

Gender Differences in Parental Involvement in Children's Learning in Public Secondary Schools: A Case of Kieni-West District, Nyeri County - Kenya

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ABSTRACT: The attitudes and aspirations of parents and of children themselves predict later educational achievement. International evidence suggests that parents with high aspirations are also more involved in their children's education (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). This study was set to investigate gender differences in parents' involvement in their children's learning in public secondary schools in Kieni-West District Nyeri County-Kenya. The objectives of the study were to: (i) Investigate gender difference in the nature of parental involvement in their children's learning; (ii) Establish gender differences in factors influencing extent of involvement children's learning and to (iii) Explore parents' views towards the teachers in their involvement in learning. One hundred and ten parents who had their children in public secondary schools were randomly selected. The research study employed a mixed method approach using both qualitative and quantitative techniques in collecting and analyzing data. The study used face to face interviews with fathers and mothers. The findings of the study indicated that 89% of the mothers participated in school events and activities compared to 83% of the fathers. Further findings indicated that 70% of the fathers communicated to their children in mother tongue while at home compared to 61% of the mothers. Majority of the fathers had attained secondary education while majority of the mothers had primary education. The study revealed that mothers experienced painful experiences during their time than the fathers. Major recommendations include among others attending parents teachers' conferences and encouraging parents to communicate to their children in English.

KEYWORDS: children's learning, gender differences, extent of involvement, teachers'parents' conferences.

1 INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is a form of investment made by parents for the future benefit of their children (Smits & Hosgor, 2006). The more confidence parents instil in their children regarding success in school, the greater their involvement in their children's education (Eliason & Jenkins, 2003). Parental involvement practices, regardless of other practices applied at home or at school, have been found to influence children's academic performance in school (Sanders & Lewis, 2004). Considering the vast development in the field of education, it is not surprising that parental involvement plays a major role in developing patterns of higher academic achievement in children. It is important to note that through their parents' participation, children not only gain cognitive and social development (Weis, Caspe & Lopez, 2006) but also develop positive attitudes and behaviours, talent, personality and potential skill development.

The quality and content of fathers' involvement matter more for children's outcomes than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children. Family learning can also provide a range of benefits for parents and children including improvements in reading, writing and numeracy as well as greater parental confidence in helping their child at home. The attitudes and aspirations of parents and of children themselves predict later educational achievement. International evidence suggests that parents with high aspirations are also more involved in their children's education. In 2007, around half of parents surveyed said that they felt very involved in their child's school life. Two thirds of parents said that they would

like to get more involved in their child's school life (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein & Coleman, 2008). Levels of parental involvement vary among parents, for example, mothers, parents of young children, Black/Black British parents, parents of children with a statement of Special Educational Needs are all more likely than average to be very involved in their child's education. Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood. The quality and content of fathers' involvement matter more for children's outcomes than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children (Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004).

Family learning can also provide a range of benefits for parents and children including improvements in reading, writing and numeracy as well as greater parental confidence in helping their child at home. The attitudes and aspirations of parents and of children themselves predict later educational achievement. International evidence suggests that parents with high aspirations are also more involved in their children's education. In 2007, around half of parents surveyed said that they felt very involved in their child's school life. Two thirds of parents said that they would like to get more involved in their child's school life (with work commitments being a commonly cited barrier to greater involvement). Lone parents and non-resident parents are both less likely than average to feel very involved. Parents are more likely to see a child's education as mainly or wholly their responsibility (28%) in 2007 compared to previous years, and nearly half (45%) of parents believed that they had equal responsibility with the school. Parents also now participate in a wider range of activities with their children. These include: doing school projects together (83%) making things (81%), playing sport (80%) and reading (79%) (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003).

Studies suggest that fathers' involvement has increased since the 1970s, particularly with children under the age of five. There is evidence, however, of great variation in levels of fathers' involvement, so that even though levels have increased on average, a substantial proportion of fathers recorded no daily direct interaction time with their children. This is likely to reflect, in part, changing family structures. When surveyed in 2007, mothers are more likely than fathers to say that they felt 'very involved' in their child's education (53% compared to 45%). Nearly 70% of fathers want to be more involved in their child's education and even higher proportions of non resident parents (81%), who are predominantly male, are also keen for greater involvement.

