

Children's Perspectives on Involvement in Housework and Its Effect on Academic Performance in Early Childhood at City Primary School, Nairobi, Kenya

Esther Kulundu Ambetsa

Assistant Lecturer , Department Of Educational Psychology
Masinde Muliro University Of Science And Technology,

Abstract

Research in early childhood emphasizes the interplay between the home and the school in enhancing quality holistic experiences in children in the early years. However the rise in industrialization and technological advancements in modern day society have had tremendous effects on childhood experiences that have all along been significant to the development of children including the participation of children in housework. This was a descriptive study whose purpose was to find out whether or not school children in urban households are being involved in housework and how this relates to their academic performance. Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used and purposive sampling techniques were employed. Target population were 6-8 year old children, parents and teachers at Cit Primary school, Nairobi County, Kenya. Findings showed that most children in urban areas did not participate in housework, few who did had positive views but opportunities were limited. School work and house helps were a major competing force to children's participation in housework. Recommendation is that parents, teachers and policy makers should be enlightened on the role of housework in developing academic competence in children.

KEY WORDS: Academic competence, Child labour, Child work, housework, household chores

INTRODUCTION

The early years of an individual are considered the basis of development of every aspect of the human being. The quality of learning experiences at this age at school and at home, have lifelong effects on the holistic development of an individual. This requires focusing on competency that takes into account the cognitive, social and physical abilities. Early childhood education meets these goals through approaches that are both family and school based. This, therefore, requires a combined effort by teachers and parents in child upbringing that builds on family values and school related functions that build on academic competence without compromising the child's holistic development.

Studies by Rosmann, (2008) and Bazley and Ennew, (2006), show that one way of enhancing children's holistic development is involving them in activities done at home as a means of family growth and survival such as housework. Work at home, constituting housework/household chores, are activities that children can naturally get involved in as they observe and role play their parents, older siblings, relatives and others. Cunningham and Stromquist (2005) indicate that this has been a traditional practice in many households throughout the world where children would take part in maintaining the home through performing housework. This traditional practice suggests that most cultures throughout the world recognized that learning begins at birth and involved children in housework as a stepping stone to the development of essential skills critical for holistic development. These traditional practices were affirmed by the Jomtien conference on Education for All (Jomtien

conference, Thailand, 1990) which asserted that learning begins at birth and early learning experiences are recognized as critical in early childhood

Children in traditional African families have been involved in supporting the family by participating in housework. However, modern life appears to have promoted ways of socializing children which are likely to focus on schooling to the neglect of skills that children used to develop at home through participating in house work. For example, families are employing house helps to free children to do homework at home. At school, Otieno (2004) further highlights that teachers insist on academic tasks at the expense of holistic development of children.

In as much as research (Rosmann, 2008) indicates that children who are likely to be successful are those that received early childhood programs that target the development of a holistic individual, it has not been established whether children in modern day society are taking part in housework and how this is affecting their academic performance at school. This is critical in ensuring holistic development of children in early childhood education. There are other studies that have been done on children and work but not particularly household chores. This study carried out an investigation to establish whether families in Nairobi involve children in housework and the reasons thereof, the contribution of this phenomenon on children's academic performance, and the opinions and perspectives of children and parents towards engaging children in housework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

