SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS
PERFORMANCE IN KENYA CERTIFICATE SECONDARY EXAMINATION
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IGEMBE SOUTH DISTRICT, EASTERN
PROVINCE, KENYA

BY
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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented to any study program in any university.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my son, Kimathi

whose love, patience and support boosted my morale
ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out the influence that family socioeconomic status has on students’ academic performance. The independent variable for the study was socioeconomic status (SES) of the family, and would be measured by the family income and education level of the parents. The dependent variable was students’ academic performance in examinations. The study adopted an ex-post factor survey design, and was conducted in public secondary schools in Igembe South District, from which ten schools were randomly selected for the study using stratified random sampling. All the headteachers from the ten schools participated in the study. The study employed a questionnaire and an interview schedule for data collection. A pilot study was conducted in one school in order to improve validity and reliability of the instruments. Questionnaires were administered to the students, while an interview schedule was used to guide interviews to be held with headteachers. Data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative techniques involved use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, modes, mean and percentages. Qualitative data was analysed by organizing them in similar themes and tallying the number of similar responses, after which the data was reported thematically in line with the objectives of the study. The study established that most of the students came from stable families, as both their parents were alive. Students from low economic status were more likely to drop out of school. The study recommended that parents should ensure that their children received all the financial support they need in order to improve their performance in school and that school heads should come up with ways of bridging the socio-economic gap between students by channeling CDF funds and bursaries to the needy students and ensure that all students feel adequate in school among other recommendations.
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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<thead>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>Certificate of Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCSE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNEC</td>
<td>Kenya National Union of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio Economic Status</td>
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<td>TSC</td>
<td>Teachers Service Commission</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Education has been an important aspect of human life throughout the history of humanity. It is one of the most fundamental instruments that can be used for bringing change in an individual and society at large. Education is a cornerstone of economic and social development. It improves the productive capacity of societies and their political, economic and scientific institutions. It helps to reduce poverty by mitigating its effects on population, health and nutrition. It also increases the value and efficiency of the labour offered by the poor. As technology advances, new methods of production depend on well-trained and intellectually flexible labour force.

Education reform efforts in less industrialized countries have aimed at making education an effective vehicle for national development (UNESCO, 2003). Governments, policy makers, and civil society have emphasized that developing countries need to invest more in education and ensure that systems of education are efficiently managed, that limited funds allocated to the sector have maximum impact, and that cost-recovery measures are adopted (UNESCO, 2003). Many governments in developing countries allocated much of their resources to education after independence (UNESCO, 2005). This resulted in considerable growth of educational activities world over. To date, education is one of the largest sectors in most countries (UNESCO, 2005). Kenya is no exception to this trend of increasing allocation of resources towards education. For example, since 2002, when Narc took over Kenya’s Government, heavy investments have been made in the education sector. In addition, other stakeholders such as parents have increased their investment in education too.
In 2003, the newly elected government of Mwai Kibaki enacted a dramatic policy that enabled millions of children to attend primary school: it abolished school fees. The implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) was heralded by Kenyan parents and international development policy makers alike. The abolition of school fees constitutes a significant step toward achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE), which is both a human right and a millennium development goal. UPE is the proposition that every Kenyan child can have full access to education, and the institution of FPE removed one large barrier to UPE.

Currently, the Kenya government has pledged to remove the burden of tuition fees off the parents’ shoulders come January 2008. This shows the government commitment to ensuring that FPE graduates access secondary education, and therefore increasing chances of higher education access for every Kenyan child. However, despite the heavy investment in this sector, and the resultant quantitative expansion of education, the country faces a number of challenges. These include the escalating cost of education and training, whereby the Government spends significant percentage of GNP on education. Another challenge is that of education wastage as a result of poor performance (Alway and Schech, 2004).

Otieno (2002) argues that examinations tell children how they are succeeding or failing. He contends that education is very important and failure in the national examination especially KCSE spells doom for the students whose life becomes uncertain and full of despair. The performance determines whether the students will proceed to university or to other tertiary institutions. Therefore, a student’s life is determined by academic performance in the national examinations.
Student achievement is not simply a matter of what happens in school. Although schools can and do make a significant difference, research has identified numerous factors which affect student success. These include the school, the family and the individual, social incentives, and socio-economic conditions. An extensive body of research has shown that youngsters from lower socio-economic strata are less likely to succeed in school. This does not mean that poor or disadvantaged children cannot learn. However, social class and economic condition are important factors related to success and cannot be ignored (UNESCO, 2004).

An adolescent from a family of lower socioeconomic status is more likely to leave high school before finishing and less likely to attend college (Hammer, 2003). According to a report by the National Commission on Children (1991), adolescents from low-income families are more likely to lack basic academic skills and to have repeated a grade as children. They are at risk for poorer health and nutrition. Poor families are likely to live in poor school districts with fewer resources to offer their students. Adolescents in low-income families are more likely to be employed, which may be harmful to school achievement if work hours are extremely long.

Any discussion of the academic achievement gap must begin with an understanding that a gap typically preexists the school experience. Circumstances are not equal for all children in Kenya. However, all children can learn and attain high expectations. To help them, the job of educators is to mitigate the effects of those circumstances that have created the gap. Educators must create opportunities for the students to build resiliency and responses to adversity that accelerate achievement through intentional, focused instruction.
1.2 Statement of the Problem

Researchers have shown that academic performance is affected by a number of factors, including student-related factors like intelligence (IQ) and willingness to learn; school-related factors like adequacy of resources and facilities; teacher-related factors like teacher morale, teaching methods and job satisfaction; and school administrators’ leadership traits. Another factor that may affect students’ academic performance is the socioeconomic status of their parents. This is so because family socioeconomic status affects the level of parental involvement; support to children through buying extra books and resources, prompt payment of school fees ensuring no school time is lost, and enrolling children for extra tuition; and conduciveness of the home environment.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence that family socioeconomic status has on students’ academic performance.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study had the following objectives

(a) To assess the effects of home environment factors on academic performance of secondary school students.

(b) To establish the effects of the level of education of parents on academic performance of students.

(c) To determine the effects of parental involvement in academic work of their children on academic performance of the students.
(d) To find out the measures that can be taken by schools to improve academic performance of students

1.5 Research Questions

(a) What are the effects of home environment factors on academic performance of secondary school students?

(b) What are the effects of the level of education of parents on academic performance of students?

(c) What are the effects of parental involvement in academic work of their children on academic performance of the students?

(d) Which measures can be taken by schools to improve academic performance of students?

1.6 Significance

The study may be most significant to parents who would like to see their children perform better in school and yet are not sure of the role they play. Teachers and other educators in order to be able to understand their students wholly in reference to their background and performance, they should be able to attempt to bridge the gaps left open by the parents and the government in general i.e. social leaders, politicians, religious leaders may benefit in the efforts to improve the living standards of the people with clear knowledge of how education is affected by ones socioeconomic background. The distributors of resources might consider the children’s backgrounds. Curriculum developers might also find the study resourceful.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The research was based in Igembe South District, which is largely a rural setting and therefore may not be representative of the urban home background. Additionally, the
study relied on performance in teacher made tests, which may not predict final performance.

1.8 Assumptions

Students were in a position to assess their own parents concerning the various areas of interest of the research and would give true, reliable information. All teachers were trained to teach the subject with competency and that they treat all students equally. Performance in the internal examinations helps predict the KCSE results and that examinations are acceptable measures of achievement.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Weiner’s (1985) Attributional Theory of Achievement Motivation. According to the theory, casual perceptions of success and failure mediate between the antecedent conditions and achievement related behaviour.