Research suggests fathers are involved (more often than mothers) in specific types of activities in their children's out of school learning: such as building and repairing, hobbies, Information Technology, maths and physical play. A survey of parents in 2007 found that fathers help less often with homework than mothers, however amongst parents working full time there was no gender difference. Evidence suggests that the quality and content of fathers' involvement matter more for children's outcomes than the quantity of time fathers spend with their children. Fathers have a critical role to play in ensuring positive outcomes for their children (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003).

There is consistent evidence that fathers' interest and involvement in their children's learning (which was measured in terms of interest in education, outings and reading to the child) is statistically associated with better educational outcomes (controlling for a wide variety of other influencing factors). These outcomes included: better exam results, a higher level of educational qualifications, greater progress at school, higher educational expectations more positive attitudes (e.g. enjoyment) better behaviour (e.g. reduced risk of suspension or expulsion) at school. These positive associations exist across different family types, including two-parent families, single parent families and children with non-resident fathers. However, the specific outcomes and strength of effect can vary across family type. Research indicates that fathers' involvement is important not only when a child is in primary school but also when they are in secondary school and regardless of the child's gender (Harris and Goodall , 2007).

Kiwasa District is a semi arid area and in most cases the residents experience prolonged drought. In most cases school events such as academic clinics, parents' teachers' meetings and annual general meetings are highly attended by mothers. On the other hand indiscipline cases are in most cases attended by the mothers while the prize giving days are attended by the fathers if the child be it a boy or girl is being awarded. It is for this reason therefore that the researchers were prompted to investigate the gender differences in parents' involvement in their children's education both at home and in school in Kiwasa West District.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood (Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). While it is shown that fathers and mothers are involved in their children's education it is not clear the extent to which the mother or the father is involved. It is

for this reason therefore that the researchers were prompted to investigate gender differences in parents' involvement in their children's learning in public secondary schools in Kieni-West District Nyeri County-Kenya.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Investigate gender difference in the nature of parental involvement in their children's learning;
- 2) Establish gender differences in factors influencing extent of involvement children's learning and to
- 3) Explore parents' views towards the teachers in their involvement in learning.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted in this study was descriptive survey design. This method was relevant to the study because it involved frequency of answers to the same questions by different mothers and fathers. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. By use of this design the researcher intended to report the status of parental involvement in their children's education as it were in the schools studied. The study targeted 110 parents in public secondary schools in Kieni-West District. Sampled parents comprised of a combination of parents of form three students who had been sampled and others who had not. A structured interview schedule for sampled parents focused on their involvement in the academic achievement of their children. In this study qualitative data was derived from open-ended questions in the interview schedule. The research questions were categorized and a coding system developed based on collected data. The frequency with which an idea or description appeared was used to interpret gender difference.

3 RESULTS

3.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

The sampled population consisted of 56(51%) mothers and 54(49%) fathers.

3.2 PARENTS' AGE

The findings of the study showed that 30% of the mothers were in the age bracket of 31 to 35 years while 36% were between 35 and 40 years of age (Figure 1). On the other hand 61% of the fathers were over 40 years of age (Figure 2) and the minority were in the range of 31 to 35 years.