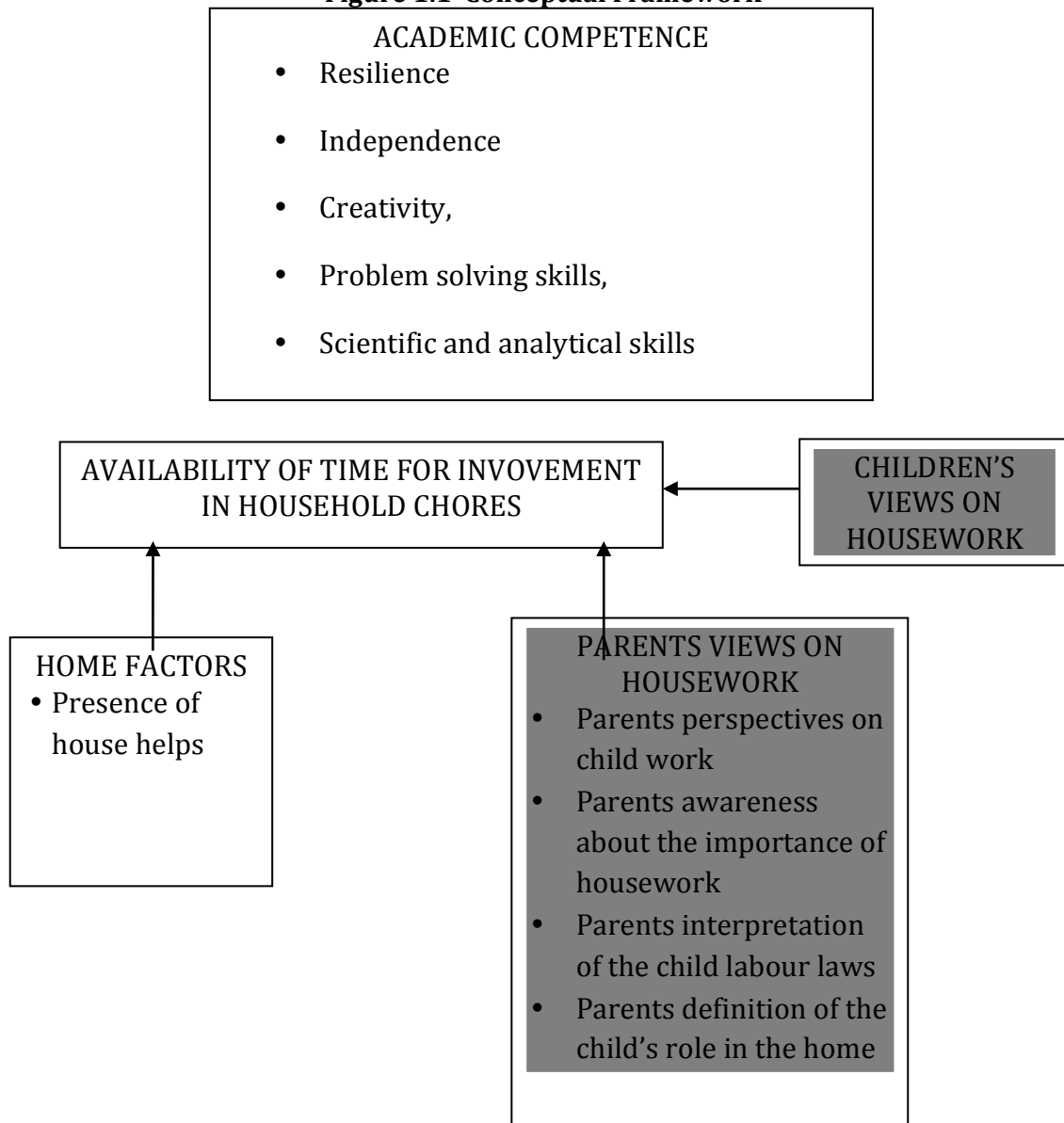
The theory of Erik Erikson on human psychosocial including personality development formed the framework of this study. This theory emphasizes the role of society in shaping the child's psychosocial development during the early stages of development. According to Erikson (1979), each individual undergoes eight stages of development each posing a conflict that should be resolved before proceeding to the next stage. These stages follow a sequence and are influenced by biological changes and environmental experiences in the individual child's context.

In early childhood, these stages are; basic trust versus mistrust (0- 1 year), autonomy versus shame and doubt (2-3 years), initiative versus guilt(4-5 years), and industry versus inferiority (6-11 years). The resolution of the conflicts in one stage enables the individual to have the capacity to resolve the next conflict in the preceding stage. If positive social conditions prevail during a particular stage of development, it leads to acquisition of a number of social and cognitive skills appropriate for that stage. Njagi (2009) further explains that, if the child does not receive the psychosocial needs of that particular stage such as encouragement and psychosocial support, it leads to lack of development of the relevant skills. The focus of this study are the six to eight year old children who are fall in the fourth stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory which is industry versus inferiority.

Conceptual Framework

This model is a diagrammatic representation of the study variables. It shows the visual relationship between the study variables, the extent of children's involvement in housework, children's and parents views in housework and the non-study variables at home such as the presence of househelps and the availability of time for involvement in household chores. The resultant outcome is achievement of overall academic competence. This is shown in figure 1.1

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework



KEY

Grey coloured areas	Study variables
White coloured areas	Non-study variables

Source; Author

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This was an exploratory descriptive survey which was concerned with narration of facts and characteristics concerning individuals and situations in the study. Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. The researcher's choice to use a qualitative paradigm to conduct this study was encouraged by the views of Maxwell (2005) who explains that the aim of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of the situations, experiences and actions of participants in the study, and to give an in-depth analysis of the participants' perspectives of the subject under study. This approach was therefore the most appropriate way to investigate the problem at hand and answer research questions.

