

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS,  
SCHOOL CATEGORY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN KERICHO  
COUNTY, KENYA**

**CECILIA CHEPNGENO SANG<sup>1</sup>**

**Prof. MICAH CHEPCHIENG<sup>2</sup>**

**Prof. MARY KARIUKI<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Associate Professors of Education, Egerton University, Kenya

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**ABSTRACT**

The secondary school students' background factors are important in the students' life and may determine the academic outcomes and. In Kenya, academic achievement is a key factor in determining the future career of the students and success is measured by the level of academic achievement. The academic achievement may be determined by the family socio economic status, family type and the home location. This study sought to establish the relationship between the students' selected background factors (school category and socio-economic status). This was an *ex post facto* research that employed a correlational research design, to determine whether there was a relationship between the students' selected background factors and academic achievement. The population was 9048 form four students enrolled in public secondary schools in the Kericho County from which a representative sample of 384 students was obtained. A stratified sampling technique was used to select the study units to ensure all strata (single sex and mixed schools) in the population were represented. A questionnaire was used to collect information on the students' background factors. The academic achievement was based on the scores obtained by students in Mock Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examinations. Descriptive statistics, Chi Square and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to analyze the data collected. The significant level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The data was analyzed using version 17 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. The study established that the greatest predictor of academic achievement was Socio Economic Status and school category. The study further established that there was no significant relationship between students' gender and their academic achievement. The results are expected to provide information to policy makers, teachers and parents about the importance of the background factors that may shape the secondary school students' academic achievement. The study concludes that the family SES and the category of school attended by students are important in determining the students' academic achievement.

**KEY WORDS:** Family Socio Economic Status, Academic Achievement, School Category

## **INTRODUCTION**

The secondary school students' background factors are important in the students' life and may determine the academic outcomes. The secondary school students' academic achievement may be predicted by many background characteristics which may include family's socio economic status, and school category. According to Weiser and Riggio (2010) the background characteristics interrelate and may predict the academic achievement of the students. The home is important in the primary socialization of the students and where the home is located may be linked to the levels of academic achievement and self esteem. The family and home location have been identified as possible influencers of students' self esteem and academic achievement. Posse and Melgosa (2002) identified three environments that intervene in the students' educational process in a decisive way. The three environments include the family, school and community and there was need for the objectives of the three environments to be harmonised if the educational process was to be a success.

The family Socio economic status is commonly determined by the parental level of education, occupation and income levels. Families with high socio economic status provide their children with more opportunities at home to build academic skills (Ferguson, 2007). Those of low socio economic status are more concerned with providing basic needs and do not put much emphasis on their children's academic achievement. The economic hardships may interfere with the students' ability to concentrate in their school work and hence poor performance (Barry, 2005). Like other parts of the world the varying family SES may determine secondary school students; academic achievement and there is need to establish whether background factors determine the academic achievement of secondary school students.

According to Slavin (2006) the state of the home environment, the social norms that govern behaviour in the community and the school experiences have been noted to have influence on the academic achievement of the student. The role played by the significant others within the student's background determining the academic achievement cannot be ignored. The level of education of parents contributes substantially in stimulating the achievement orientation in their children with parents with higher education levels being in a better position to impart the virtue of good performance to their children. (Berk, 2006) observed that the constant stressors that accompany poverty, reduced parental involvement and hostile home living environments profoundly affect the student's self esteem and academic achievement. While

many studies have established that there is a link between background factors may determine the secondary students academic achievement few of these studies have combined self esteem and academic achievement and this makes it necessary to establish what happens when the two variables are studied together. The parental involvement in the education of their children helps them improve their academic achievement.

The socio economic disparities that exist between family backgrounds in Kenya could have far reaching consequences on how students from the backgrounds perform academically. Whilst so much has been done to establish the link between the students' background factors and academic achievement, similar studies have been limited in the Kenyan situation. Performance in national examinations has been dismal in many Counties including Kericho County with very few students attaining grades that can enable them to successfully proceed for further education which will in turn enable them pursue gainful employment. Table 1 illustrates the KCSE performance trend in Kericho County in the last four years.

**Table 1 KCSE Performance Trend for Kericho County 2009- 2012**

Sub county	Year	KCSE enrolment	Grade A	Percentage %	Grade C- and below	Percentage %
Kericho	2009	4651	14	0.3	2655	57.1
	2010	4867	29	0.6	2524	51.9
	2011	5188	16	0.31	2519	47.03
	2012	5671	23	0.41	2829	49.89
Bureti	2009	2353	5	0.21	1391	59.1
	2010	2769	11	0.4	1834	66.2
	2011	2934	9	0.31	1429	48.7
	2012	2193	22	1	1604	73.1

**Source: County Education Office 2011**

The results presented in Table 1, clearly indicates the poor performance in national examinations with over 50% of the students enrolled for KCSE in the last four years obtaining very low grades. It is important to establish whether there is a link between

students' background in order to come up with policies that would guide the education process and improve performance in KCSE.