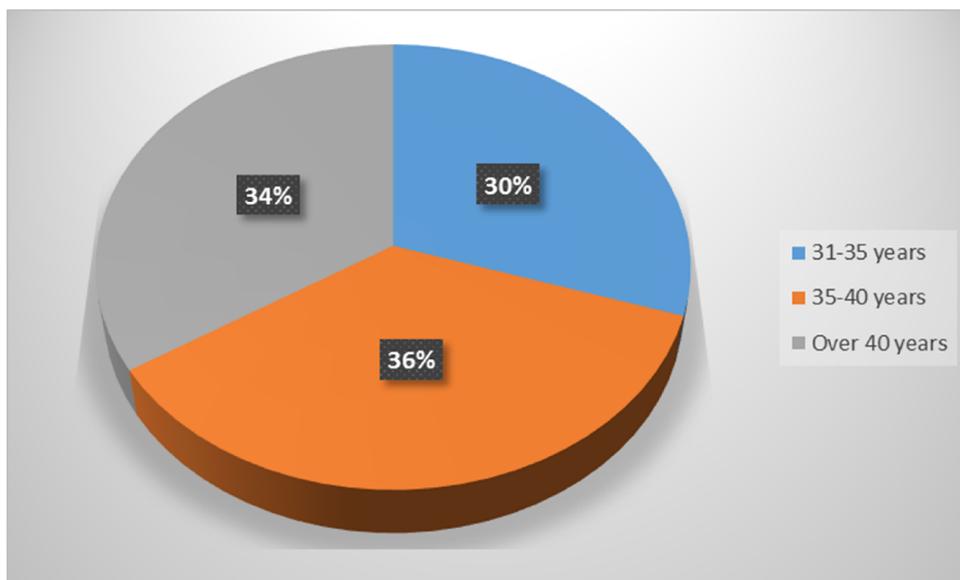


Figure 1: Mothers' Age (DATA 2013)

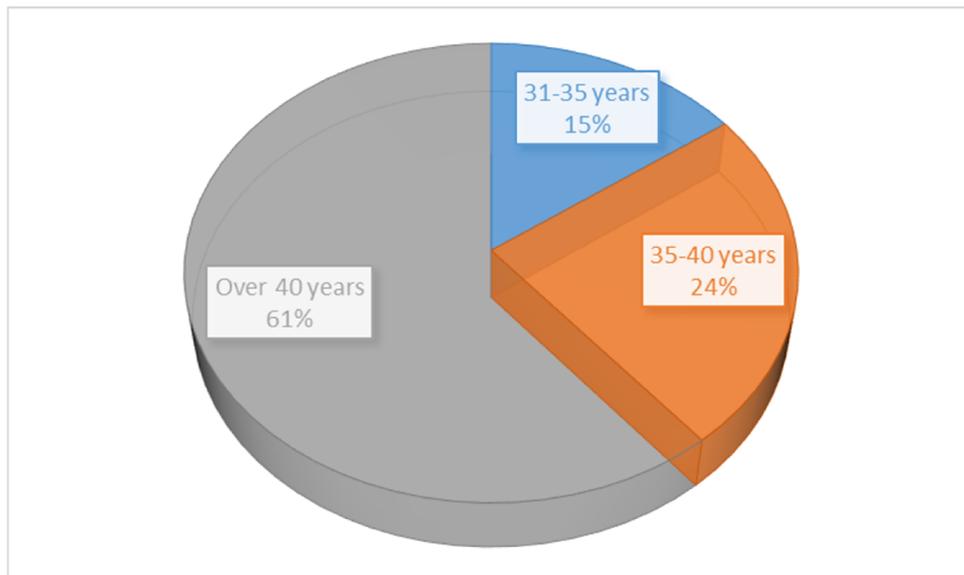


Figure 2: Father’s Age (DATA 2013)

3.3 PARENTS’ EDUCATION LEVELS

Regarding educational levels majority(39%) of the mothers had acquired primary education and 2% had post graduate education(Figure 3). Table 1 indicates that majority(50%) of the fathers had acquired secondary school education while only 2% had postgraduate education.