It used questionnaires and interviews to provide in-depth descriptions as given by children and parents about their attitudes and lifestyles concerning the involvement of children in housework and the impact of this to the development of academic competence in children. It employed an inductive, open ended strategy whereby the underlying motives and desires of the subjects were brought out, using in depth interviews for the purpose.

This qualitative research was interested not only in the physical events and behavior that were taking place, but also in how the participants made sense of these and how their understanding influenced behavior. These qualitative approach generated results and theories that are understandable and experientially credible, both to the subjects and to others. The researcher was also able to conduct formative evaluations that were intended to help improve existing practices and also in engaging in collaborative or action research with practitioners or the research participants.

Variables

The independent variable was involvement of children in housework which included: varieties of chores done at home such as; washing dishes, dusting, sweeping, setting the table and so on, and the frequency of performance of each chore per week. The study challenged the emerging views that work in the family can be a waste of study time. The study used various mechanisms to establish whether work in a family was a positive or a negative thing.

The dependent variable was the quality of the engagement of the child at school in his/her academic work. The researcher was interested in whether children who appeared to indicate active participation in family household chores also indicated good records in academic performance as measured by their classroom tests in all the learning activities such as science, mathematics, language, physical exercises, social studies and creative activities and life skills. Participation in school did not just reflect academic performance but also how the teachers rated the child in general involvement with school activities. For example leadership skills, pro social activities and willingness to takes risks in learning.

Study site

The study was carried out in City primary school in Nairobi County, Kenya. Nairobi is the capital and largest city in Kenya. Nairobi County was purposively selected because it is a highly populated urban area, consisting of a predominantly cosmopolitan population which was the main focus of this study. It is the most populous city in East Africa. According to the 2009 population census, 3,138,295 inhabitants live in Nairobi. The growth rate of Nairobi is currently 4.1% (Travel discover Kenya, 2011-2012). Most parents in this city were found to have acquired basic literacy skills and were enlightened on the existing labor laws. Majority of the parents were also in full time work (employed/self employed) and engage the services of house helps at home.

The challenges of modern life and the pursuit of respect for children rights were issues that required research in modern parenting. In African culture children perform household chores and the family considers this as a measure of competence and a way of socializing children to be productive members of society. Whether families living in Nairobi were still respecting this African beliefs and values was a critical issue of research and Nairobi location was suitable for this study.

Target Population

The target population in this study was lower primary school; standard one to three children in City Primary school, Nairobi County, Kenya, teachers and parents. Children in this age group were relatively independent physically, mentally and socially thus were capable of taking part in some housework. They also fell into the theoretical framework that formed the basis of this study. The children and parents gave firsthand information on their practices, opinions and beliefs related to the involvement of children in housework while the teachers gave information on the children's academic competence.

The targeted population were the 150 six to eight year old children of both genders in the lower primary section, classes one to three, 1 parent/guardian of one or more children (100 parents/guardians) and 6 teachers, giving a total population of 256.

Sampling techniques and sample size

Sampling techniques

The researcher purposively sampled City Primary School because of the unique nature of the school in that it had children from a variety of socioeconomic background and cultural groups. With the assistance of the class teachers, the researcher selected children based on their academic abilities, socioeconomic characteristics (slum families representing the lower socioeconomic class, middle income earners such as employed civil servants and so on) and cultural backgrounds (represented by ethnicity of the children). Parents/guardians were selected.

Sample size

Of the total population, 30.08% (77 respondents) were selected. Fifteen children from each class were purposely selected giving a total of forty five children. As a result, one of the parents/guardian of the selected children each, was also purposively selected based on those who were likely to be readily available and willing to participate, from different socio-economic classes, those that had and had not employed services of house helps in their homes and those whose homes were easily accessible to the researcher giving a total of thirty parents/guardians. Two teachers formed the sample.

Table 1 : Total population of lower primary children, teachers and sample frame of the respondents

RESPONDENTS	TOTAL POPULATION OF CHILDREN,PARENTS, TEACHERS, CLASS 1-3	SAMPLE		
		Male	Female	Total
Children (class 1-3)	150	23	22	45
Parents	100	15	15	30
Teachers	6	-	2	2
TOTAL	256	38	39	77

Source ;Author

Construction of research instruments

The primary data collection instruments included; oral interview schedules and questionnaires. In addition data was taken through naturalistic observation, and document analysis and descriptive field notes in a journal to capture any other information that was relevant to the study but which was not included in the research instruments. The instruments (oral interview schedules and questionnaires) were administered to collect information on

involvement in housework, perspectives of parents and children towards involving children in housework and the performance of children in the various activity areas.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to analyze the data obtained. This involved uncovering and discovering themes that ran through the thick narratives in the raw data and interpreting the implication of those themes for research questions. As explained by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), it involved generation of themes, categories and patterns through the process of coding, annotating and searching for interconnections.

