



## DETERMINANTS OF PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON SCHOOL READINESS AMONG PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN KARASANI DIVISION, NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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### 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:** determinants; parents' perception; school readiness; pre-primary school

### 1. Introduction

Children, who begin school with inadequate social-emotional and cognitive skills, are at a greater risk for several negative cognitive outcomes that include peer problems, low achievement, as well as school dropout. On the other hand, parents who consider

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school readiness as essential, their children are associated with positive behavioral and social competencies in adulthood and improved academic outcomes both in primary and secondary school, in terms of performance and equity (Booth, 2008). Perception of children's school readiness refers to the awareness of the degree of children's competence within various developmental aspects upon entry to formal schooling that first reveals their capacity to learn. On the other hand, some parents perceive school readiness as the students' cognitive abilities (Cowan, 2005).

Globally, parents' perceptions concerning children's school readiness is rapidly gaining recognition as a viable strategy with regard to closing the learning gap and improving equity in attaining lifelong learning, as well as full developmental prospective among young children (Cowan, 2005). In a study done by Kathleen Moore (2008), concerning school readiness in relation to parent-child activities, teachers' perceptions, as well as students' skills, she found out that the relationship between parents, teachers and the child was significant to children's school success. Alternatively, Ramey and Ramey (2004) studied some American children to examine the percentage of children joining kindergarten with partial readiness skills. From the study, 35% of the children lacked skills considered significant for kindergarten transition (Booth, 2008). Findings from this study demonstrated that parents did not participate adequately in enhancing their children's school readiness and that was attributed to their perception of children's school readiness.

In Kenya, the integrated policy framework states that children needs are complex and diverse and they involve catering for all developmental areas including social, physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and moral. In the policy, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, has stressed on the significance of parents partnering with other stakeholders to ensure that children's holistic needs are met (MoEST, 2007). In different countries, the perceptions that parents had regarding children's school readiness were influenced by various factors. In Pakistan, the perceptions that parents had were influenced by quality of education and low cost of schooling (Zhang, Sun & Gai, 2008). However, in Canada, the major factors influencing parents' perception of children's school readiness were religion, learning environment and child's individual needs (Parsons, 2010). Research showed that Australian parents were highly influenced by academic and religious factors (Lemos, 2011). On the other hand, for the Israeli parents, their perceptions were based on cultural values, discipline and the individual needs of the child (Parsons, 2010). The literature reviewed revealed that the major factors influencing parents' perceptions of children's school readiness could not be generalized to all countries because every country possesses its unique

issues. Therefore, the researchers found it necessary to investigate the determinants of parents' perceptions in Kenya regarding children's school readiness.

In Kenya, economic times have changed the level of attention that children receive from their parents even when it comes to school readiness (MoEST, 2007). Parents have the freedom to perceive children's school readiness the way they wish, however, their perception can have significant influence on the child's future development (NACECE, 2007). Positive perceptions held by parents about school readiness assists in laying the foundation for the child. Children are also helped to begin primary school being well adjusted socially and morally (Republic of Kenya, 1998).

The Government of Kenya recognizes how Early Childhood Development 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 ECD 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 determinants of parents' perceptions regarding children's school readiness.

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 parents' perceptions and school readiness, 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 determinants of parents' perception on children's school readiness.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were:

1. To find out if there is a difference in parents' perception on school readiness across levels of parents' education.
2. To determine if there is a difference in parents' perception on school readiness across parents' income levels.
3. To find out the relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and area of residence.

## **4. Research Methodology**

Survey research design was used to guide this study. The independent variables included parents' level of education, income, and area of residence; 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, 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 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 Level of Education and Parents' Perception on Children's School Readiness

The first objective of the study sought to find out the difference in parents' perception on children's school readiness across parents' different levels education. The means and standard deviations for parents' perception and their level of education were compared and Table 6 presents the results.

**Table 6:** Mean Score in Parents' Perception of School Readiness by Level of Education

Academic level	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Scores in Parents' Perception of School Readiness
Lower than standard seven	11	1	4	1.8
Primary certificate	20	1	4	2.1
Secondary certificate	35	1	4	2.3
College diploma	25	1	4	3.0
University degree	11	1	4	3.6

As it can be seen in Table 6, the perceptions that parents had concerning children's school readiness ranged from low to high perception depending on their academic levels. It is also clear that parents' education influenced their perception of children's school readiness. This is because parents with high perception scored high mean scores which were above 3 and those with low perception scored below 3. Those with high perception agreed to the school readiness indicators but those with low perception disagreed with the indicators.