Weiner’s (1985) attributional theory of achievement motivation assumes causal attributions are mediators of achievement, achievement-related behaviour and self-esteem. The theory suggests that individuals use four attributions to explain the causes of success and failure on achievement tasks; ability, effort, luck and difficulty of task. Ability and effort describe characteristics that are internal to the person. Luck and difficulty of task are states external to the individual. These four factors can also be classified as stable (ability, task difficulty) or unstable (effort, luck). Therefore their causal model involved two dimensions, locus of control (internal or external) and stability (stable, unstable).

The theory postulates that expectancy for future success is determined by the stability of the causes. Unstable causes produce greater shifts in expectancy of achievement to
the desired outcome than stable causes. Failure at an achievement task attributed to unstable causes may result in expectations for eventual success. Failure due to stable causes is expected to continue since these causes are believed to remain similarly if success was attributed to stable causes, continued success would be expected. Students who attribute their success to internal causes experience effects of pride, competence, confidence. Students who attribute their failure to unstable - controllable causes such as efforts tend to persist long in failure situations. This attributions of a failure enables them to believe that there is a possibility of modifying the outcome in the future attribution of unstable controllable causes such as efforts, causes the person to assume the outcome depending on will therefore these individuals perform with great intensity an achievement task. Stable or uncontrollable causes such as ability or mood do not motivate the person to perform with intensity since there is no belief in having control over the causes of success or failure. Individuals tend to prefer to perform tasks that are compatible with their casual perception. Students who generally attribute their achievements outcome to ability are likely to choose tasks in which competence is requisite to outcome. Students who attribute their success to luck prefer tasks which depend on chance and avoid tasks requiring competence. Teachers’ performance constraints and nature of the achievement task and other influence dictates the performance. Teachers as well as students make attributes regarding the success and failures in relation to the achievement related behaviour.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

Literature reviewed in this section has revealed that there are a number of factors that predict academic achievement. Weiner’s (1985) attributional theory of achievement motivation has also shown the factors associated with success or failure in examinations. Researchers have shown that academic performance is affected by a
number of factors, including student-related factors like intelligence (IQ) and willingness to learn (Magiri, 1997); school-related factors like adequacy of resources and facilities (Ng’ethe, 2004); teacher-related factors like teacher morale, teaching methods (Muchina, 2003) and job satisfaction (Ngumi, 2004); and school administrators’ leadership traits (Anyango, 2001; Orina, 2005) among others. This study sought to find out the role that family socio-economic factors have in academic performance of students. Figure 1.1 presents the conceptual framework of the study.

**Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework**

**Family Socioeconomic Status (SES)**
- Family income
- Education level of parents

Level of parental involvement in child’s schoolwork  
Support through  
- Textbooks  
- Extra tuition  
- Prompt fees payment  
Conducive home environment  
- Space for studies  
- Good nutrition

Students’ academic performance

**Source:** Researcher’s own

The independent variable for the study was socioeconomic status (SES) of the family, and will be measured by the family income/wealth and education level of the parents. The dependent variable, on the other hand, was students’ academic performance. The researcher hypothesized that family SES determines the level of parental involvement; support to children through buying extra books and resources, prompt payment of school fees ensuring no school time is lost, and enrolling children for extra tuition;
and conduciveness of the home environment. These factors in turn affect academic performance of students.
1.11 Operational Definition of Significant Terms

**Attitude**: Positive or negative reaction towards the subject (geography)

**Education**: The process through which students acquire knowledge.

**Examination**: The process of evaluating how well a student has learnt a particular concept.

**Factors**: Aspects affecting academic performance

**High academic performance** - Those who attain at least C+ and above in examinations

**Low academic performance** – Those who attain below C+ in examinations

**Principal** - Refers to the executive officer in a school, who has been given the authoritative power in matters concerning the administration of the school by the TSC.

**Socioeconomic status (SES)** – refers to family wealth including income from employment, business, etc.

**Students**: Learners in a secondary school.

**Teacher**: A person given responsibilities of instructing students in a school.

**Type of school** - Refers to sex composition of the students, that is whether the school is single sex (boys or girls) or co-educational (mixed school)
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review given in this section is divided into four main sections. Section one looks at the resource framework used in explaining educational outcomes. Section two covers a review of literature on factors affecting academic achievement, including motivation, home environment, and class effort. Section three covers studies from Kenya on factors affecting academic performance. Section four gives the conceptual framework of the study.

2.2 Effects of Home Environment on Academic Performance of Students

The family is the primary social system for children. Rollins and Thomas (1979) found that high parental control were associated with high achievement. Cassidy and Lynn (1991) included a specific factor of the family's socioeconomic status, crowding, as an indicator of how being disadvantaged affects educational attainment. They found that a less physically crowded environment, along with motivation and parental support, were associated with higher educational levels of children. Religiosity as an aspect of the family environment is another independent variable possibly influencing academic achievement (Bahr, Hawks, & Wang, 1993).

According to Hammer (2003) the home environment is as important as what goes on in the school. Important factors include parental involvement in their children's education, how much parents read to young children, how much TV children are allowed to watch and how often students change schools. Achievement gap is not only about what goes on once students get into the classroom. It's also about what
happens to them before and after school. Parents and teachers have a crucial role to play to make sure that every child becomes a high achiever. Parental influence has been identified as an important factor affecting student achievement. Results indicate that parent education and encouragement are strongly related to improved student achievement (Odhiambo, 2005).

Phillips (1998) also found that parental education and social economic status have an impact on student achievement. Students with parents who were both college-educated tended to achieve at the highest levels. Income and family size were modestly related to achievement. Peng and Wright’s (1994) analysis of academic achievement, home environment (including family income) and educational activities, concluded that home environment and educational activities explained the greatest amount of variance. In conclusion denying the role of the impact of a student's home circumstances will not help to endow teachers and schools with the capacity to reduce achievement gaps (Hammer, 2003).

Allen and Kickbusch (1992), cited in WEAC, (2005), found that the higher-achieving students plan to continue their education after graduation from high school, participate extensively in extracurricular activities, have a few absences each school year, more likely to engage in recreational reading and to check books out of the school or public library on a regular basis, watch less television, spend more time each evening doing their home work, have friend who have positive attitudes toward school and who rarely cut classes or skip school, have positive feelings about their teachers and about specific courses they take and attribute success in school to hard work rather than ability. This study will find out the relationship family environment and academic achievement.
2.3 Effects of Level of Education of Parents on Academic Performance of Students

Literature on achievement consistently has shown that parent education is important in predicting children’s achievement (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). The mechanisms for understanding this influence, however, have not been well studied. In general, family process models have examined how parenting behaviours, such as the structure of the home environment, influence children’s achievement outcomes (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). Others have focused on specific behaviours such as harsh parenting, nurturing, and warmth (Mistry, Vanderwater, Houston, & McLoyd, 2002). There has been less work on how factors like parental beliefs such as achievement expectations or efficacy might function as links between socioeconomic status and achievement outcomes.

The studies that do exist generally examine young children in low-income or at-risk populations and focus on income-related variables as the moderator variables and family stress as a mediator to achievement outcomes (Mistry et al., 2002). Thus, researchers have very little understanding of how parent education may influence the beliefs and behaviours of parents of school-age children (the age at which decisions about course selection and supplemental education such as tutoring might be beneficial to later college attendance).

Even though the majority of the literature on parents’ education pertains to the direct, positive influence on achievement, literature also suggests that it influences the beliefs and behaviours of the parent, leading to positive outcomes for children and youth (Eccles, 1993). For example, Alexander, Entwisle, and Bedinger (1994) found that parents of moderate to high income and educational background held beliefs and
expectations that were closer than those of low-income families to the actual performance of their children, Low-income families instead had high expectations and performance beliefs that did not correlate well with their children’s actual school performance.

