

ASSESSMENT OF COPING STRATEGIES BY ORPHANED LEARNERS AND THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT : *Despite the vulnerable status of the orphaned learners, every child in Kenya has a right to quality education that should lead to good performance and achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE). This study assessed coping strategies by exceptional orphaned learners and their academic achievement in Winam Division in Kisumu County. The theory underpinning the study was self- efficacy theory by Albert Bandura (1994). Descriptive survey design was used in the study. The study population consisted of 43 head teachers, 516 teachers and 3042 orphaned learners in 43 mixed public primary schools. Data was collected by questionnaire, interview schedule and document analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using frequency counts, means, percentages and standard deviation. Data from the interviews were organized into themes and sub-themes as they emerged through the objective. The study established that; most orphaned learners stay with older siblings, lacked some basic needs and lacked guidance from adults. Hard work, personal ambition, role models from their schools and guidance from teachers were the most outstanding factors that enabled orphaned learners to perform well in their academics. The study recommends that grandparents who care for the orphans be supported financially by the government. The Ministry of Health in collaboration with other stake holders should launch health and nutrition program in schools where the program has not yet been started. Life skills education should be examined like any other subject in the curriculum. There should be a vote head under FPE to cater for orphaned learners' school requirements. School administration should link orphaned learners who perform well with sponsors to ensure that they continue with their secondary education.*

KEYWORDS: Assessment, Coping Strategies, Orphaned Learners, Academic Achievement, Primary Schools, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The state of orphan hood has existed since the “dark ages.”The orphaned children have always been with us either directly or indirectly. Most orphans in the world are as a result of wars,

natural calamities, diseases like HIV/AIDS, maternal death in child birth due to neglect and poorly trained traditional birth attendants. Current reports indicate that there are between 143 million and 210 million orphans worldwide (UNICEF, 2000). Every day 5,760 more children become orphans. This renders many children helpless. 2,102,400 more children become orphans every year in Africa alone. Most (92%) of the world's orphans are in developing countries. According to UNICEF's most recent "State of the world's children" report, the number of orphans has continued to grow in many developing countries and third world countries partially due to the spread of famine, violence and diseases in particular AIDS. Out of those 143,000,000 orphans, an estimated 15,000 children die every day of hunger related causes (UNICEF, 2001). These incapacitate their learning ability.

It is estimated that by the year 2020 with the rate that children are becoming orphaned, there will be more than 200 million children orphaned around the globe and this is over 2.8% of the world's population (UNICEF, 2006). In Russia and Ukraine, studies have shown that 10% - 15% of these children commit suicide before they reach age eighteen. Every single child that makes up the thousands or millions is a precious child, just like other children whose parents are alive. The negative effects of orphan hood have important implications for future opportunities in terms of education, employment, health, social support and economic development. Evans and Miguel (2007) find that parental loss decreases school attendance and participation rates of children by seven percentage points. The orphans' situation in Thailand is worsening with the AIDS pandemic, natural calamities increase. This has in turn led to the establishment of homes for the orphans (WHO, 1995). Orphans are at risk and significantly affected by their inability to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing health care and education (Meier, 2003). There are more orphans in sub-Saharan Africa than all of the children in Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Canada, Sweden combined. This calls for interventions and ways of caring for the orphans in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Kenya the situation is equally the same. Most orphans in Kenya and indeed the highest percentage is as a result of parents dying from the dreaded disease HIV/AIDS (Nation Newspaper, 2006). Over 40 million people have been infected worldwide (Osewe, Habiyambere & Bassi, 2008). Children who have lost their parents due to different attacks have since been left destitute and homeless (Okayo, 2006). Older siblings in the child headed families are left with the arduous task for fending for their younger siblings. As a result they are vulnerable to abuse, suicide, prostitution, slavery, becoming child soldier and immorality (Harvest Ministry, 2010). Girls skip schools in the afternoon to beg for food from their neighbors to feed their brothers and sisters in Turkana but still endeavor to go to school (Standard Newspaper June, 2011). The children are left wondering from house to house looking for food but even the neighbors have nothing to offer. This implies that their schooling and their health are affected. The little they get after begging cannot sustain them both at home and school although some of them make great efforts and continue with schooling. It is evident that mitigating or alleviating some of the

problems and risks orphans face would have an effect on improving orphans' academic performance (Evans & Miguel, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The existing number of orphans in Kenya today is alarming and has continued to escalate in the whole country. Given the evidence that there is an increasing number of orphans in Kenya (UNAIDS, 2004), it is necessary to note that these orphans are part of the population of the country and so they are as important as any other citizen. It is evident from the background information that orphans are deprived group of people. Moreover their increasing number due to various factors continues to cripple the country (Susan 2005). Government statistics reveal that the number of orphaned learners has risen from 20% of the total population of the children in Kisumu East District to 30%. This is from 4,270 to 6,406 orphaned learners in Primary Schools (Kisumu East District Primary Schools Establishment, 2011). This could be as a result of various factors ranging from diseases, wars, natural calamities and accidents. Orphaned learners are substantially more likely to drop out of school than non-orphans. So the issue at hand is to see to it that these orphaned learners can be well adjusted in their social and personality development so as to develop holistically. The changes in family circumstances to some extent deprive these orphaned learners of the stimulus resources found in the normal family (Sunday Nation, 2011).