To determine whether the difference between parents' perception and level of education was significant, the null hypothesis was stated as:

*H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant difference in parents' perception on school readiness across various levels of education.*

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to test whether the difference was significant. The results have been presented in Table 7.

**Table 7:** ANOVA Computation on Parents' Perception Level and their Academic Level

Perception	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Calculated F	Critical F	Sig.
Between Groups	3308.539	4	827.135	48.951	2.47	.000
Within Groups	1639.039	97	16.897			
Total	4947.578	101				

Table 7 shows that there was a significant difference in means of parents' perception on children's school readiness among parents of different academic levels. The significance value was  $p=0.000 < 0.05$  with the calculated  $F=48.951$  at 4 degrees of freedom, while the



critical  $F=2.47$ . The finding shows that the  $p$  value was less than the critical value of 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected on this basis. Hence, the results imply that parents' perception on children's school readiness was determined by their level of education meaning that parents who were more educated tend to have a high level of perception regarding their children's school readiness.

The findings were consistent with the findings of a study done by Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000), which showed that educated parents considered basic knowledge such as rote counting as absolutely important for school readiness. This implies that such parents know that school readiness encompasses various components regarding the domains of a child's development. Furthermore, the findings are in line with the National Centre for Early Childhood Education, which notes that parents' perceptions on children's school readiness determines the extent they will go to ensure their children are adequately prepared for formal schooling (NACECE, 2007). Similarly, Koech (2010) found out that parents with low level of education or none at all within Uasin Gishu district participated less in parent-teacher partnerships since they felt ineffectual in their contributions.

Parents with a high level of education knew that school readiness entailed children having language and literacy skills, possessing common knowledge of self, being socially competent, being able to self-regulate and displaying independence. Moreover, they also realized that school readiness is about motor abilities and possessing knowledge of numbers. Linver, Davis-Kean and Eccles (2011) propose that when considering the efficiency of primary school systems, there is normally a predisposition of essential early experiences which a child obtains before commencing formal schooling. Therefore, available evidence illustrates that early learning experiences may have significant positive impacts on children's primary school readiness, admission, progress and performance that could be noticeable in later grades.

A study done by Harrison (2012) revealed that pre-primary school education is helpful in equipping learners with the basic early numeracy and literacy skills and capabilities which improve the overall academic accomplishment in later grades. Moreover, Lemos (2011) found out that Australian parents were highly influenced by academic and religious factors.

Alternatively, Waldfoe (2012) observes that pupils in the U.S. join school with diverse experiences which creates a gap in their academic performance. Therefore, he recommends that this gap should be addressed during a child's early years. Therefore, parents' level of education can determine their children's academic performance after pre-primary education.

### 5.3 Parents' Income and Perception on Children's School Readiness

The second objective of the study sought to establish whether there was a difference in parents' perception on school readiness across parents' income levels. Table 8 presents the mean scores of parents' perception on children's school readiness according to their income levels.

**Table 8:** Mean Scores in Parents' Perception of School Readiness by Level of Income

Income level	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Scores in Parents' Perception of School Readiness
High	10	1	4	3.4
Medium	35	1	4	3.3
Low	57	1	4	2.2
Total	102	1	4	2.7

Table 8 shows that parents with high and medium income had positive perception on children's school readiness. The results imply that level of income influenced parents' perception on children's school readiness. This is because parents with high and medium income agreed to school readiness indicators such that their means were above 3. Parents with low income had negative perception on children's school readiness because they disagreed with the school readiness indicators; hence, their means were below 3.

To determine if there was a significant difference in parents' perception on school readiness across various income levels, a null hypothesis was stated and tested:

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference in parents' perception on school readiness across various income levels.*

ANOVA was computed to establish whether there was a significant difference in parents' perception on school readiness across various income levels and Table 9 presents the results.

**Table 9:** ANOVA Computation on Parents' Perception and their Income Level

Perception	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Calculated F	Critical F	Sig.
Between Groups	3156.488	2	1578.244	73.163	3.09	.000
Within Groups	2135.591	99	21.572			
Total	5292.078	101				

Table 9 shows that the difference in means was found to be significant; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results imply that difference in parents' perception on children's school readiness across various levels of income was significant.

The findings were consistent with those found by La Paro and Pianta (2000), which revealed that the level of parents' income is also related to the home environment in relation to quality. Research shows that the quality associated with the home environment explains the relationships that exist between income, as well as children's developmental outcomes. This is because income often impacts parenting behaviors and investments within developmentally-supportive home environment.