Alexander et al. (1994) suggested that the parents’ abilities to form accurate beliefs and expectations regarding their children’s performance are essential in structuring the home and educational environment so that they can excel in post-schooling endeavours. Halle et al. (1997), using a sample of low-income minority families, also found that mothers with higher education had higher expectations for their children’s academic achievement and that these expectations were related to their children’s subsequent achievement in math and reading. Halle et al. (1997) found that these more positive beliefs and expectations predicted higher amounts of achievement-related behaviour by mothers in the home as well as more positive perceptions of achievement by the children.

Research on parenting also has shown that parent education is related to a warm, social climate in the home. Klebanov et al. (1994) found that both mothers’ education and family income were important predictors of the physical environment and learning experiences in the home but that mothers’ education alone was predictive of parental warmth. Likewise, Smith et al. (1997) found that the association of family income and parents’ education with children’s academic achievement was mediated by the home environment. The mediation effect was stronger for maternal education than for family income. Corwyn and Bradley (2002) also found that maternal education had the most consistent direct influence on children’s cognitive and behavioural outcomes with some indirect influence through a cognitively stimulating
home environment. This study investigated the influence of parental level of education on academic achievement of secondary school students in Kenya.

2.4 Effects of Parental Involvement on Academic Performance of Students

The benefits of parental involvement are well-documented; therefore, there is reason to believe that a high level of parental involvement could benefit students. On parental involvement and academic achievement, studies have shown that the two variables seem to be positively related. Findings have demonstrated that parent’s involvement in the education of their children is of benefit to parents, children, and schools (Tella and Tella 2003). Rasinki and Fredrick (1988) concluded that parents play an invaluable role in laying the foundation for their children’s learning. Zang and Carrasquillo (1995) similarly remarked that when children are surrounded by caring, capable parents and are able to enjoy nurturing and moderate competitive kinship, a foundation for literacy is built with no difficulty. Cotton and Wikeland (2005) capped it by asserting that the more intensively parents are involved in their children’s learning; the more beneficial are the achievement effects. Thus, it is believed that when parents monitor homework, encourage participation in extracurricular activities, are active in parents –teacher associations, and help children develop plans for their future; children are more likely to respond and do well in school.

Based on a review of findings from 66 studies, Henderson and Berla (1994) were of the opinion that repeated evidence has confirmed that the most accurate predictor of student achievement is the extent to which the family is involved in the child’s education, and not the family’s level of income. Similarly, McMillan (2000) noted that parental pressure has a positive and significant effect on academic performance.
This becomes particularly obvious when the exactness of the parental pressure is brought to bear on the children’s academic performance.

Schickedanz (1995) also reported that children of passive parents were found to perform poorly academically. Ryan (2005) reported that academic performance is positively related to having parents who enforce rules at home. The obviousness of the research findings reported in this study is that family involvement improves facets of children’s education such as daily attendance, student achievement, behaviour, and motivation (Cotton & Wikeland, 2001). It is on this note that the study set to find out whether parent involvement would play a role on students’ academic performance.

Epstein (1997) developed a model in which he analysed how children learn and grow through three overlapping spheres of influence: family, school, and community. According to him, these three spheres must form partnerships to best meet the needs of the child. Epstein (1997) again identified six types of involvement based on the relationships between the family, school and community. These are: parenting skills, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. He stressed that these six types of involvement need to be included to have successful partnerships (between the home and the school).

2.5 Other Factors Influencing Academic Achievement

The discussion in the preceding sections have shown how home environment, parental level of education, and parental involvement influence academic achievement of children. There are also other factors that could influence academic achievement, some of which are discussed in this section.


2.5.1 Effects of Motivation on Academic Achievement

Intelligence is not the only determinant of academic achievement. High motivation and engagement in learning have consistently been linked to reduced dropout rates and increased levels of student success (Kushman, Sieber, & Harold, 2000). Development of academic intrinsic motivation in students is an important goal for educators because of its inherent importance for future motivation as well as for student's effective school functioning (Gottfried, 1990). Studies that have examined motivation in young children have found that it is a weak predictor of achievement (Shantz and Rideout, 2003).

Early motivational theorists in psychology attempted to explain motivation in many different settings and for many kinds of behaviors. Motivation is referred to as multidimensional: it measures impulsive and deliberate action, is concerned with the internal and external factors, and observes causes for behavior. Harter (1983) proposed a model of mastery or effectance motivation, describing the effects of both success and failure experiences on mastery motivation. The goals of effectance motivation are acquiring competence and influencing one's environment (Schiefele, 1998). Mastery motivation is defined as a general tendency to interact with and to express influence over the environment.

According to Goldberg (1994), children with intrinsic motivation in academic would have higher self-perceptions of competence in academics and that children who are extrinsically motivated would have lower perceived academic competence. Harter's effectance motivation theory is important because it includes the effects of both success and failure on subsequent motivation (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2004).
Student’s motivation for learning is generally regarded as one of the most critical determinants, if not the premier determinant, of the success and quality of any learning outcome. Examining the construct of intrinsic motivation in elementary school students is significant and important, because academic intrinsic motivation in the elementary years may have profound implications for initial and future school success. Students who are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated fare better and students who are not motivated to engage in learning are unlikely to succeed (Gottfried, 1990).

Intrinsic motivational patterns have been associated with high-perceived ability and control, realistic task analysis and planning, and the belief that effort increases one's ability and control. An extrinsic orientation toward learning is characterized by a concern with external reasons for working, such as the judgment of others regarding one's performance, grades, or some anticipated reward. Intrinsic motivation is attenuated by the use of extrinsic rewards and tends to change or decrease as the age of the child increases (Goldberg, 1994).

Academic achievement is accomplished by the actual execution of class work in the school setting. It is typically assessed by the use of teacher ratings, tests, and exams. Research shows that students’ perceptions of academic competency decline as they advance in school. Pajares F. (2002) attribute this decline to various factors, including greater competition, less teacher attention to individual student progress, and stresses associated with school transitions. Students were motivated by teachers who cared about student learning and showed enthusiasm. These teachers introduced topics in an interesting and challenging way, used varied teaching strategies, and promoted
student involvement by allowing participation in the selection of learning activities (Cothran & Ennis, 2000).

Gottfried found positive correlations between motivation and achievement. Specifically, young students with higher academic intrinsic motivation had significantly higher achievement and intellectual performance. She also found that early intrinsic motivation correlates with later motivation and achievement and that later motivation is predictable from early achievement (Gottfried, 1990). It was also found that perceived academic competence was positively related to intrinsic motivation. It seems that students who feel competent and self-determined in the school context develop an autonomous motivational profile toward education, which in turn leads them to obtain higher school grades. Perceived academic competence and perceived academic self-determination positively influenced autonomous academic motivation, which in turn had a positive impact on school performance (Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 1995).

Some studies have found little or no significant relationship between motivation and academic achievement. A study by Niebuhr (1995) examined relationships between several variables and student academic achievement. The study included an investigation of the relationship of individual motivation and its effect on academic achievement. Findings indicate that student motivation showed no significant effect on the relationship with academic achievement. Niebuhr's (1995) findings suggest that the elements of both school climate and family environment have a stronger direct on academic achievement. Another study by Boggiano, Main, and Katz (1991), regarding differences in gender in motivation, found that females were significantly more extrinsic than males. Male students’ performance accords their interest level more than
is the case for female students. Specifically, female students' academic performance is less associated with their interests than male students' academic performance (Schiefele, Krapp, & Winteler, 1992).

