



# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON SCHOOL READINESS AND THE TYPE OF SCHOOL CHILDREN ATTEND

By

**Mercy Kerubo Nyakundi**

Department of Early Years Education  
Machakos University

**Professor Peter Kibet Koech**

Department of Early Years Education  
Machakos University

## ABSTRACT

Global studies show the need for parental involvement in children's school readiness. In Kenya, studies show that students' poor performance in school is mainly caused by lack of school readiness. This study was guided by the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which regards children as the center of various layers of systems. Survey research design was used to guide the study. The location of the study was Kasarani Division in Nairobi County, Kenya. The target population of this study was parents with children aged 5 to 6 years in pre-primary schools in Kasarani Division. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to obtain data from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data. The results had revealed that several factors were influencing parents' perception on children's school readiness.

**Keywords: Relationship; Parents' perception; School readiness; Type of school.**

## 1. Introduction

School choice makes the role of a parent to be an active participant from a passive observer. In addition, active school choosers tend to avoid the worst schools and select schools which best match the individual needs of the child (Justice, 2003). Nonetheless, school choice can divide society along class-lines, such as socio-economic status, racial, and tribal. A study done in Beijing concerning parent's choice of school indicated that the wrong selection made by parents can impact child performance. The error made by parents caused poor examination results since several pupils were admitted to lower quality schools (Stipek & Ryan, 1997). Nonetheless, this study did not examine how parents' perception on children's school readiness is influenced by the type of school the child attends. Hence, it was imperative for this study to establish the relationship between parents' perception on children's school readiness and the type of school the child attends.

Across the world, parents have the freedom to select for the children any school they prefer; however, their choice may have a considerable influence on the child's future development. A preschool that is considered appropriate can assist to lay a robust educational foundation for the child, minimize dropout, as well as

repetition rates. Such schools can also promote success in school and better paying jobs in future. Furthermore, children who have special needs or are disadvantaged can be helped to exploit their potential and finally get out of the cycle of poverty. Generally, children are assisted to grow up well-adjusted both morally and socially (Booth, 2008).

There are different types of pre-primary schools in Kenya which were established by different group organizations. These groups include faith based organizations, local communities, commercial firms, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and private entrepreneurs (Kabiru & Njenga, 2009). These schools are further divided into two main categories; private and public. Consequently, parents in Kenya are normally faced with the challenge of selecting a preschool from a wide range of available preschools. The learning of the child can be negatively impacted when parents ignore the available school options, various fee schedules and school philosophies.

The Government of Kenya recognizes how Early Years Education is a crucial pillar for enhancing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The ECD policy framework was enacted in 2006; it offers a coordination mechanism, clearly defining the role of communities, parents, different Government departments and ministries, development partners, including other stakeholders within the provision of EYE services (Republic of Kenya, 2006).

There are various partners who cooperate with the Government of Kenya within the delivery of early childhood development services. The Comprehensive Policy Framework should be used by these partners to guide them in offering enhanced services to infants and children (MoEST, 2007). In Kenya, many parents who have negative attitudes towards school readiness have caused their children to experience a wide range of transition problems once they join primary school (NACECE, 2007). Therefore, most children begin school, but are not able to adapt to the school environment and this makes them perform poorly (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Therefore, the present study investigated the relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and the type of school children attend.

In Kasarani Division, Agik, (2012) conducted a study on the influence of reflective teaching on pre-school children's socio-emotional skills. Other studies that have been done in the area focused on the factors that influence preschool teachers' attitude towards teaching mathematics and the influence of various teaching methods on children's performance in the subject. However, in Kasarani, there was no study that had been conducted on relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and the type of school children attend, hence the need for the study.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Parents are usually eager to take their children to school, but many children tend to experience difficulties in adjusting to the school environment. Studies reviewed shows that school readiness has been associated with behavioral and social competencies in adulthood and improved academic outcomes in primary and secondary schools, both in terms of performance and equity. They also indicated that in different countries, parents' perception of children's school readiness were influenced by several factors such as availability of time, their level of education, personality traits, and occupation among others.

Literature reviewed has also shown that in Kenya, most parents do not take school readiness seriously. The Government of Kenya has stressed on the significance of parents partnering with other stakeholders to ensure that children's holistic needs were met. However, most children join primary school unprepared for social and academic expectations. Thus, it was not clear what factors influenced parents' perceptions on children's school readiness such that some children are able to join formal schooling prepared while others join unprepared. It was in this context that this study sought to find out the relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and the type of school children attend.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was:

- i) To establish the relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and the type of school the child attends.

### 4. Research Methodology

Survey research design was used to guide this study. The independent variable was the type of school the child attends while the dependent variable was parents' perception on children's school readiness. The study was done in Kasarani sub-county located in Nairobi City County. The target population was parents with children aged 5 to 6 years in pre-unit class enrolled in licensed pre-primary schools in Kasarani Division. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to obtain data from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data.