Similarly, evidence provided by the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys indicates that the threats to early development were extreme amongst children living in the poorest households (UNICEF 2012). This is because such children have less chances of receiving support for early learning at home. They also have less probability of attending early childhood education programs. Therefore, school readiness is an influential framework for enhancing equity in access to education, as well as in learning outcomes, particularly for marginalized children.

The findings were also consistent with a study by Kibaara and Kaburu (2013), who reported that different factors determine learning impacts of primary school pupils. Some of these factors include; social economic, psychological, and environmental factors.

#### 5.4 Parents' Area of Residence and Perception on Children's School Readiness

Objective three of this study sought to establish whether there was a relationship between parents' perception of school readiness and area of residence. Mean scores in parents' perception of school readiness by area of residence were determined and Table 10 presents the results.

**Table 10:** Mean Scores in Parents' Perception of School Readiness by Area of Residence

Area of Residence	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Scores in Parents' Perception of School Readiness
Kahawa zone	48	1	4	3.4
Ruaraka zone	54	1	4	1.9

As shown in Table 10 parents' perception was influenced by where they resided. Parents who lived in Kahawa zone had a positive perception on school readiness because their means were above 3 meaning they agreed to the school readiness indicators. Parents who resided in Ruaraka zone had a negative perception on children's school readiness because they scored low means which were below 3 since they disagreed with the school readiness indicators.

To determine the relationship between parents' perception on children's school readiness and areas of residence null hypothesis was stated as:

*H<sub>03</sub> There is no significant relationship between parents' perception on school readiness and area of residence.*

Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis and Table 11 presents the results.

**Table 11:** Chi-Square Computation on Parents' Perception and Area of Residence

Instrument used to measure	Calculated $\chi^2$	Critical $\chi^2$	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.855 <sup>a</sup>	5.991	2	.000

Table 11 indicates that the calculated chi-square value was 33.855 at 2 degrees of freedom with a significance  $p=0.000<0.05$  while the critical chi-square value was 5.991. The calculated  $p$  value was less than the critical value 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there was a significant relationship between the two variables. The results imply that the perceptions that parents had regarding their children's school readiness was influenced by where they live.

The findings were consistent with a study done by Hill (2001), which provided outcomes of a study that involved three different school communities. Therefore, she described how attitudes associated with a particular community shaped the interpretations of parents concerning school readiness, as well as early education. The findings also showed that in every community, subtle messages are usually sent, as well as interpreted by parents concerning school readiness.

A study done by Harrison (2012), established that children who manage to complete their preschool programs successively before joining standard one are usually likely to be more prepared to handle primary school tasks. They can also effectively manage academic demands faced at that level. This is more relevant to children from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds.

Similarly, Green and Riddle (2012) conducted a study which revealed that early educational experiences possess substantial causal impacts on cognitive skills. They also established that formal education determined basic numeracy, literacy, as well as problem-solving skills. Therefore, this stresses the significant role preschool learning experiences may have in shaping and even forecasting later academic accomplishment of learners.

The findings also suggested that in slum areas, parents' perception on school readiness is influenced by the lack of knowledge and awareness mainly because most parents in such places have some common issues to deal with such as increased poverty, insecurity, lack of employment and natural calamities among others. These myriad issues prevent them from having absolute commitment towards their children's school readiness.

On the other hand, in affluent localities, most families are usually economically advantaged and they are able to afford a higher standard of living as compared to families that live in slum areas (Chang & Burns, 2005). Therefore, they are likely to have adequate knowledge on children's school readiness and most of them assist in preparing their children for primary school.

## **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. Parents' level of education was found to be significantly associated with parents' perception on children's school readiness. This implied that limited education may not permit parents to perceive their children's school readiness as important.

Parents' level of income was found to be significant in influencing their perception on children's school readiness. Hence, it was concluded that parents who had a high and moderate level of income had a high level of perception on children's school readiness as compared to those with low income. The parents' area of residence was found to be significantly related to their parents' perception on children's school readiness implying that the place a parent resided influenced their perception on children's school readiness.

## **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

There is need for the board of management to initiate programs where once in a term or in a year, they have a special day for parents and their children to educate them on the important role they play regarding their children's school readiness. These roles include providing their children with educational, financial, emotional and moral support. They are also expected to act as good role models to their children.

## 7.3 Recommendations for Parents

There is need for all parents regardless of their gender, education level, income level and area of residence 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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