The literature reviewed showed that most elementary students begin their academic career with a desire to learn and with an intrinsic approach to achievement. It has been revealed that an intrinsic orientation toward education switches to a more extrinsic orientation as students increase in age (Goldberg, 1994). Often educators complain that students are unmotivated to learn; parents echo this cry and each blame the other for the students' apathetic response to learning. If schools and parents focused on the different parts of academic motivation and developed meaningful programs, across the home and classroom, possible gains could result (Niebuhr, 1995).

2.5.2 Effects of Resources on Academic Achievement

Sociological research on poverty and children’s school outcomes has increasingly adopted an integrated approach, focusing on children’s homes, communities and schools to better understand factors that provide opportunity, and factors that impede it. Brooks-Gunn et al. (1995) describe a “resource framework” for studying child and adolescent development. This framework formalizes an emerging tradition of an integrated approach to analyzing the effects of poverty on child development and education conducted in the US (Booth and Dunn 1996).

The resource framework can be viewed as unifying various overlapping theoretical arguments that have emerged to explain the relationship between poverty and educational outcomes: 1) “material resource” arguments that indicate that poor children suffer because their parents, communities and schools lack the financial resources that can aid learning and achievement, 2) “human capital” arguments that
suggest that poor children suffer because of the poorer endowments and investments they receive from their parents (Mayer 1997), or, by extension, the poorer human resources in the schools that they attend; 3) “social capital/network” arguments which suggest that impoverished parents and children lack supportive social relationships and networks within and outside of the family necessary for aspiring to and achieving success; and 4) “cultural capital” arguments which suggest that children of historically disadvantaged groups suffer because they lack the cultural environment at home that would allow them to connect to content in the classroom (Bourdieu, 1977).

Much of this literature has focused on US settings. In developing country settings, the majority of educational studies have focused on family socio-economic background and its effects on enrollment or attainment, or school effects on achievement. The resources emphasized have been human and material resources (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001). A few sociological studies have begun to consider the role of social and cultural resources in conditioning educational outcomes in developing country settings (Buchmann, 2002). A major challenge in moving beyond studies of human and material resource effects, however, is that social and cultural resources are much more culturally circumscribed. The very different contexts in developing country settings mean that different types of social and cultural factors are likely to matter for school achievement, making standard measures difficult. Further, factors traditionally outside the realm of material, human, social and cultural resources may be particularly important in developing country settings.

One important example is nutrition. Empirical research outside of sociology has consistently demonstrated that malnutrition and inadequate nutrient and energy intake are closely associated with poor school performance in less developed countries. For example, of the nine studies reviewed by Pollitt (1990), all reported significant links
between nutritional status indicators and cognitive test scores or school performance indicators. Similarly, Sigman and others (1989) found that in Kenya, better-nourished children achieved higher composite scores on a test of verbal comprehension and Raven Progressive Matrices. Further, malnourished girls were less attentive during classroom observations than their better-nourished counterparts. In the Philippines, Florencio (1995) concluded that the academic performance of pupils with good nutritional status was significantly better than that of pupils with poor nutritional status, although the relationship varied by grade level and subject matter. Studies have also discussed how various common malnutrition problems, such as protein-energy malnutrition, micronutrient deficiency disorder, and helminthic (worm) infections affect a child’s school performance (Berkman et al. 2002).

The validity of these relationships, however, remains in question. Strong associations of health and nutrition with educational outcomes do not necessarily indicate causal relationships. Behrman (1996) has observed that previous studies fail to incorporate into their analysis the probable endogenous nature of child health. Estimates are likely to be biased in one direction or the other because households may make decisions on child health and child schooling simultaneously. Using data from the Ghanaian Living Standards Measurement Survey, Behrman and Lavy (1994) found that with family and community fixed effects, the true effects of child health on school success were nearly zero, in direct contrast to statistically significant results obtained via traditional OLS and instrumental variables approaches. On the other hand, Alderman and his colleagues (1997) dealt with endogeneity problems through a longitudinal approach. Results suggested that children’s health and nutrition were three times more important for enrollment than were suggested by the assumption that children’s health and nutrition are predetermined or exogenous.
Adopting yet a different strategy, Gomes-Neto and others (1997) dealt with the possibly endogenous nature of child health by including prior achievement to lessen any potential impact of previous family investment. Results showed that students’ nutritional status did affect school performance in rural northeast Brazil. Similarly, a recent study on a large sample of Filipino children by Glewwe and his colleagues (2001) suggested a causal link between nutrition and academic success, controlling for heterogeneity in learning endowments, home environment, and parental preferences.

### 2.5.3 Class Effort and Academic Performance

Can the amount of effort exerted in the classroom be an effective criteria used to evaluate student performance? Various studies have tried to address this question using the framework of public choice theory. Two studies (Schuman et al 1985 and Michaels and Miethe 1989) used a random sample of 424 and 676 undergraduates respectively. The Schuman et al (1985) study (1) used hours studied under different time frames as a gauge of effort while the Michaels and Miethe (1989) study (2) used quantitative and qualitative measures to gauge effort. The Schuman et al (1985) study found no relationship between hours studied and grades, while the Michaels and Miethe (1989) study only found a positive relationship for freshmen and sophomores.

Few studies seem to focus on the role that class effort plays in determining academic performance. While in the field of educational psychology, empirical studies of primary and secondary school students have shown that effort is a key indicator of academic outcomes, these samples usually contain students at two extremes. These extremes are those who care excessively about studies and hence put in a lot of effort and those who do not care at all and therefore put in little effort. In previous studies
with samples of students who obviously care about grades, no strong relationship between the amount of time spent studying and final year end grade was found, controlling for socio-economic status (S ES) (Cheo 2002).

Yet effort can have many indirect effects that may explain the lack of direct correlation with academic outcomes. The presence of externality effects from high achievers to lower achievers highlights the role that knowledge and effort plays in the modern classroom. A significant amount of research has focused on the issue of the "peer group" effect in recent economic analysis of education. Education economists such as Ferris (2002) and Johnson (2000) have done studies that highlight the spillover effects that higher achievers tend to generate within a classroom learning environment to increase the overall quality of education for all students.

Knowledge need not necessarily be communicated explicitly, i.e. the high achiever tutors the low achiever, but may be communicated as a social norm for performance. To illustrate this, Marks (2002) explains that academic standards operate like social norms which exhibit public good characteristics. 'Academic standards' help identify the quality of academic performance (e.g. a grading system or peer review) but the benefit they confer strongly resembles a public good (Marks, 2002). In our setting, the norm would then be to participate actively in class, however since participation itself requires personal cost while conveying benefits to non-participants, this would lead to free-riding and an inefficient production of this norm.

To illustrate this, a previous study by Summers and Wolfe (1977) used differences in composite achievement scores between grade three and grade six as a measure of schools' value added and found that an increase in the percentage of high achievers in a student's school has two offsetting effects on student scores: one that significantly
improves all students' scores and a second that reduces individual scores by an amount that correlates with student ability. Marks’ (2002) interpretation of the externality effect of class participation as a public good could account for Summers and Wolfe's (1977) finding of an offsetting effect that reduces individual scores according to ability. Once knowledge is surrendered in a classroom via a written or oral presentation, homework or even a set of well-written notes, it can be available at almost no cost to the other members of the class, subject to memory and time constraints. This externality may be negative or positive depending on how competitive the class environment is in assessing the quality of knowledge freely propagated.