The researcher began by reading the interview scripts, observational notes and documents that were to be analyzed. During the reading, the researcher wrote notes and memos on what she read and heard and developed tentative ideas about likely relationships and categories in the information. After this the researcher organized this raw data from the field notes and narratives into various codes by identifying the various categories in the data which were distinct from each other and then established the relationships among these categories. This coding process fractured the data and rearranged them into categories that facilitated comparison between ideas in the same category and eventually helped in the organization of data into broader themes and theoretical concepts.

Once the themes, categories and patterns were identified, the researcher used descriptive statistical methods and measurement scales to present the information. It involved measures of central tendency such as the mode, mean and median which were calculated and presented in form of frequency distribution tables, bar charts, curves and line graphs.

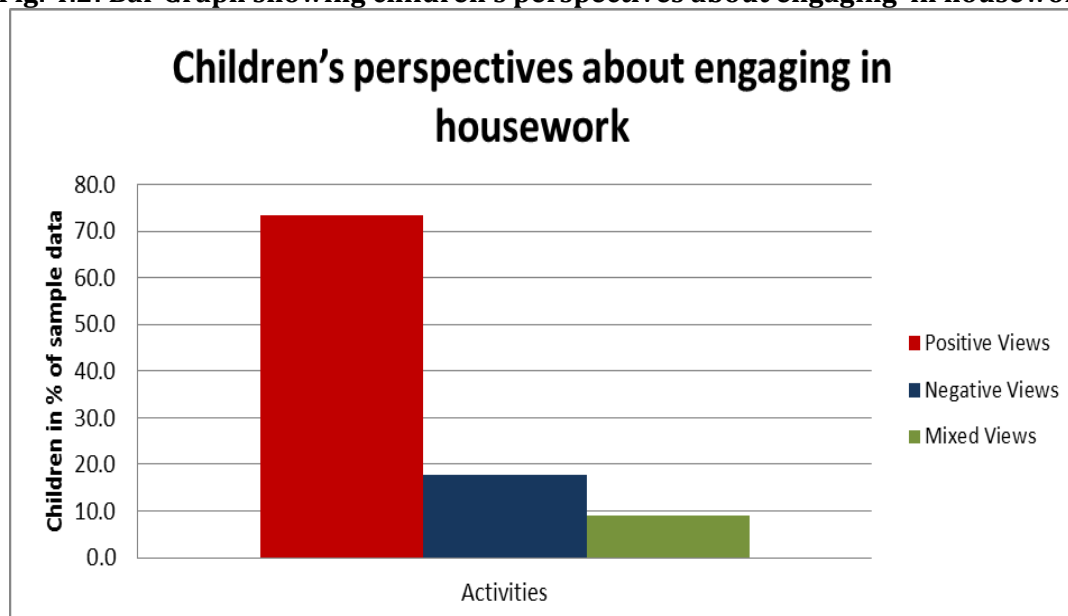
Limitations of the study

Home observations were part of the methods of data collection. This was a limitation because the sample collected from the parents was not randomly selected as this relied on the willingness of the parents to allow the research to be conducted in their homes. This had an influence on the validity of the results as the sample collected was not representative enough. In order to overcome this, the researcher was very selective and selected parents from different backgrounds in order to enhance the representativeness of the sample selected.

RESULTS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Children's perspectives on engagement in household chores

Children's views and ideas about engaging in housework were explored using questionnaires and through face to face interviews. Children had varied perspectives concerning being involved in household chores. Figure 4.2 shows the proportions of various perspectives.

Fig. 4.2: Bar Graph showing children's perspectives about engaging in housework

The findings demonstrated in figure 4.2 shows that, most children (73.3%), had positive perspectives towards house chores. A small proportion of them had negative perspectives (17.8%) while another smaller group had mixed feelings (8.9%).

Reasons for children's views and perspectives on housework

From the previous findings, a very small proportion of children performed housework; most were engaged in doing homework. Surprisingly, from these findings, the few who got opportunities to perform household chores enjoyed doing it. A good proportion of them gave positive views towards housework.

Reasons for positive perspectives

Positive perspectives were expressed in a variety of ways including descriptions of work as good, fine and enjoyable. A close look at the children's responses showed that children with positive perspectives towards work gave three categories of reasons;

- a. Health related reasons
- b. Enjoyment related reasons
- c. General reasons

a. Health related reasons

Reasons in this category related to the contribution of work towards their physical health and wellbeing. This included statements such as;

"It makes me strong and healthy."