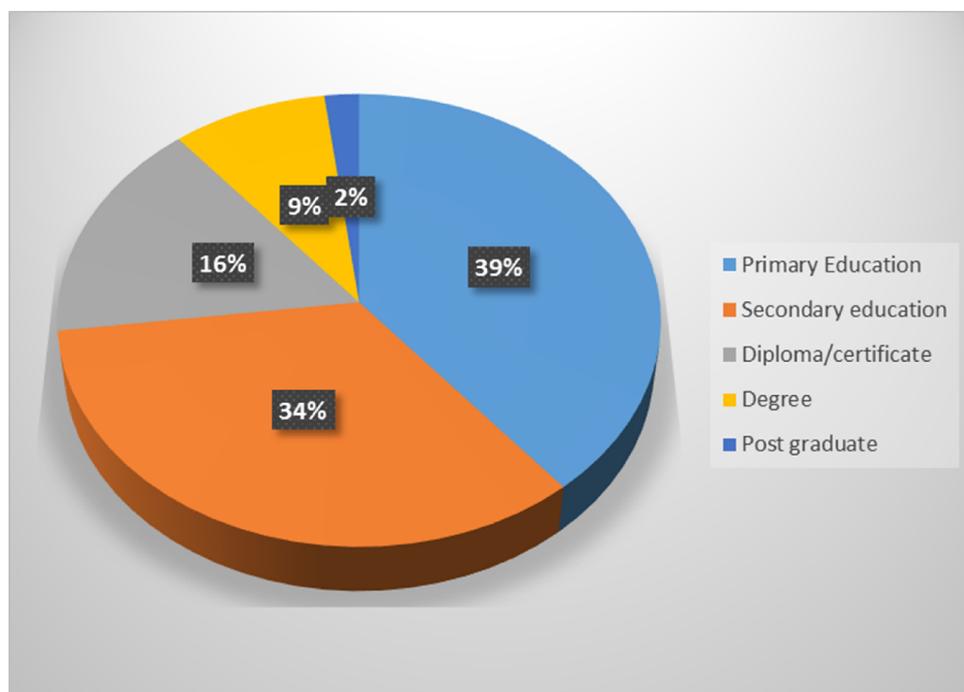


Figure 3: Mothers’ Educational Levels (DATA 2013)

Table 1: Fathers' Educational Levels

Education	F	%
Primary Education	13	24
Secondary education	27	50
Diploma/certificate	8	15
Degree	5	9
Post graduate	1	2
Total		100

3.4 PARENTS' INCOME LEVELS

Figure 4 below shows that 67% of the mothers earned less than ksh 10,000 while 33% earned more than ksh. 10,000. The study revealed that 43% of the fathers earned more than ksh 10,000 while 39% earned less than ksh 10,000.

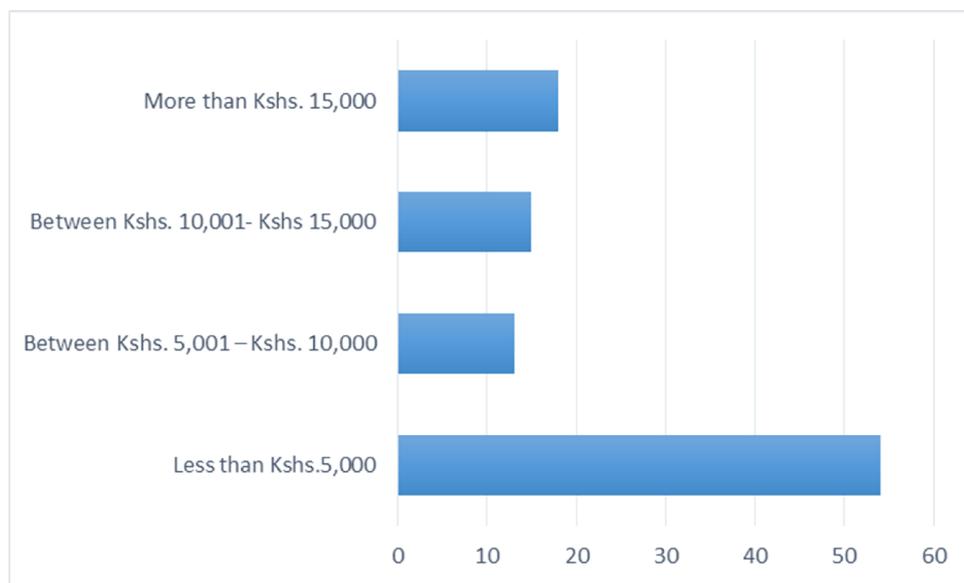


Figure 4: Mothers' Income Levels (DATA 2013)

3.5 EXTENT TO WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Mothers were asked about their awareness of the parents' involvement programmes (Table 2) and the response was that 85% were aware while 15% were not. Figure 5 shows that 79% of the fathers were aware of the programmes while 21% were not.