Cheo (2003) concludes that greater effort in the classroom does not necessarily lead to higher marks (direct causality); adding that instead, it may convey externality effects to other people. A competitive environment ensures that all observable information prior to decision-making correctly reflects the market value of such knowledge. In this way, misperception is not a significant problem. To maintain such a classroom environment necessitates the facilitator, usually the teacher, to openly critique students' contributions in the form of highlighting useful knowledge and downplaying the bad (Cheo, 2003). Without adequate feedback to students, it is possible that lecturers or tutors who had originally assumed that their charges were learning what they were trying to teach, will be regularly faced with disappointing results from exams.

2.6 Studies from Kenya on Factors Affecting Academic Performance

A number of studies have been carried out locally to find out why some students perform better than others academically. With regard to the overall performance at the
KCSE, research findings show that, generally, girls are lower achievers than boys, (Orina, 2005). This finding is supported by research conducted by Maritim (1985), which showed that boys did better than girls at the ‘O’ level examinations in all the subjects. With the 8-4-4 system of education, the trend does not seem to have changed. It is important to note that given a generally conducive learning environment, girls can perform as well as, if not better than, boys (Eshiwani, 1983).

An analysis of the past examination results at primary and secondary school levels gives credence to Eshiwani’s (1985) observation. For example, several girls’ schools have been among the top 10 and 50 nationally in the primary and secondary final examinations respectively over the years in both the former 7-4-2-3 and the current 8-4-4 education systems.

Research exploring why some students achieve high academic performance than others has revealed four theoretically important determinants. They include, school plant, leadership behaviour of the principal, teacher characteristics and student behaviour. Eshiwani (1983) identified the following policy-related factors that may cause poor academic performance:

- School plant and resources (Textbooks, library and laboratory facilities).
- Leadership behaviour of the principal (school administration and management).
- Teacher characteristics (training, teacher certification, professional commitment, experience and transfer index).
- Students’ behaviour (early childhood education, primary education and social characteristics).

Research conducted in the United States indicated that very small schools have lower academic performance than large schools. However, a school cannot provide a
reasonably well-qualified staff for the different subjects of curriculum below a minimum size. There will be an optimum size of school beyond which the level of attainment falls.

A number of studies in several African countries found a strong relationship between resources and students achievement. They gave the laboratory a central and distinctive role in education. In addition, studies done in less developed countries such as Uganda, India, Ghana, Brazil and Malaysia, indicated that access to textbook availability is positively related to students achievement ((Alway and Schech, 2004).

For example, the data for India and Chile showed that a block of factors, which included textbook availability accounts for more of the variance in test scores than does a block, which includes home circumstances and student’s age and sex (Heyneman et al 1984). Among the most recent studies undertaken in Kenya regarding factors influencing academic performance are those carried out by Kathuri (1993), Magori (1990), Malau (1988) and Achola (1990).

Kathuri’s (1984) research reveals that schools resources including textbook availability are not significantly related to performance in Certificate of Primary Education (CPE). However, he summarizes his work by saying that teaching resources may not be significant in totality but very critical in some situations and subjects.

2.7 Summary

The literature presented in this chapter shows that there are a number of socio-economic factors that could influence academic performance of children. Some of the factors identified include education qualifications of parents, parental involvement in
school work, as well as home environment factors. There are also other factors like motivation, class effort and discipline. Although studies have been conducted in Kenya on factors influencing academic performance, not much had been done on socio-economic factors affecting academic performance of students, especially in Igembe South District where this study was based. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to find out the influence that family socioeconomic status has on students’ academic performance.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, details on how the research was conducted are presented. The chapter is divided into seven sections: the research design, target population, sample and sampling technique, research instruments, reliability and validity of instruments, data collection procedures and methods of data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The proposed study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design was considered appropriate for the study because according to Kothari (1985) survey is concerned with describing, recording, analyzing and reporting conditions that exist or existed. Kerlinger (1973) argues that survey method is widely used to obtain data useful in evaluating present practices and in providing basis for decisions. The design was chosen because in the study the researcher was concerned with the state of affairs on the ground, and no variables were manipulated.

3.2.1 Variables

The independent variables of the study are home environment factors such as conduciveness of the environment for learning, parental level of education, and parental involvement with school work of their children. The dependent variable of the study was academic performance of students.

3.3 Target Population

Target population is the larger group to which one hopes to apply findings (Frankel and Wallen, 1993). The target population is all the public secondary schools in Igembe South District. All the students and headteachers in these schools comprised
the population of the study. Singleton (1993) noted that the ideal setting for any study should be easily accessible to the researcher and should be that which permits instant rapport with the informants. Igembe South District was chosen because it is easily accessible to the researcher. Another reason for choice of the population was that, according to reports from the District Education Office (2009), education performance in the district had been on the decline. Similarly, the current District strategic plan (2005 – 2010) indicates that one of the challenges facing Igembe is declining academic standards. It is therefore important to conduct the study in the district to find out whether home environment, parental involvement and level of education of parents have any contribution to academic performance of students in the district.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample is a small portion of a target population. Sampling means selecting a given number of subjects from a defined population as representative of that population. Any statements made about the sample should also be true of the population (Orodoho, 2002). The researcher randomly selected ten schools from all public secondary schools in Igembe South District to participate in the study. All the headteachers from the ten schools participated in the study. The researcher randomly sampled thirty students from each school to participate in the study. To get the thirty students the researcher randomly selected ten students each from forms two, three and four. In mixed gender schools, the researcher selected five boys and five girls per class, to ensure gender balance. In total, the sample size comprised of ten headteachers and 300 students.
3.5 Research Instruments

The study employed a questionnaire and an interview schedule as the research instruments for data collection. Questionnaires were administered to the students, while an interview schedule was used to guide interviews held with headteachers. The questionnaire was used for data collection because, as Kiess and Bloomquist (1985) observe, it offers considerable advantages in the administration: it presents an even stimulus potentially to large numbers of people simultaneously and provides the investigation with an easy accumulation of data. Gay (1992) maintains that questionnaires give respondents freedom to express their views or opinion and also to make suggestions. On the other hand, an interview schedule is considered appropriate when the sample is small since a researcher is able to get more information from respondents than would be possible using a questionnaire (Kiess and Bloomquist, 1985).

3.6 Pilot Study

Before the actual data collection, piloting of questionnaires and the interview schedule was done on one secondary school in Igembe South District, which did not participate in the actual study. Piloting enabled the researcher to test the reliability of the instruments. The researcher used the pilot study to identify any items in the questionnaires that were ambiguous or unclear to the respondents and such items were changed effectively. The pilot study also enabled the researcher to familiarize herself with administration of the instrument.

3.6.1 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability measures the extent to which an instrument will consistently yield the same results after being administered severally to the same respondents (Orodho
Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) define reliability as a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trial. The researcher used the pilot study to identify any items in the questionnaires that were ambiguous or unclear to the respondents and changed them effectively. Test-Retest technique of reliability testing was employed; whereby the pilot questionnaires were administered to the respondents twice, with a one week interval. After this a correlation coefficient for the two tests was calculated using the formula given below.

\[
R = \frac{\sum Xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{\frac{\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2}{N}\frac{\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}{N}}}
\]

Where:
- \( R \) = correlation coefficient
- \( N \) = total number of scores \( \sum \) = summation of scores
- \( X \) = scores for test 1
- \( Y \) = scores for test 2

A reliability coefficient of at least 0.7 was obtained and accepted as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999).

### 3.6.2 Validity of Instruments

Kombo and Tromp (2006) define validity as a measure of how well a test measures what it is supposed to measure. In other words, validity is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represents the phenomena under study. The pilot study was used to identify those items that could be misunderstood, and such items were modified accordingly, thus increasing face validity (Wilkinson,

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

After approval of the proposal from Kenyatta University, the researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the university and then visited the National Council for Science and Technology offices, from where a permit to conduct the research was issued. After this, the researcher visited each of the sample schools and book an appointment with the head teachers to administer the questionnaire and conduct focus group discussions. The researcher in person administered the piloted and modified questionnaire to the students. The researcher booked appointments with the headteachers on dates when interviews were held. Given below are the logistical and ethical considerations that were maintained during the study.