"It is like exercising and helping someone like cleaning the house, wash the dishes and helping."

b. Enjoyment related reasons

These reasons related to children's experience of fun and enjoyment in doing the tasks. This included statements such as;

"I feel happy and nice when working."

'I enjoy working.'

c. General reasons

These are reasons that were positive but did not specifically relate to a given experience or benefit. They found working to be just okay, they had no problem engaging in it. They were proud to contribute to their own livelihood and that of their families. This was reflected in statements such as;

“it is fine to do housework.”

‘ it is okay to help in work at home.’

Reasons for negative perspectives

A few children (8.9%), had negative perspectives about housework. These reasons related to:

- a. Interference with schoolwork
- b. Lack of interest
- c. Boredom

a. Interference with schoolwork

These reasons were in relation to their school work. They found it a distraction that hinders them from concentrating in their homework. This included statements such as;

‘Housework is not good because it can negatively affect my education.’

‘I will be unable to do homework.’

b. Lack of interest/ Dislike

Some children were simply not interested in housework and said;

‘I do not think I love the idea.’

‘ I dislike housework, It is not fun.’

c. Boredom

These reasons related to how the work experience made them feel. Some felt that housework was a boring activity and said;

“I get bored because there are usually other more fun activities that I can do like playing with my friends and watching television.”

‘ It is boring to do housework.’

Reasons for mixed feelings

A small number of the children (8.5%), were not completely sure of their feelings towards housework. Their perspectives depended on their moods and the activities they had to do.

They gave responses such as:

“Sometimes I feel good sometimes I feel bad when doing housework”.

‘When I am idle I feel good, but when doing homework I feel bad and distracted.’

DISCUSSION

The children in this study see the value of being involved in work at home and desire to be involved in it. Yet, their level of involvement was rather low. This suggests that children's perspectives do not get reflected in their work involvement. The children are not getting enough opportunities to engage in housework. From previous findings, this is mainly because, there was a lot of homework from school that took most of their time. School work is therefore a major competing force against time for housework.

In addition, these findings are an indication that children did not really have a say in matters that concern them. They did not have a say in choosing to do the activities that are of interest to them and make them happy such as housework. Children are viewed as passive about their interests, likes and situations. Studies carried out by Boyden and Ennew (1997), show that most of the current research concerning children have been carried out through the perspectives and understanding of adults who speak on behalf of children and in most cases the voices of children are not heard.

Article 12(1) of the UNCRC asserts, state parties shall assure that; 'the child is capable of forming his or her own views, has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child and the views of the child to be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (UNCRC,2006). This means moving away from perceptions of children as passive victims, and rather recognizing them as active participants, capable of analyzing and responding to their situations and problems, and as citizens with both rights and obligations in society.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the few times that children engaged in housework, were shown to be mostly for their own personal wellbeing and not to the wellbeing of the whole family.

However, the few children who got opportunities to work, enjoyed it, they felt good when taking part in the maintenance of the home and were willing to take part in it. They appreciated the contribution of housework to their academic competence. It contributed to the skills and concepts learnt at school, and had a tremendous impact on their school work. However, they lacked enough opportunities to engage in it. Teachers were aware of the importance of housework but mainly on its contribution to values enhancement. They were not aware of its benefits on academic skills and concepts.

The curriculum was exam oriented where emphasis was on passing examinations and not on the holistic development of children, it did not offer opportunities for housework because of the heavy workload, emphasis on performance in examinations and the long hours that children spend at school. There was no interplay between the home and the school in learning. Thus, children were missing out on basic learning opportunities at home such as housework which is fundamental to their academic competence and indeed their overall holistic development.

Parents did not give children enough opportunities to engage in housework. To parents, homework and play took more priority than housework and viewed housework as a distraction to school work. Thus, children lacked opportunities to develop initiative and self driven actions. There was ignorance among both parents and teachers on the contribution of housework on development of academic skills and concepts and to knowledge as a whole

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends the government, relevant ministries and stakeholders to set up policies on the following areas;

- i. Research concerning child development should incorporate children's ideas and views. Their voices should be heard on matters that concern them such as their interest in engaging in family housework activities.

- ii. Partnership between teachers and parents / home and the school should be enhanced so that the home and the school can work together to promote the involvement of children in household chores.
- iii. Awareness campaigns through both electronic, print media and parents meetings at school should be carried out intensively to enlighten parents and other caregivers on the importance of housework on child's success in school related tasks.

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