In Kenya the growing phenomenon of single parenthood, broken families and poverty pose serious challenges in the growth and development of the Kenyan child. Compounded with this is the rise in violence against children. This demands well co-ordinated and informed intervention strategies through Guidance and Counselling which provides the students with life skills to enable them face the challenges that await them (Kenya Education Students Support Programmes, 2005-2010). Parental attributes as well as how parents view the importance of education of their children are important factors that may determine the performance in school. It has been observed that an individual's success in post secondary education and consequently in the labour market is dependent on how well they do in primary and secondary school (McIntosh, 2008). It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of the relationship between the students' background and their academic achievement.

The exposition captured in the background clearly shows that there is a link between secondary school students' background factors, academic achievement. In a society where academic achievement is measured by the quality grades one attains, there is need to determine the relationship between the background factors of the secondary school students, their academic achievement. Although studies have linked students' background factors to academic achievement the set ups of these studies have been different with many done outside Africa hence the need to establish whether the case is the same in Kericho County Kenya. This study therefore sought to establish the relationship between secondary school students' selected background factors namely; the family Socio Economic Status, school category and the students' academic achievement in Kericho County Kenya.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- i. To establish the relationship between Family Socio-economic Status and students' academic achievement
- ii. To establish the relationship between School Category and students' academic achievement

### **HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY**

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no statistically significant relationship between secondary school students' Family Socio-economic status and their academic achievement.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between School Category and students' academic achievement.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Family Socio Economic Status Difference and Academic Achievement**

The SES of students will vary according to the background. In most parts of the world the SES is measured by family income, parental occupation, parental level of education and family accomplishment. Shaffer (2005) points out that, children from middle and upper class backgrounds score higher and are more likely to do well in school than those from lower SES. They have more resources and are exposed to better opportunities. Economic hardships become a barrier to parents getting involved in encouraging their children to perform. In most instances parents from lower SES societies are lowly educated themselves and may not have the appropriate knowledge about the learning materials required by their children and this can undermine the academic achievement. According to Caro and Willms (2009) there is a positive link between family SES and academic achievement. It is further observed that a wide Socio Economic gap in the early years can have lasting consequences as the children grow older. The challenges associated with shortage of resources may result in secondary school students being less motivated and putting less effort in their academic work.

### **Family Characteristics**

Parental characteristics and attributes as well as how parents view the importance of good performance and what they actually do in terms of helping and guiding the child are all important factors in the child's academic achievement (McIntosh, 2008). The poor performance experienced by the students, could be attributed to the changing life patterns in some families. These patterns may include economic hardships linked to the occupation of the parent or the level of parental involvement in the educational activities of their child. The strive towards high academic achievement can be a challenge when the secondary school student is a member of Minority group, growing up in a single parent family and having parents who are of low schooling level. Such family characteristics may increase absenteeism and hence low academic achievement. Students from such families are likely to spend time worrying about the challenges they face at home and may lack the motivation to achieve in school. On the contrary, a student from small caring families with stable parents who

encourage and instil consistent discipline may achieve better academic results (Udida, Ambeken, Ukwayi & Agwanyang, 2012)

### **Cognitive growth and Negative Feedback**

Children become increasingly capable of analyzing causes of events, interpreting feedback from teachers and inferring enduring traits for example low or high ability from their behaviour. The result is that they view their strength and weaknesses more realistically and lose some of their high academic self-esteem and expectancies of success. According to Bekken (2003) positive feedback from teachers can encourage students to work harder and achieve better academic results while negative feedback can discourage them. In situations where teachers are more reserved with their praise and more biased to criticism the students may develop a sense of helplessness which may in turn result in poor quality grades. Arguably the students who are unable to meet the standard set by the teachers may develop low self esteem which in turn may impacts negatively on academic achievement.