3.7.1 Recruitment for Participation

None of the members of the target population was forced to take part in the study. In cases where sampled respondents refused to participate, the sampling procedure was repeated to pick another respondent or group of respondents until the desired sample size was obtained. All members of the target population were informed that there would be no penalty for failure to participate.

3.7.2 Informed Consent

The respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and requested to participate in the study out of their own volition. Only those who willingly agreed to participate were involved.
3.7.3 Confidentiality

The responses to the questionnaires and interviews were kept confidential. Respondents were asked not to write their names or any personal details that may reveal their identity.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedure

This research yielded data that required both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis entails analyzing numbers about a situation by choosing specific aspects of that situation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data obtained. The statistics used included frequency counts, means and percentages. Quantitative data analysis required the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used. As Martin and Acuna (2002) observe, SPSS is able to handle large amount of data, and given its wide spectrum of statistical procedures purposefully designed for social sciences, it is also quite efficient. On the other hand, qualitative analysis entails analyzing in words or pictures by collecting data, recording peoples’ experiences not selecting any pre-chosen aspect. The qualitative data obtained in this study was analyzed by organizing them into similar themes and tallying the number of similar responses. The results of data analysis were presented using frequency distribution tables, bar graphs and pie charts.
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data analysis and discussion of the study findings. The general objective of the study was to find out the influence that family socioeconomic status has on students’ academic performance. The findings of the research are presented based on the three research questions restated below:

(a) What is the socioeconomic background of students in Igembe South District?

(b) What is the relationship between socioeconomic background of students and their academic performance?

(c) What can secondary schools do to improve academic performance of students?

The background data of the respondents is given first, followed by the analysis and discussion of each of the four research questions.

4.2 Background data of the respondents

The participants comprised of 10 headteachers and 280 students from 10 public secondary schools in Igembe South District. Out of the 280 students, 84 (30%) were male while 196 (70%) were female. Out of the 10 headteachers, 3 (30%) were males while 7 (70%) were female.

Table 4.1 shows the ages of students in years.
Table 4.1: Students’ ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 and below</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14- 16</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 - 18</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above 18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>280</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 shows that majority 173 (61.8%) of the students were aged between 14 – 16 years, followed by 79 (28.2%) who were aged between 17 -18 years. Only a few of the students were aged 14 and below and also above 18. This implies that the students who participated in the study were old enough to be able to answer the questions given to them, and would be expected to give intelligent answers.

Table 4.2 shows the grades attained by students in the last two terms.

Table 4.2: Grades attained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ grades</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to A-</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B to B-</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C to C-</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D to D-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 shows that most of the students scored grades B and C, with 47.9% of them getting a C to C- in term 1 and the number increasing to 50% in term 2. 39.6% of the students scored a B to B- in term 1, with the number increasing to 45% in term 2. Only a few students scored between A to A-. This implies that most of the students were average performers.
Table 4.3 shows students’ positions in the last two terms.

**Table 4.3: Students’ positions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Positions</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 shows that over 45% of the students performed well in term 1 and 2, and at least 37% were average performers both in term 1 and 2. Only a few of the students performed below average and poorly. This implies that most of the students were good performers.

### 4.3 Socio-economic Background of Students

Students’ socio-economic backgrounds play a big role in their academic life, because it draws the line on who can afford education and to what level. Students from well-heeled backgrounds have naturally more opportunities than their counterparts who come from underprivileged backgrounds. Students from privileged backgrounds are also expected to perform better than their counterparts from underprivileged backgrounds, though this may not always be the case.

Figure 4.2 shows the people students live with most of the time.
Figure 4.1: People who live with students

Figure 4.2 shows that 132 (47.1%) of the students indicated that they lived with both parents (mother and father) while 14 (5.0%) indicated father only, 120 (42.9%) indicated mother only while 14 (5.0%) indicated that they lived with relatives. The majority of the students come from backgrounds with both parents, who are expected to provide for them their needs sufficiently.

The family is the primary social system for children. Rollins and Thomas (1979) found that high parental control were associated with high achievement. Cassidy and Lynn (1991) included a specific factor of the family's socioeconomic status, crowding, as an indicator of how being disadvantaged affects educational attainment. They found that a less physically crowded environment, along with motivation and parental support, were associated with higher educational levels of children. Religiosity as an aspect of the family environment is another independent variable possibly influencing academic achievement (Bahr, Hawks, & Wang, 1993).
The students were given statements about families and were required to indicate which one was true about their families. Their responses are shown in table 4.4.

### Table 4.4: Statements on family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father is not alive</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent (Mother)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorced</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents are alive</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>280</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 shows that 36 (12.9%) of the students indicated that their male parent (father) is not alive, 21 (7.5%) indicated that they lived with a single parent (mother), 21 (7.5%) indicated parents had divorced while 202 (72.1%) indicated that both parents were alive. Most of the students indicated that both of their parents were alive. This implies that they come from stable families.

Table 4.5 shows the students’ parents and guardians’ level of education.

### Table 4.5: Parents’ level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Father’s education</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College (Polytechnic/Teacher Training)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not attend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 shows that most of the students’ parents had attained education to primary school level, with the fathers registering a slightly higher number than the mothers. This could be because of the responsibilities the girl child faces. 16.1% of the fathers and only 5% of the mothers had reached university level, while 17.9% of the fathers and 33.6% of the fathers had reached college level.

Phillips (1998) found that parental education and social economic status have an impact on student achievement. Students with parents who were both college-educated tended to achieve at the highest levels. Income and family size were modestly related to achievement.

Table 4.6 shows the amount of money earned by the students’ parents.

**Table 4.6: Amount of salary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of salary</th>
<th>Father’s Earnings</th>
<th>Mother’s Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5,000</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001 – 15,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,001 – 25,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 25,000</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 shows that majority of the students did not know the amount of salary their parents earned, while the majority of those who knew indicated that their parents earned less than 5,000 shillings.

Peng and Wright’s (1994) analysis of academic achievement, home environment (including family income) and educational activities, concluded that home environment and educational activities explained the greatest amount of variance. In
conclusion denying the role of the impact of a student’s home circumstances will not help to endow teachers and schools with the capacity to reduce achievement gaps (Hammer, 2003)

Figure 4.3 shows students’ responses concerning where they live.

![Pie chart showing 154 (55%) urban and 126 (45%) rural students]

**Figure 4.2: Students’ residence**

Figure 4.3 shows that 154 (55.0%) of the students indicated that they lived in a rural setting while 126 (45.0%) indicated they lived in an urban setting.

### 4.4 Relationship between socioeconomic background of students and their academic performance

Students’ performance is affected by many internal and external factors, among them being their socio-economic background. Students’ socio-economic background plays an important role in the performance of students since they need all kinds of support from this sector in order to perform well. Students from a poor background may not be able to afford enough books to read and apart from just the books, they may not even have a good reading environment at their homes. They may also be plagued with many other responsibilities that students from rich backgrounds may not have, thus
the students from rich backgrounds may be said to have an advantage over those from poor backgrounds.

Student achievement is not simply a matter of what happens in school. Although schools can and do make a significant difference, research has identified numerous factors which affect student success. These include the school, the family and the individual, social incentives, and socio-economic conditions. An extensive body of research has shown that youngsters from lower socio-economic strata are less likely to succeed in school. This does not mean that poor or disadvantaged children cannot learn. However, social class and economic condition are important factors related to success and cannot be ignored (UNESCO, 2004).

