur *et al.*, 2013). Social capital, as earlier pointed out refers to the relationships among group actors that facilitate social outcomes. In this regard, there is a need for schools to invest in social relationships with parents and children in view of the fact that such bonds have a higher potential to enhance children wellbeing including academic achievement. Indeed, Bassani (2008) observed that school's social capital is the variable most closely to children academic and non-academic outcomes. The role of social capital in a school can be understood if one takes cognizance of the fact that it is social capital that facilitates mobilization of other educated related resources in a school. For example, teachers' knowledge and competencies (human capital) can only impact on children learning in a scenario where children have a positive relationship with teachers. This is mainly because in a school where children feel engaged and connected to teachers they (children) are likely to utilize this dimension of social capital and thereby narrow their achievement gaps as they progress in their studies.

Schools that connect well with parents are also highly likely to easily mobilize other forms of capital from parents, and by extension the community which can mitigate risk factors that threaten academic achievement. For instance, the school may attract more external funding (economic capital) towards learning related programmes. Moreover, parental connectedness to and engagement in a school has a moderating influence on the relationships between unfavourable children's background characteristics and low academic achievement. In other words, a strong social climate can weaken the effects of low family income and academic achievement (Crosnoe *et al.*, 2004; Johnson and Stevens, 2006). Furthermore, Teachman *et al.* (1996) have posited that social capital protects children against the risks of truancy and dropping out of schools. This has the implication that schools that are characterized by productive home partnerships and a humanitarian cultural orientation towards learners are more likely to promote children achievement. The converse is more likely to characterize schools where parents feel less connected in which case they will tend to perceive themselves more or less as strangers in the school. Building school-home social capital entails providing opportunities (e.g., through parent-teacher meetings, open communication with parents and so on) to form trusting relationships with school staff and managers. This kind of partnership will not only lead to larger gains in pupils' achievement but will also increase home levels social capital including enhanced capacity among parents to navigate the school system to the benefit of pupils.

Another equally significant aspect of school social capital is the one that resides in the relationship among teachers and between them and the head teacher. A cordial relationship between teachers and school leader for example may enhance the effectiveness of the leader since he or she will have the opportunity to easily enlist teachers' ideas when making decisions. Besides, a collegial leadership approach has the potential to build teachers' trust which is one of the key drivers of teacher morale, satisfaction and commitment to children's learning needs (Bush, 2003; Edwards and Moriba, 2009). In their contribution towards the nexus between school social capital and learning achievement Pil and Leana (2009) further noted that teacher social capital is a significant predictor of learners' achievement gains above and beyond teacher experience or ability in the classroom. The two authors concluded that policy makers (including schools) should invest in efforts that enhance corroboration and information sharing among teachers.

4. Methodology

The study utilized an *ex-post facto* research design. The design is adopted in a scenario whereby the independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s) have already interacted. Consequently, it is not possible to manipulate the independent variable(s) so as to determine its/their effects on the dependent variable(s). In this regard, the effect of interaction between the independent and dependent variables is determined retrospectively (Kerlinger, 1986). The design was deemed suitable in light of the fact that the study aimed at determining retrospectively the extent to which school social capital may be influencing quality of pupils' preparation for the upper primary curriculum.

5. Instrumentation

Data were collected through a personally delivered questionnaire from 254 class three teachers (this is the last grade in lower primary) who were randomly selected from a total population of 706 teachers. The selection of the 254 subjects was guided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample sizes from given populations. The data gathering instrument had nine(9) Likert scale items with response options ranging from "strongly agree", "agree", "somewhat agree", "disagree" and "strongly disagree", which were allocated 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 scores respectively. The maximum mean score for the items was expected to be 5 while the minimum mean score was expected to be 1 indicating very high and very low level of influence of the school social capital on pupils' preparedness for upper primary respectively. For ease of analysing and making valid conclusions relating to the responses to the Likert scale items, it was presumed that the mean scores would fall into four ranges as indicated in table 1.

5.1. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was validated by ten randomly selected class three teachers in the neighbouring Koibatek Sub-county. The teachers were requested to assess the extent to which items in the instrument were adequately representing the school social capital in relation to its influence on pupils' preparation for upper primary. Based on

the teachers' suggestions, changes which were deemed necessary were effected in the instrument before they were delivered to the actual study participants. The instrument's external reliability on the other hand was estimated through test-retest technique. This entailed administration of the instrument to ten (10) teachers in the neighbouring Nyahururu Sub-county and re-administration of the instrument to the ten (10) subjects after two weeks. Scores generated from the two instrument administration phases were in turn correlated in which a reliability coefficient of $R=0.89$ (or 89%) was realized. Internal reliability which is a measure of the degree to which the instrument is measuring a single idea (or construct for that matter) was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. The alpha obtained was 0.91(91%) which implied that the ten items in the instrument were measuring the impact of school social capital on pupils' preparedness for upper primary 91% of the time and that error may have occurred only 9% of the time. The two estimates of reliability indicated that the instrument's reliability was high (Marczyk *et al.*, 2005).

6. Data Analysis

Data from the nine (9) Likert scale items on the influence of school social capital on lower primary pupils' preparedness for upper primary was analysed through arithmetic mean to establish the negative influence of each item on criterion variable (pupils' preparedness for upper primary education). Simple regression statistics was further computed to determine whether selected nine (9) Likert scale items on school social capital had statistically significant influence on pupils' preparedness for upper primary at .05 alpha level.