Due to this adverse situation, orphaned children schooling outcomes is significantly worse than those of non-orphaned children. Orphans are at risk and significantly affected by their inability to meet and access basic needs such as food, clothing, and health care among others (Meier, 2003). However, there are exceptional cases where orphaned learners perform well and excel in their academics despite the challenges they go through leaving one to wonder and question the causes and contributors to their achievement and good performance. It is interesting that Winam Division outperforms Kadibo Division in KCPE yearly with 2352 orphans yearly yet Winam with a larger number of orphaned learners of 4054. In the year 2009, 2010 and 2012 Winam Division had mean scores of 267, 262 and 278 respectively while Kadibo Division had 203, 213 and 220 in KCPE (Kisumu East District Examination Analysis, 2011).

The scenario therefore called for a vital question: Are there some strategies employed by orphaned learners which enable them to perform well? Studies which have been conducted on coping strategies by orphaned learners target all orphans especially those orphaned as a result of AIDS pandemic, however there is an information gap when it comes to their survival after parental death and academic performance. Hence it is in view of such gap that the researcher feels it is logical to assess the factors which contribute to such orphaned learners' academic achievement in Winam Division.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Winam Division in Kisumu East District which is one of the districts in Kisumu County. The district shares borders with other districts namely Kisumu North District to the North, Nyando District to the East, Kisumu West District to the West and some part of Rachuonyo District to the South. It occupies an area of 559.2 square km. It has a total population of 473,649 with a 2.1 percent population growth rate (2009 Kenya population and Housing Census). It is sub-divided into two administrative divisions namely Winam Division and Kadibo Division. Kadibo Division performs poorly every year whereas Winam performs well yearly in the national exams yet with a large number of orphaned learners hence the need to use this division for the study. The district has 58 public mixed day primary schools.

The population of the study consisted of 3042 orphaned learners, 43 head teachers and 516 teachers in mixed public primary schools Winam Division. Only orphaned learners who had completed one year and above in the selected schools were included in the study to enable the researcher trace past academic records and assess their performance in different exams which they had done.

The sample consisted of 234 orphaned boys and girls, 39 teachers and 13 head teachers from the selected public primary schools. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 13 schools from the 43 public primary schools in Winam Division. A simple purposive sampling technique was used to select 3 orphaned boys and 3 orphaned girls from std 6, 7 and 8 in the 13 selected schools. Purposive sampling technique fits the study because the researcher targeted orphaned learners only (Onen & Oso, 2008). Simple random sampling was used to select 3 teachers in upper primary to participate in the study. 13 head teachers were purposively selected in the 13 primary schools. This was one third of the total number of head teachers in 43 primary schools in Winam Division.

The instruments used to gather information from the sampled respondents were: questionnaires, interview schedule and document analysis. The researcher selected the tools in regard to the nature of the data to be collected and the time available as well as the objectives of the study. Data from interviews was organized into themes and sub- themes as they emerged based on the objectives.

Descriptive statistics including means, mode, and standard deviation were used to enable the researcher come up with clear counts concerning the responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents were asked factors which contribute to their good performance and their response were as shown in the table 1.

Table1: Response of Pupils on why they perform well and their mean scores in examination n = 230

Reasons for Good Performance	Frequency	Mean Score	Std dev
Remedial Tuition	1	440	0
Motivation from teachers	44	373.61	21.654
Personal Ambitions	7	342.38	5.845
Hard work	133	339.11	3.658
Discipline	28	298	20.852
Advice from guardian	6	297.19	2.36
Good role models in school	6	278.11	14.328
Support from my sponsors	4	261.46	4.231
Humility	1	260	0

The data obtained from the orphans who were involved in the study were used to calculate the standard deviation in the mean scores of the orphaned learners. The table shows the relationship between the factors that make orphaned learners perform well and their mean scores in the examinations they do. From the table, it can be observed that all the factors contributed to the performance of the orphaned learners although motivation from teachers, personal ambitions, role models in school and hard work were the most contributors. Those who responded to these factors had mean scores of 300 and above. Majority 133(57.83%) of the pupils agreed that it was due to hard work that made them perform well enabling them to attain an average mean of 339.11. Some indicated in their questionnaires that they wanted to work hard and come out of their current situation. This could be due to the application of the principles of self efficacy Theory. These findings indicate that orphaned learners are aware that they have to work hard in order to perform in their academics.