Table 2: Mothers' Awareness

	F	%
Yes	46	85
No	8	15
Total	54	100

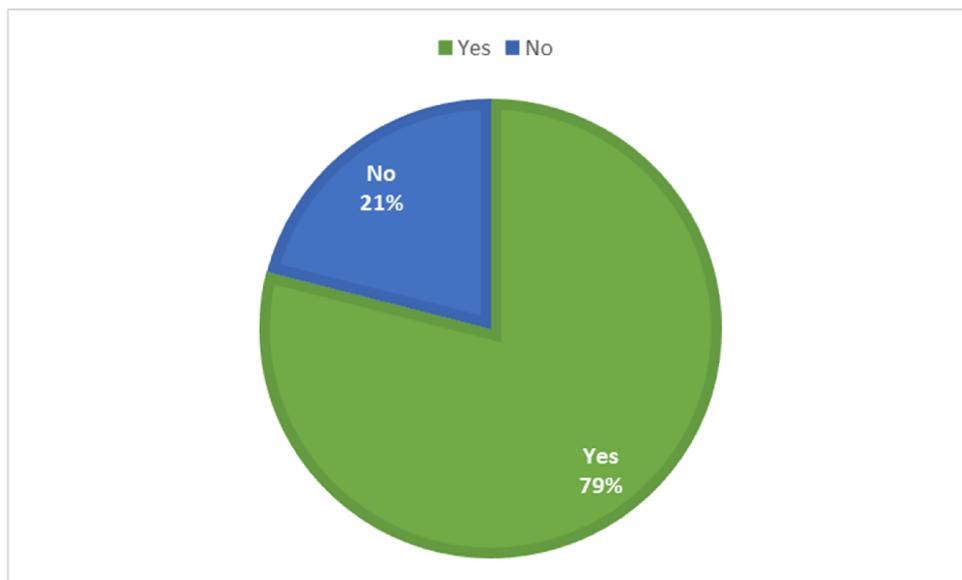


Figure 5: Fathers’ Awareness (DATA 2013)

The study revealed that 89% of the mothers participated in school events and activities such as annual general meetings and academic clinics while 11% did not. Figure 6 shows that 83% of the fathers did participate in school events while 17% did not.

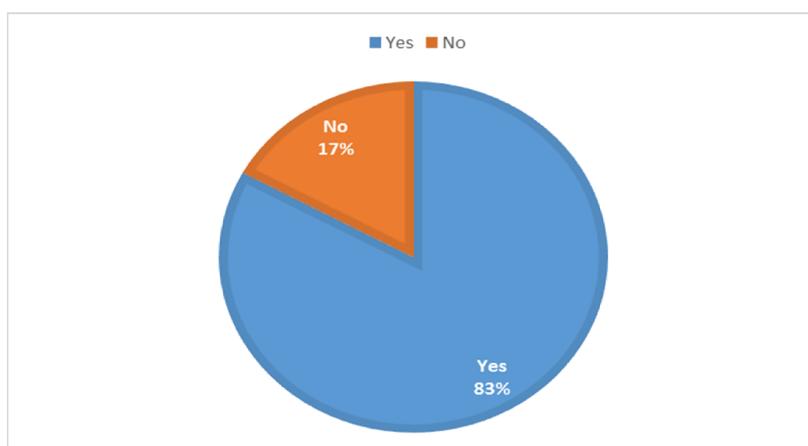


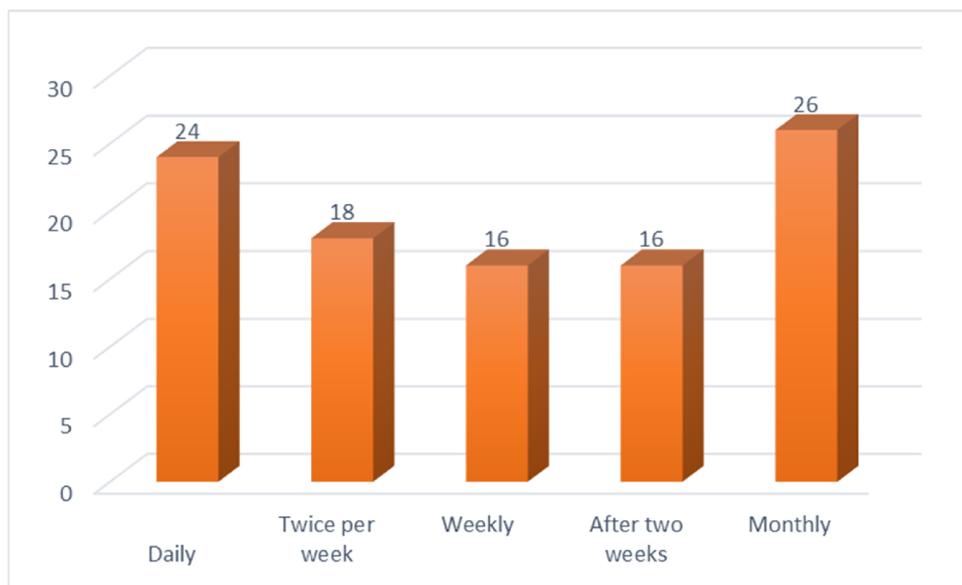
Figure 6: Fathers’ Participation in School Events (DATA 2013)

Regarding monitoring of homework 73% of the mothers were involved while 27% were not.