### 5. Results and Discussions

#### 5.1 Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness

Parents' perception level of their children's school readiness was measured using their response to items measuring perceived children's school readiness ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The participants responded to three thematic areas to indicate their perception of school readiness. The areas include cognitive development, socio-emotional development and physical development. Table 1 presents the results of parents' perception on school readiness indicators.

**Table 1: Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness Indicators**

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Counting beyond twenty	37	36.3	50	49	7	6.9	8	7.8	102	100
Listening and following instructions	35	34.3	51	50	3	2.9	13	12.8	102	100
Reading written words	51	50	35	34.3	10	9.8	6	5.9	102	100
Recognizing the alphabet	59	57.8	28	27.5	13	12.8	2	2	102	100
Being disciplined for misbehaving	26	25.5	51	50	23	22.6	2	2	102	100
Controlling personal emotions	26	25.5	62	60.8	7	6.9	7	6.9	102	100
Displaying confidence in development of skills	26	25.5	60	58.8	11	10.8	5	4.9	102	100
Sharing, taking turns and engaging in cooperative tasks	59	57.8	34	33.3	6	5.9	3	2.9	102	100
Running,	64	62.7	23	22.6	12	11.8	3	2.9	102	100

climbing and jumping										
Sorting by color or shape	25	24.5	53	52	19	18.6	5	4.9	102	100

Table 1 show that most parents had a positive perception about school readiness because they agreed with the school readiness indicators. However, some parents had negative perception on school readiness because they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the school readiness indicators.

Therefore, the level of parents' perception on children's school readiness was determined and Table 2 presents the results.

**Table 2: Level of Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness**

Perception level	Frequency	Percent
High	85	83.3
Low	17	16.7
Total	102	100.0

Table 2 shows that 85 (83.3%) parents had high perception regarding children's school readiness, while 17 (16.7%) parents had low perception on children's school readiness. Parents with high perception had greater mean scores on the above school readiness indicators that ranged between 3 and 4. For parents with low perception, their mean scores on perception regarding school readiness indicators were between 1 and 2.

Perceived children's school readiness indicators were broadly grouped as cognitive development indicators, socio-emotional development indicators and physical development indicators. Parents' perception on the different categories were determined and the results have been discussed in the following subsections.

### 5.1.1 Parents' Perception in Cognitive Development School Readiness Indicators

Cognitive development included school readiness indicators such as being able to count beyond twenty, ability to listen and follow instructions, read written words and recognize the alphabet. Table 3 presents the results.

**Table 3: Parents' Perception in Cognitive Development School Readiness Indicators**

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Counting beyond twenty	37	36.3	50	49	7	6.9	8	7.8	102	100
Listening and following instructions	35	34.3	51	50	3	2.9	13	12.8	102	100
Reading written words	51	50	35	34.3	10	9.8	6	5.9	102	100
Recognizing the alphabet	59	57.8	28	27.5	13	12.8	2	2	102	100

Table 3 indicates that majority of the parents confirmed that being able to count beyond twenty is a crucial school readiness indicator. The findings also demonstrated that most parents believed that being able to listen and follow instructions was important before children joined primary school.

### 5.1.2 Parents' Perception in Socio-emotional Development School Readiness Indicators

Socio-emotional development school readiness indicators included being disciplined for misbehaving, ability to control personal emotions, displaying confidence in development of skills and being able to share, take turns and engage in cooperative tasks. Table 4 presents the results

**Table 4: Parents' Perception in Socio-emotional Development School Readiness Indicators**

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Being disciplined for misbehaving	26	25.5	51	50	23	22.6	2	2	102	100
Controlling personal emotions	26	25.5	62	60.8	7	6.9	7	6.9	102	100
Displaying confidence in development of skills	26	25.5	60	58.8	11	10.8	5	4.9	102	100
Sharing, taking turns and engaging in cooperative tasks	59	57.8	34	33.3	6	5.9	3	2.9	102	100

Table 4 shows that as much as parents believed that it was necessary for children to attain discipline before they joined primary school, there were parents who considered children in preschool as very young to be disciplined. These findings also illustrated that most parents were aware of the significance of gaining the ability to control personal emotions before joining primary school. Alternatively, few parents did not consider ability to control personal emotions as vital in preschool probably because the children were still young to develop such control.

### 5.1.3 Parents' Perception in Physical Development School Readiness Indicators

Physical development school readiness indicators included: Ability to run, climb, and jump, as well as being able to sort by color or shape. Table 5 presents findings on parents' response to physical development school readiness indicators.