### **School Category and Academic Achievement**

The academic achievement of secondary school students may be determined by the category of school attended. The school culture may also vary from one set up to the other and this may have consequences on the academic achievement. Whitlock (2006) observed that coeducational schools have existed for a long time and the emergence of single sex schools has been fuelled by the debate about how well girls are doing in public secondary schools. Of importance is the discrimination that girls may suffer in mixed schools and the determination to minimize the practice. According to Hartman (2011) girls from co-educational school exhibited low levels of self esteem while those from girls' only schools had a higher self esteem. The girls from girls' only schools had more self confidence and were more successful in their academic work. According to Hartman, girls from girl's only schools generally received more recognition for their accomplishments, through awards scholarships and opportunities for leadership positions. It is observed that these positions would however be a preserve for boys in coeducational schools. The author further observes that in single sex schools, students the students get the opportunity to be mentored by role models who are of their gender and do not base their self esteem on the opinion of the opposite gender. Students in single sex schools have also been observed to enjoy acceptance by peers and this boosts their self esteem.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was an *expost facto* study that employed a correlational research design to establish whether there was a relationship between the selected background factors (family Socio economic, school category), and academic achievement of secondary school students in Kericho County. A correlation research design can be used to answer questions about the existence of a relationship between two or more variables. In this study the students' background factors were treated as independent variables while the academic achievement students was the dependent variable. The correlation research design allows a researcher to make predictions from one variable to another with a certain degree of accuracy. A correlation research design would also be suitable where manipulation of variables is not possible (Gravetter & Forzano, 2006). For this study, both the independent (background factors) and the dependent variable (academic achievement) could not be manipulated. The study population consisted of 384 students and 17 class teachers. A questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to collect data from the students and teachers respectively. The academic achievement was based on scores obtained by students in examinations preceding the national examinations. The research instruments were piloted and tested to establish the reliability. This was done using the Cronbach's alpha technique and a reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### School Category and Students' Academic Achievement

The results in Table 2 indicate that the mean of the academic results for the coeducational schools is lower than that of single sex schools. The schools that participated in the study were grouped into three, boys only, girls only and coeducational schools. The descriptive results further indicate that the boys' only schools recorded the highest mean of 6.1 (C) while the girls only schools attained 5.69 (C). Co-educational school performed the lowest with a mean grade of 4.1 (D+).

**Table 2 Students' Academic Achievement and School Category**

School Category	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Boys School	6.10	133	1.54
Girls School	5.69	91	1.98
Co-educational	4.21	151	2.04
Total	5.24	375	2.04

The difference in performance among the three different categories of schools cannot be underestimated especially that majority of the schools in the study area were coeducational. The findings of this study concur with the findings of Oigara (2001) who observed that there was significant difference in academic achievement of girls in single sex and mixed schools. The girls in girls' only schools scored higher academic grades compared to the girls in mixed schools. The author pointed out that the girls in mixed schools experienced intimidation and discrimination from their male colleagues and teachers. Most of the girls reported that teachers undermined them and referred to them as lazy which demoralized them and undermined their academic potential. Bullying and teasing of the girls by the boy was also identified as contributing to the poor performance and low levels of self esteem. Girls in mixed schools were more reluctant to express themselves in the classroom. The students in the current study area could be experiencing similar challenges with the students in other countries and there was need for educationists to employ measures that would minimize the unfair treatment of either boys or girls. This study also established that the ratio of boys to girls in the study area under review was 3:1. This implies that the girls are a minority which makes them more vulnerable to unfair treatment.

The results in Table 3 indicate that that there is a significant relationship between the students' school category and their academic achievement. The null hypothesis that stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between School Category and students' academic achievement is rejected. The results of this study concur with those of Whitlock (2006) who observed that coeducational schools have existed for a long time and the emergence of single sex schools has been fuelled by the debate about how well girls are doing in public coeducational secondary schools. Of importance is the discrimination that girls may suffer in mixed schools and the determination to minimize the practice. It is believed that all adolescence can develop a positive self esteem and healthy social relationships however the category of school may determine the direction of self esteem levels and with proper care management the girls in coeducational schools can achieve high academic grades.



**Table 3** Chi-Square Results on Students' Academic Achievement School Category

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	45.659 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	46.500	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	35.927	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	375		

The results also reveal that poor performance affects the girls more than the boys since when studying alone in girls' schools; they still performed worse than the boys. Papalia and Feldman (2001) emphasized that social cultural forces tend to influence the gender difference in academic achievement. The parental gender attitude towards girls and expectation, treatment of boys and girls in school and cultural expectation play a role in shaping the direction of academic achievement. Berk (2006) further confirms that feedback from parents and teachers to girls on their ability to achieve academically can undermine their motivation to perform when the feedback is focused on the weaknesses of the girls and not their potential to perform at the same level with the boys if not better.