7. Findings

The first level of data analysis involved computation of Likert scale response averages to the nine (9) items. This analysis is captured in table 2. The findings show that the overall mean score for the nine (9) school social capital items was 2.60. This implies that the impact of the nine (9) factors as perceived by the respondents was low (see the SCI index in table 1). The table further reveals that the factor that was rated highly was mistrust of parents by teachers (mean= 3.43) followed by low teacher-parent partnership (mean= 2.91) and weak school-home linkages (mean= 2.68). This implies that low level of social capital relating to trust relationships between parents and teachers, and school-home linkages were the major factors impacting negatively on pupils' preparation for upper primary. The data additionally demonstrates that factors that had the least effect on pupils' preparation for upper primary were weak connection among teachers (mean= 2.39), unwillingness to share professional related matters among teachers (mean= 2.33), and low level of support among teachers in matters pertaining to teaching related challenges (mean= 2.31).

Responses to the nine (9) Likert items were further analysed using simple regression analysis. The objective was to test the hypothesis germane to the study which presumed that the relationship between school social capital and pupils' preparedness for upper primary was statistically insignificant. This level of analysis is captured in table 3. The findings indicate that there was an insignificant linear relationship ($F= 3.491$; $df= 253$; $P>.05$) between the selected dimensions of school social capital and pupils' preparedness for upper primary. The table also reveals that the beta value ($\beta= -.019$; $t= -.310$; $P>.05$) was negative and statistically insignificant. These findings imply that although the focused school social capital factors had a negative influence on pupils' preparedness for upper primary, their effect was not statistically significant. The computed R^2 value ($R^2= .0031$) renders support to this observation since it implies that the factors accounted for only 0.31% of the total variation in pupils' preparedness for upper primary education. In this regard, the tested hypothesis was confirmed and conclusion made that the nine (9) aspects (see table 2) of school social capital and pupils' preparedness for upper primary were statistically independent.

8. Discussion

The findings that selected school social capital factors had a statistically insignificant negative influence on primary pupils' preparedness for upper primary concurred with the earlier findings by Bassani (2008), (Crosnoe *et al.*, 2004) and Johnson and Stevens (2006) which among others revealed that mistrust of parents by teachers, low teacher-parent partnership and weak school-home linkages had a negative effect on children motivation to learn and non-academic outcomes such as school attendance and character development. Ayers (1999) study similarly noted that low level of willingness to share professional related information among teachers was positively linked to pupils' achievement gains and other measures of success such as honesty, self-confidence and desire to achieve. Other studies that have established a positive link between school social capital and pupils' academic success include the studies by Adesola (2005), and Marais (2016) which revealed that if teachers can work as a team by supporting their colleagues experiencing teaching related challenges, they are more likely to impact positively on pupils' learning and academic gains. Mutua *et al.* (2010) study further observed that an active guidance and counselling department in schools has a capacity to minimize the negative effects of parents-teacher mistrust, low teacher-parent partnership, weak home-school linkages and weak teacher-head teacher relationship on pupils' academic performance and success in school.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings which have accrued from the study have important implications and lessons with respect to preparation of pupils' for upper primary in Nakuru County and by extension other parts of the county. A major observation is that mistrust of parents by teachers, including low level of school-parent linkages were perceived as the key factors lowering the capacity of the schools to adequately prepare pupils for upper primary. On the basis of

these observations, the study proffers a number of recommendations with a view to enhancing quality of lower primary pupils' preparation for upper primary.

First, schools should invest in strengthening trusting relationships between teachers and parents. In particular, teachers need to note that parents are co-partners in their efforts to develop children. In this regard, they need to build their trust in them (parents). This can be achieved through healthy social interactions which can help to build teacher trust in parents which the latter can reciprocate by developing a favourable attitude towards teachers. Second, schools need to create opportunities for parents to engage with teachers and school management. Through such interactions educators and parents will share information and common experiences revolving around strategies to improve pupils' achievement and by implication their quality of preparedness for upper primary.

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Table-1. Expected Mean Score Ranges by Level of Social Capital Influence (SCI) on Pupils' Preparedness for Upper Primary

Mean Score Range	Level of SCI
1 - 1.99	Very low level of influence
2 - 2.99	Low level of influence
3 - 3.99	High level of influence
4 - 5.00	Very high level of influence

Table-2. Level of Influence of School Social Capital on Pupils' Preparedness for Upper Primary

Aspects of Social Capital	Mean Score
Mistrust of parents by teacher	3.43
Low teacher-parent partnership	2.91
Weak home-school linkages	2.68
Weak teacher-head teacher relationship	2.56
Low level of engagement between teachers and the school managers	2.44
Mistrust of school managers by teachers	2.40
Weak connections among teachers	2.39
Low level of willingness to share professional related information among teachers	2.33
Tendency by teachers to with hold their support to colleagues facing teaching related challenges	2.31
Grand Mean	2.60

Source: Field Data

Table-3. Regression Analysis Summary between School Social Capital and Pupils' Preparedness for Upper Primary

Variable		R ²	Adj. R ²	df	F	P- value
Dependent	Pupils' Preparedness for Upper Primary	.101	.0031	253	3.491	.612
Independent	School Social Capital		β= -.019		t= -.310	.612