Table 4.7 shows headteachers’ responses regarding the main factors influencing the performance of their students.

Table 4.7: Factors affecting performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors affecting performance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiscipline</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of commitment to studies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence from school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning abilities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ attitude towards education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and community involvement in educational process</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence and conformity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 shows that the most common factors affecting student performance as per the views of 80% of the headteachers were indiscipline, learning abilities and peer
influence and conformity. 70% of the headteachers indicated that absence from school, students’ attitudes towards education and lack of motivation were also some of the serious factors affecting student’s performance.

Research exploring why some students achieve high academic performance than others has revealed four theoretically important determinants. They include, school plant, leadership behaviour of the principal, teacher characteristics and student behaviour. Eshiwani (1983) identified the following policy-related factors that may cause poor academic performance: school plant and resources, leadership behavior of the principal, teachers characteristics and students behavior.

Table 4.8 shows headteachers’ views concerning the role of family socioeconomic status in academic performance of students.

**Table 4.8: Role of family socioeconomic status on student performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of SES on performance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who are from a low economic status are more likely to drop out of school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from single-parent households do not perform as well as those from two-parent households</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive and attentive parenting positively affect academic achievement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated parents support students more than uneducated ones</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High parent aspirations increase students’ interest in education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More educated mothers who have high self-esteem influence children’s education positively</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller family size is linked with positive performance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from high quality neighborhoods perform better in school than those from poor neighborhoods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8 shows that 90% of the headteachers indicated that supportive and attentive parenting positively affects academic achievement, 80% of them indicated that students from low economic status were more likely to drop out of school and that educated parents supported students more than uneducated ones.

An adolescent from a family of lower socioeconomic status is more likely to leave high school before finishing and less likely to attend college (Hammer, 2003). According to a report by the National Commission on Children (1991), adolescents from low-income families are more likely to lack basic academic skills and to have repeated a grade as children. They are at risk for poorer health and nutrition. Poor families are likely to live in poor school districts with fewer resources to offer their students. Adolescents in low-income families are more likely to be employed, which may be harmful to school achievement if work hours are extremely long.

Table 4.9 shows students’ performance across their fathers’ levels of education.

Table 4.9: Student performance across father’s level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s level of education</th>
<th>Grade for term two</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A to A-</td>
<td>B+ to B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College (Polytechnic, teacher training college)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not attend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9 shows that 5 of the students whose fathers had university education had an A to A-, 16 of them had B+ to B- and 24 of them had C+ to C-. 37 of the students
whose fathers had reached college level attained B+ to B-, while 12 of them attained C+ to C-. On the other hand, all the 6 students whose fathers had not received any kind of formal education attained A to A- grades. The results in the table seem to imply that fathers’ education had minimum impact on the performance of the students, since even students whose fathers got no formal education performed well.

Table 4.10 shows students’ performance across their mothers’ levels of education.

Table 4.10: Student performance across mothers’ level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s level of education</th>
<th>of Grade for term two</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A to A-</td>
<td>B+ to B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College (Polytechnic,1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher training college)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not attend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 shows that all the 6 students whose mothers did not have any formal education attained between A to A-. On the other hand, 13 of the students whose mothers had reached university level attained B+ to B-. Most of the students whose mothers had reached college level ranged from B+ to C-. This implies that mothers’ education levels had no impact on students’ performance.
Table 4.11 shows students’ performance across their place of residence.

**Table 4.11: Student performance across place of residence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Grade for term two</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A to A-</td>
<td>B+ to B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11 shows that 14 of the students from rural areas scored between A to A-, 63 of them scored between B+ to B- and 77 of them scored C+ to C-. On the other hand, 63 of the students from urban areas scored between B+ to B- while the same number scored C+ to C-. This seems to suggest that students from rural areas performed better than their counterparts who came from urban areas. This could be because students from rural areas worked harder than their counterparts in the hopes of building themselves a better future in the urban areas.

Table 4.12 shows student performance across the availability of private studying areas.

**Table 4.12: Student performance across availability of private studying area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have private place for studying</th>
<th>Grade for term two</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A to A-</td>
<td>B+ to B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12 shows that 7 of the students who had private study areas attained A to A-, 71 of them attained B+ to B- and 76 of them attained C+ to C-. On the other hand, 7
of the students who had no private study area attained A to A-, 55 of them attained B+ to B and 64 of them attained C+ to C. This implies that those students who had a private study area performed slightly better than those who did not.

4.5 Ways of Improving Students’ Academic Performance

Students’ academic performance plays a very important role in the lives of students after school. It is therefore the responsibility of parents, teachers and the community to ensure that everything in their power is done to improve the academic performance of students so that they have a better future. There are many challenges that stand in the way of students’ academic performance and counter-measures must be established in order to help the students in achieving their dreams.

The students were given some statements regarding factors that affect their academic performance and were required to either agree or disagree with the statements. Their responses are shown in table 4.13.

**Table 4.13: Factors affecting academic performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a quiet place at home for studying without disturbance?</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a quiet place at home for studying without disturbance?</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your studying area have a chair and table?</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your parent/guardian buy you other books to improve your school work?</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your parent/guardian buy you other books to improve your school work?</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever been sent home for failure to pay fees?</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever been sent home for failure to pay fees?</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever missed school for any other reason other than failure to pay fee?</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever missed school for any other reason other than failure to pay fee?</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13 shows that 75% of the students had been sent home from school for lack of school fees, 65% of them reported that their parents/guardians bought them other books to improve their school work, while 63.2% indicated that their studying areas had a chair and a table. However, 62.5% of the students indicated that they had ever missed school for other reasons other than payment of fee, and they cited such reasons to be sickness, work at home and the burial of a loved one.

Studies have shown that there are many factors that affect academic achievement of students. Higher-achieving students are likely to have the following characteristics: positive feelings about their school experiences; attribute their success in high school to such things as hard work, self-discipline, organization, ability, and high motivation; tend to watch relatively little television during the school week; tend to associate with students who also were successful in school; and avid readers (WEAC, 2005).

Table 4.14 shows students’ agreement levels concerning how their parents treat them after performing well.

**Table 4.14: Treatment after good performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do your parent/guardian give you a gift when you do well in your examinations?</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do your parents praise or congratulate you for doing well in school?</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14 shows that 55% of the students indicated that their parents/guardians always congratulated them for doing well in school, while 44.6% indicated that their parents/guardians sometimes gave them a gift when they did well in their
examinations. However, 40.7% of the students reported that their parents never gave them gifts for doing well in their examinations.

Table 4.15 shows headteachers’ views on how to improve performance of students.

**Table 4.15: how to improve student performance in schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early covering of the syllabus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance and counseling</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining good discipline</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement and motivation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in the learning process</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing qualified teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a conducive learning environment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing adequate teaching/learning materials</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being good role models to students</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15 shows that the most common ways of improving student performance in schools is to maintain good discipline, through encouragement and motivation and providing adequate teaching/learning resources. 80% of the headteachers also commented that early covering of the syllabus, parent involvement in the learning process and employing qualified teachers were some of the ways of improving students’ performance.

A number of studies in several African countries found a strong relationship between resources and students achievement. They gave the laboratory a central and distinctive role in education. In addition, studies done in less developed countries such as Uganda, India, Ghana, Brazil and Malaysia, indicated that access to textbook availability is positively related to students achievement ((Alway and Schech, 2004).
Kathuri’s (1984) research reveals that schools resources including textbook availability are not significantly related to performance in Certificate of Primary Education (CPE). However, he summarizes his work by saying that teaching resources may not be significant in totality but very critical in some situations and subjects.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations arrived at. It also gives suggestions for further studies.