**Students' family SES and their academic achievement**

The result on Table 4 shows the contingency table analysis which was conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between students' family SES and their academic achievement. The results on Table 39 revealed that there was a relationship between students' family SES and their academic achievement. The calculated Chi Square value of 13.926 was statistically significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$  with a P value of 0.008. Based on these findings the null hypothesis which stated that "There was no significant relationship between family SES and students' academic achievement is rejected".

The results of this study imply that family SES was a major predictor of secondary school students academic achievement. Low family SES comes with the challenges of inadequate resources, non payment of school fees and inadequate education resources. These challenges may impact negatively on the academic achievement of the students from low SES families. These findings concur with findings of other researchers that have linked

students' academic performance with family SES. This finding is in agreement with the observations Shaffer (2005) that students from middle and upper class background tend to score higher grades in school compared o their counterparts from low SES backgrounds. The poor performance by students from low SES families could be attributed to shortage of educational resources and the quality of home environments. Their counterparts from middle SES families have access to educational resources which includes reading materials which supplements what is offered at school and more suitable home learning environments. Students from low SES families are also sent home frequently to collect unpaid fees. This compromise on their studies as they lose class hours while at home. Economic hardships also become a barrier to parents getting involved in their children academic achievements.

**Table 4 Chi Square Results on the Relationship between Family Socio economic Status and their Academic Achievement**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.926 <sup>a</sup>	4	0.008
Likelihood Ratio	14.160	4	0.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.950	1	0.001
N of Valid Cases	375		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.60.

The consequences of the socio economic gap on children in the early years are fairly enduring but as the child advances to adolescence the situation has been observed to get worse (Caro, Macdonald, & Willms, 2009). The challenges they face may result in poor performance and even dropping out of school and failure to progress into college. The Author further observes that in many countries, the educational and labour opportunities are unequally distributed among individuals of varying SES which also implies that the academic achievement among students from varying SES backgrounds will yield varying outcomes. The situation in Kericho County may be similar although the majority of the respondents were from low SES backgrounds which also imply that the students may not be enjoying the same opportunities as their counterparts from middle income and high income backgrounds.

To mitigate the effects of family SES on academic achievement, teachers and school managers need to put in place measures that ensure achievement disparities are reduced the minimum if not eliminated. The government should also deal with economic forces that undermine the academic potential of students that come from low SES families by supplementing the schools' finances with bursaries and scholarships.

Guidance and counselling in secondary school can be used to help students manage their academic challenges. Howe (2009) observed that guidance and counselling helps the student to make positive changes and develop coping skills on how to adapt to situational challenges which could be academic or psychological. The class teachers in this study confirmed that students who consistently made use of the counselling services performed better academically. According to Corey (2005) people can be resourceful and are capable of self direction. It has been noted that when the counsellor is non judgemental and understanding the client can experience positive changes. There is need for the guidance and counselling teacher to identify the unique needs of every student and develop strategies to deal with them. The school counsellor should purpose to create an environment where the students can explore a full range of opportunities which can help them achieve academically. (O'Donn Chada, 2000) postulates that by introducing cognitive restructuring through guidance and counselling, the counselling teachers can recognize negative behaviour; eliminate obstacles to academic achievement therefore enabling students to achieve their academic goals. The results of this study imply that guidance and counselling should be strengthened to ensure students having difficulties related to background factors are assisted to achieve their potential.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study established that the majority (72%) of the respondents came from low SES families. The study concludes that there was a statistically significant relationship between secondary school students family SES and their academic achievement with a significance of 0.008 which was highly significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The study further confirms that the students' family SES is a predictor of the academic achievement of the students. The study also established that there was a statistically significant relationship between school category and academic achievement. The study concludes that school category is a predictor of academic achievement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The academic achievement in the study area was established to be very low and there was statistically significant relationship with the family SES. The Government should allocate more funds to secondary schools to help support students from low income families. It should be noted that many students who are unable to clear their schools fees are always out of schools looking for same. Such students were more likely to record poor academic achievement. Schools should put in place remedial programmes to help the students who are always out of school because of non payment of fees to compensate for the lost time during their absence from school. Although much has been achieved through the free secondary education programmes the gains are watered down by the inability of the parents to meet their obligations in clearing the balance of school fees required.

2. There is need to establish functioning guidance and counselling departments especially in mixed schools. Such departments would help deal with the challenges faced by students from difficult backgrounds. This study established that more than 60% of the secondary schools did not have teachers who had extra training in guidance and counselling and this limited their ability to establish functional guidance and counselling programmes to deal with students' needs. Furthermore some of the class teachers in the area of study indicated that the Guidance and Counselling services in the schools were not structured. With the increasing student enrolment policy makers should put in place well structured Guidance and Counselling services in the secondary schools

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