Mothers were asked whether they engaged their children in holiday tuition and the response was that 75% did but 25% did not. Fathers were highly involved (74%) in engaging their children in holiday tuition while 26% were not. The researchers wanted to know how often the mothers checked on the performance of their children .The findings of the study showed that majority of the mothers (32%) did it on daily basis while 21% did it monthly (Table 4) while 24% of the fathers checked their children’s performance on daily basis and 26% did it monthly(Figure 7).

Table 4: Checking of Performance by Mothers

	F	%
Daily	17	32
Twice per week	8	15
Weekly	3	6
After two weeks	14	26
Monthly	11	21
Never		

**Figure 7: Checking of Performance by Fathers (DATA 2013)**

The study found that 65% of the mothers were able to sustain their children in school throughout the term while 35% were not able. On the other hand 52% of the fathers were able to retain their children in school while 48% were not. Regarding visiting children in school to discuss the performance data showed that 27% of the mothers made it on a weekly as well as after two weeks. None of the mothers failed to discuss performance. Majority of the fathers visited their children's school on weekly basis to discuss academic progress while 12% did it monthly. Table 5 shows that majority of the mothers relied on farming (46%) while 41% were salaried. The study revealed that majority of the fathers (45%) were salaried and 40% relied on farming (Figure 8).

Table 5: Mothers' Sources of Income

	F	%
Salary	24	41
Funds	1	2
Farming	27	46
Others	7	11
		100



Figure 8: Fathers’ Source of Income (DATA 2013)

Regarding the language spoken to the children the researchers found that 61% of the mothers spoke mother tongue while 12% spoke in English (Figure 9). Figure 10 indicates that 70% of the fathers spoke vernacular to their children while 20% spoke in Kiswahili remaining with 10% who communicated in English.

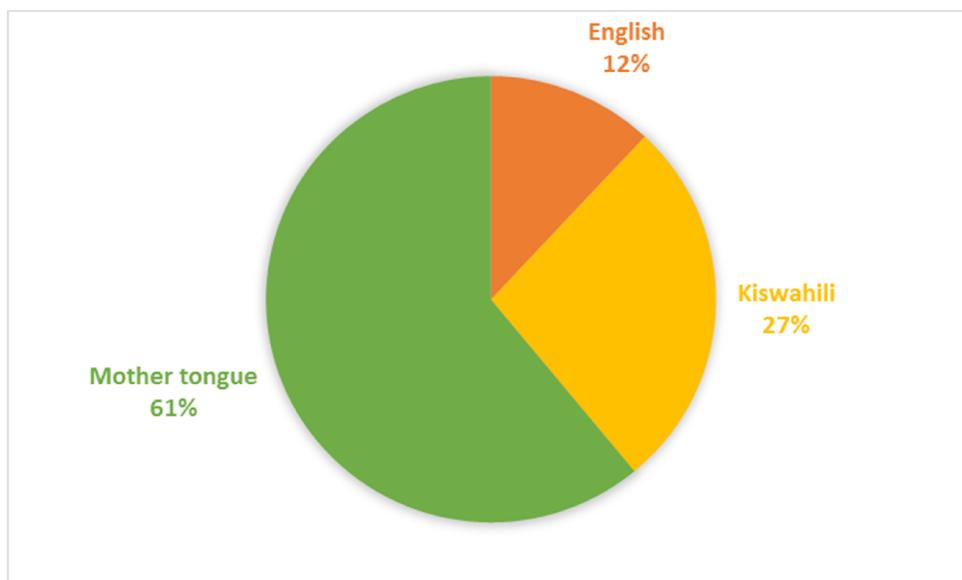


Figure 9: Language used by Mothers (DATA 2013)