**Table 5: Parents' Perception in Physical Development School Readiness Indicators**

Item	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	Total	%
Running, climbing and jumping	64	62.7	23	22.6	12	11.8	3	2.9	102	100
Sorting by color or shape	25	24.5	53	52	19	18.6	5	4.9	102	100

Table 5 indicates that most parents believed that being able to run, climb and jump was significant for school readiness, while the few parents who rejected this school readiness indicator did not believe in children's physical development as part of school readiness. On the other hand, most parents believed that children should be able to sort by color or shape before joining primary school, while other parents believed that this was a more complex skill for pre-school children.

## 5.2 Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness and Type of Preschool

Objective five of the study sought to determine whether there was a significant relationship between parents' perception on children's school readiness and type of school the child attended. Chi square was utilized to establish this relationship. Table 6 presents the expected and observed counts of parents' perception according to the type of preschool their children attended.

**Table 6 Expected and Observed Counts on Parents' Perception and Type of Preschool the Child Attends**

		Perception level			Total
		High	Low	Moderate	
Type of school	Count	35	10	43	88
	Private Expected	32.8	14.7	40.5	88.0
	Count				
	Count	3	7	4	14
	Public Expected	5.2	2.3	6.5	14.0
	Count				
Total	Count	38	17	47	102
	Expected	38.0	17.0	47.0	102.0
	Count				

Table 6 suggests that more parents with children in private preschools had high level of perception than parents having children in public preschools. This indicates that the type of preschool the child attends influences parents' perception on their children's school readiness.

The relationship between parents' perception and type of preschool was computed using Chi-square to test the hypothesis that stated:

*H05 There is no significant relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and type of school the child attends.*

Table 7 presents findings on the Chi-square computation for the above hypothesis.

**Table 7 Chi-Square Computation on Parents' Perception and Type of Preschool**

Instrument used to measure	Calculated $\chi^2$	Critical $\chi^2$	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.989 <sup>a</sup>	5.991	2	.002

Table 7 indicates that the calculated Chi-square was 12.989 at 2 degrees of freedom with a significance value  $p=0.002<0.05$ , while the critical chi square value was 5.991. The calculated p value was less than the critical value 0.05. This shows that there was a significant relationship between parents' perception and type of preschool the child attended. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected based on this finding. This shows that parents' perception on children's school readiness is influenced by the type of preschool the child attends.

The findings were in agreement with Booth (2008) who argued that the type of school can influence a parent's choice of school because a school that is considered appropriate can assist to lay a robust educational foundation for the child, minimize dropout, as well as repetition rates. Such schools can also promote success in school and better paying jobs in future.

Waldfoe (2012) proposes that children typically have literacy gaps before joining school, while Murray and Harrison (2011) also argue that preschool experiences can impact school readiness. Therefore, in some schools, children who have special needs or are disadvantaged can be helped to exploit their potential and finally get out of the cycle of poverty. Generally, children are assisted to grow up well-adjusted both morally and socially.

These findings contrasted with those found by Sabitu, Babatunde and Oluwole (2012) who examined type of schools, students' academic performance and nature of facilities in Nigeria. They compared the academic achievement of students between private and public schools. The findings of that study showed that no significant difference was found in academic achievement between private and public schools. This implies that parents' perception on children's school readiness is not influenced by type of school in this region.

The type of school children attend can influence parent's perception on children's school readiness, including their involvement in the children's education. Brandt (2011) reported that in the United States, majority of the teachers complained of low parental involvement levels in schools. Most parents never attended school functions, parent-teacher meetings, and did not help their children with homework. Lack of time was reported as the key reason for this since both parents had tight working schedules.

## 6. Conclusion

Parents' perception regarding their children's school readiness was found to influence how they perceive school readiness. This suggested that parents tend to be more concerned with their children's school readiness when they know what school readiness entails and consider it significant for their children's formal schooling. Type of preschool the child attended was found to be significantly related to parents' perception on children's school readiness. This implies that parents who had children in private preschools had a high level of perception on

children's school readiness than parents who had children in public preschools. Therefore, it is possible that administrators in private preschools may be having mechanisms in place to promote parents' perception on children's school readiness than administrators in public preschools.

## 7. Recommendations

Various recommendations were drawn from the study findings for various stake holders.

### 7.1 Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers should assist in enhancing parents' perceptions on school readiness by inviting them to school during open days for discussions about their children's preparedness for primary school. They should also encourage parents to buy learning materials for their children and assist them in their areas of weakness. Apart from improved academic performance, this will help the children to develop positive behavioral and social competencies as they grow.

### 7.2 Recommendations for School Board of Management

Parents who had their children in private preschools were found to have a high level of perception than those with children in public preschools. There is need for the board of management in public preschools to put systems in place to ensure that parents' perceptions on school readiness are enhanced by inviting them to school during open days to discuss with teachers about their children's preparedness for primary school.

### 7.3 Recommendations for Parents

There is need for all parents regardless of the type of school they take their children to perceive school readiness as significant in their children's lives. This will enable them to become actively involved in preparing their children for school in all aspects of development such as emotionally, cognitively, physically and socially.

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