Forty four respondents who had mean score of 373.61 indicated that motivation from teachers among other factors contributed to their performance with a standard deviation of 21.852. Orphaned learners who had an average mean of 373.61 agreed that this factor created an environment which enabled them to work extra hard. Teachers can motivate pupils in different ways; the way they teach, handle pupils or even use of material gifts. Poor methods of teaching and unprofessionalism in the teaching fraternity can also demoralize learners. This is an

indication that teachers are expected to be warm to the learners at all times so that they are able to confide in them. It was interesting that some orphaned learners indicated in open ended questions that the love provided by the teachers made them like those schools and could be the reason why they confided in their teachers. A study conducted by Ray (1972) confirmed that teachers played a vital role in responding and intervening for orphaned learners. The respondents were happy that even when some guardians were not treating them well, teachers really encouraged and motivated them making them to work extra hard hence perform well. This concurred with the study done by Ogina (2010) which found that teachers contributed a lot and played vital role in responding to the needs of orphaned learners. The outcome of the teachers' role is gain of full benefits of learners' educational experiences by these orphaned learners while in school. It also justifies the theory of self-efficacy used in the study by Gibson and Dembo (1984) which showed that teachers with high sense of instructional efficacy devote more instructional time to the teaching process. They maximize the use of available time while in school. Ray (1972) stated that teachers should encourage and motivate learners in order to work hard and perform well. Unprofessionalism by teachers in the teaching learning process can easily yield undesired results leading to poor performance. It was interesting that only one respondent indicated that remedial teaching contributed to good performance and had a mean of 440. Whereas other orphaned learners confined themselves on other factors, this pupil was enthusiastic that remedial teaching contributed to his good performance.

Personal ambition was also revealed as one of the factors contributing to good performance by orphaned learners as illustrated in Table 1. Orphaned learners who scored an average mean of 342.38 believed that what they wanted to achieve in future pushed them to work hard and attain such marks. Some respondents disclosed that despite the fact that they had lost their parents, there was still an opportunity for them to fulfill their dreams. This implies that their attributes enabled them to perform well despite their status. In essence learners should set goals and endeavor to achieve those set goals. This concurred with the story of an orphan who was quoted in one of the daily news papers as having defied all the odds and made it to University. *The Standard Newspaper* on Sunday (May 13, 2012). He had to say this, "I want to pull through this last yet very important part of my education and I will be a better person." He was yet to complete his bachelor's degree in Economics in one of the public universities in the country. The fact that one has lost a parent is not the end of everything and therefore orphaned learners should work towards achieving their set goals.

Good role models in schools with a standard deviation of 14.328 also emerged as one of the factors contributing to their performance. This was revealed when some respondents disclosed that they wanted to be like other pupils who had joined very good secondary schools after passing their KCPE examination. In all the progress records observed in different schools in the study, majority of the orphaned learners scored an average mean score of 300 marks and above. The results also found out that the respondents were still eager to do their best and improve on their scores in every examination they are subjected to do so that they join national schools.

Humility appeared to be a lesser contributor since only one respondent cited it and had a mean score of 260. The finding denotes that humility alone without hard work cannot make one perform and get good results and that could be the reason why most respondents did not indicate as a major factor which contributes to good performance by the orphaned learners.

CONCLUSION

Motivation and assistance from teachers with a standard deviation of 21.654 enabled orphaned learners to work hard and gain full benefits of educational experiences. This makes them to even confide in teachers who are with them most of the time and sometimes solve their problems. They were more open to teachers than their guardians. Again most teachers 60(26%) agreed that they provided both material and educational guidance to orphaned learners.

Personal ambitions and determination had a standard deviation of 5.845 this enabled them to work hard and perform well. At least all orphaned learners included in the study had set goals and what they wanted to be in future. While others were not performing well, these orphaned learners were highly efficacious such that they were able to act and think differently thereby setting targets and work towards the set goals. Most of them were enthusiastic towards education.

Role models with a standard deviation of 14.328 in the schools inspired orphaned learners making them to put extra effort resulting into high self-esteem. These were former pupils in their schools who had performed well and were pursuing their secondary education in very good schools having been sponsored by either financial institutions or individuals. This enabled them to work even harder despite challenges causing them to defy all the odds they were facing as orphans.

Advice from the guardians with a standard deviation of 2.36 on their education and future life inspired them despite their status. This made them to work hard so that they could come out of their poor and vulnerable situations. Some guardians were found to be concerned hence took the role of parents of the orphaned learners by providing the school requirements as well as their basic needs at home.

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