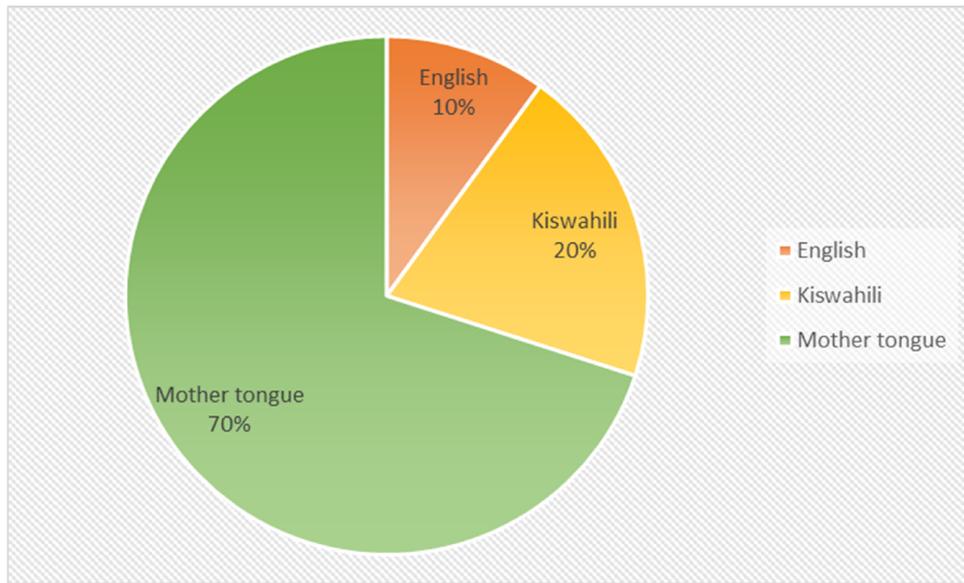


Figure 10: Language used by Fathers (DATA 2013)

Mother believed that their involvement was beneficial to the teachers in aiding in their children educational progress (89%) while 11% did not. The researchers revealed that all the fathers believed that their involvement is beneficial to the teachers in aiding their children educational progress. The study indicated that 46% of the mothers were often engaged in meaningful discussions about their children’s education by the teachers while 16% were not. The study indicated that 47% of the fathers were oftenly engaged in meaningful discussions about their children’s education while 2% were not and 38% were rarely involved. Response to the attendance of mothers to parents’ teachers’ conferences showed that 25% rarely attended while the same percentage never did it. The findings indicated that 31% of the fathers attended teachers’ parents’ conferences while 23% did not and 34% rarely did .

3.6 LEARNERS’ FACTORS

Figure 11 shows that majority (64%) of the mothers were reminded about academic clinics by their children while 9% were not. The study revealed that 57% of the fathers were oftenly reminded by their children about the academic clinics in the school while 8% were never reminded.

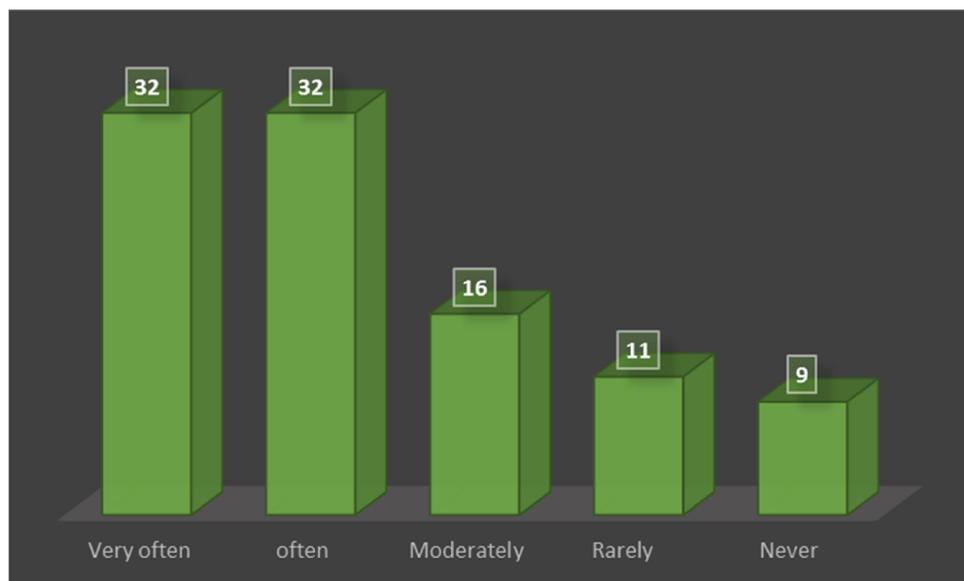


Figure 11: Mothers Reminded on Academic Clinics(DATA 2013)

Mothers were asked if their children brought newsletters and report forms to them and the results were that 91% did but 9% did not. Fathers reported that their children brought newsletters at home(87%) while 13% of them did not receive. The researcher wanted to know how often mothers discussed their academic progress with their children. The findings indicated that 59% oftenly discussed while 26% rarely did it. Majority of the fathers(63%) oftenly discussed the academic progress of their children with the children while 9% never did so. Majority of the mothers (57%) worked more than eight hours in a day while 28% worked for eight hours which is the standard working time according to the International Labour Organisation. The findings of the study revealed that 50% of the fathers worked more than eight hours while 37% worked the standard time. Figure 12 shows that majority of the mothers (75%) stated that there was a good flow of information while 25% felt that this did not exist. The study found that 78% of the fathers felt that there was good flow of information between the parents and teachers while 12% felt that this did not exist.

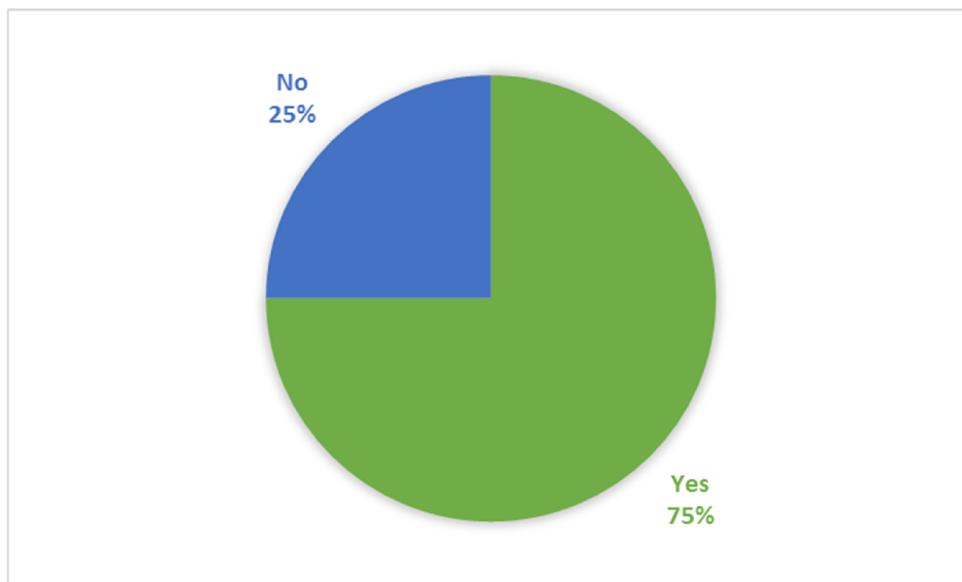


Figure 12: Mothers’ Opinion on Information Flow(DATA 2013)

The findings of the study indicated that majority of the mothers (83%) had difficult and painful experiences during their school time while a minority (17%) did not. On the other hand 80% of the fathers suffered while 20% did not. The researchers found that all the mothers felt that parental involvement programmes can improve their relationship with their children in schools. On the other hand 96% of the fathers felt that organized parental involvement programmes can improve their relationship with their children while 4% felt it would not.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to investigate gender differences in parents involvement in their children’s learning in public secondary schools in Kieni West District of Nyeri County, Kenya. The results indicated that there are various ways in which mothers and fathers are involved in their children’s learning but all at different extents. Regarding participation in school events the participation of the mothers was higher than that of the fathers. The findings of the study showed that mothers were able to sustain their children in school for a term and pay for holiday tuition to a greater extent than the fathers. The researchers found that majority of the fathers communicated in vernacular more than the mothers did. Majority of the mothers suffered during their school time as compared to the fathers though both mothers and fathers felt that parental involvement programmes were essential in their children’s learning.

4.2 CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicated that parents are involved in their children’s learning at different levels. The mothers are highly involved as compared to the fathers. The study realized that even though mothers are more involved the academic

performance of girls is wanting. When parents are involved, children achieve more and everyone benefits in the sense that the school is recognized, parents have faith in the teachers and students are willing to stay. Parental involvement in their children's academic achievement yields positive academic outcomes ranging from early childhood throughout adolescence and beyond.

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