5.2 Summary

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence that family socioeconomic status has on students’ academic performance. The participants comprised of 10 headteachers and 280 students from 10 public secondary schools in Igembe South District. Given below is a summary of the study findings.

The study established that 132 (47.1%) of the students indicated that they lived with both parents (mother and father) while 14 (5.0%) indicated father only, 120 (42.9%) indicated mother only while 14 (5.0%) indicated that they lived with relatives. 36 (12.9%) of the students indicated that their male parent (father) was not alive, 21 (7.5%) indicated that they lived with a single parent (mother), 21 (7.5%) indicated parents had divorced while 202 (72.1%) indicated that both parents were alive. Most of the students indicated that both of their parents were alive. Most of the students’ parents had attained education to primary school level, with the fathers registering a slightly higher number than the mothers. This could be because of the responsibilities the girl child faces. It was established that 16.1% of the fathers and only 5% of the mothers had reached university level, while 17.9% of the fathers and 33.6% of the mothers had reached college level.

The study found out that majority of the students did not know the amount of salary their parents earned, while the majority of those who knew indicated that their parents
earned less than 5,000 shillings. The study also found out that 154 (55.0%) of the students indicated that they lived in a rural setting while 126 (45.0%) indicated they lived in an urban setting. The most common factors affecting student performance as per the views of 80% of the headteachers were indiscipline, learning abilities and peer influence and conformity. 70% of the headteachers indicated that absence from school, students’ attitudes towards education and lack of motivation were also some of the serious factors affecting student’ performance.

90% of the headteachers indicated that supportive and attentive parenting positively affects academic achievement, 80% of them indicated that students from low economic status were more likely to drop out of school and that educated parents supported students more than uneducated ones. Five of the students whose fathers had university education had an A to A-, 16 of them had B+ to B- and 24 of them had C+ to C-. 37 of the students whose fathers had reached college level attained B+ to B-, while 12 of them attained C+ to C-. On the other hand, all the 6 students whose fathers had not received any kind of formal education attained A to A- grades.

All the 6 students whose mothers did not have any formal education attained between A to A-. On the other hand, 13 of the students whose mothers had reached university level attained B+ to B-. Most of the students whose mothers had reached college level ranged from B+ to C-. 14 of the students from rural areas scored between A to A-, 63 of them scored between B+ to B- and 77 of them scored C+ to C-. On the other hand, 63 of the students from urban areas scored between B+ to B- while the same number scored C+ to C-. Seven of the students who had private study areas attained A to A-, 71 of them attained B+ to B- and 76 of them attained C+ to C-. On the other hand, 7 of the students who had no private study attained A to A-, 55 of them attained B+ to B-
and 64 of them attained C+ to C. This implies that private study areas did not influence performance.

It was discovered that 75% of the students had been sent home from school for lack of school fees, 65% of them reported that their parents/guardians bought them other books to improve their school work, while 63.2% indicated that their studying areas had a chair and a table. However, 62.5% of the students indicated that they had ever missed school for other reasons other than payment of fee, and they cited such reasons to be sickness, work at home and the burial of a loved one. It was established that 55% of the students indicated that their parents/guardians always congratulated them for doing well in school, while 44.6% indicated that their parents/guardians sometimes gave them a gift when they did well in their examinations. However, 40.7% of the students reported that their parents never gave them gifts for doing well in their examinations.

The most common ways of improving student performance in schools is to maintain good discipline, through encouragement and motivation and providing adequate teaching/learning resources. The study also found out that 80% of the headteachers also commented that early covering of the syllabus, parent involvement in the learning process and employing qualified teachers were some of the ways of improving students’ performance.

5.3: Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study as summarized above, it can be concluded that most of the students came from stable families, as both their parents were alive.
Students from low economic status were more likely to drop out of school and educated parents supported students more than uneducated ones. The study found out that most of the students dropped out of school for lack of school fees.

5.4: Recommendations

1. Parents should ensure that their children receive all the support they need in order to improve their performance in school.

2. School heads should come up with ways of bridging the socio-economic gap between students and ensure that all students feel adequate in school by channeling CDF funds and school bursaries to the needy students. This will give them an equal footing with the ones who are from well-off families.

3. The government should ensure that schools are provided with adequate teaching/learning resources to give all the students an equal opportunity in learning.

4. Parents should be involved in the school work of their children so that they can monitor their progress and provide them the necessary learning resources.

5. Parents should ensure that the chores given to students at home are minimal so as to give them more time to do their studies.

5.5: Areas for Further Research

1. A study on other factors other than socio-economic ones that affect students’ academic performance in the country.

2. A study on the influence of family socio-economic status on student performance in the country, since this study was conducted only in Igembe South District.
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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Section One

Age: ..............................................................................

Male/Female: ..............................................................

Class: .................................................................

Grade attained in the last two terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term one</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Class position</th>
<th>Out of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term two</td>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Class position</td>
<td>Out of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section Two

Instructions

Here are some questions about you and your family. Please fill in the blank spaces and put a tick (√) in the bracket against the word or sentence that is most applicable to you. You are requested to read carefully and to answer all the questions truthfully. The information you give will be kept confidential and will not be made available to anybody.

1. With whom do you live most of the time?
   Both father and mother ( )  Father ( )
   Mother ( )  With relatives ( )
   Others (specify) ........................................................

2. Which of these statements is true of your family?
   Father is not alive ( )  Mother is not alive ( )
   Single parent (Father) ( )  Single parent (Mother) ( )
   Parents (divorced) ( )  Both parents alive ( )
Depending on your answer in 2 above answer the following questions.

3.  (a) Where does your father work? .................................
(b) What kind of work does he do? .................................

4.  (a) Where does your mother work? .................................
(b) In addition to housework, what other kind of work does she do?
.................................................................................

5.  (i) Some parents went to school while others did not. What level of education has your parents reached (tick one for each).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) University</td>
<td>a) University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) College (Polytechnic, teacher training college etc)</td>
<td>b) College (Polytechnic, teacher training college etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Secondary School</td>
<td>c) Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Primary School</td>
<td>d) Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Did not attend school</td>
<td>e) Did not attend school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Do not know</td>
<td>f) Do not know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.  How much does your father earn per month?  KShs  

7.  How much does your mother earn per month?  KShs  

8.  Do you live in a rural or urban setting?

   Rural  ( )  Urban  ( )

9.  Do you have a quiet place at home where you can do your private studies without being disturbed?

   Yes  ( )  No  ( )
10. If yes, in (9) above,

   Does it have a chair?   a) Yes ( )   b) No ( )

   Does it have a table?   Yes ( )   No ( )

11. If No in (9) above, from where do you do your private studies?

   ...........................................................................................................

10 a) In addition to the recommended school books, does your parent/guardian buy you other books so that you can improve on your school work?

   Yes ( )   No ( )

11 Do your parents/guardians give you a gift when you do well in your examinations?

   Always ( )   Sometimes ( )   Never ( )

12 How often do your parents/guardians praise or congratulate you for doing well in school.

   Always ( )   Sometimes ( )   Never ( )

13 a) have you ever been sent away from school for failure to pay school fees?

   Yes ( )   No ( )

   b) If yes in 13a) above, how often are you sent home?

   Every term ( )   once a year ( )   one time only ( )

14. Have you ever missed school for any other reason other than failure to pay fees?

   Yes ( )   No ( )

   If yes, indicate why.................................................................
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HEADTEACHERS

School name………………………………………………………………

Gender of students…………………………………………………………

1. How would you rate the general performance of students in your school compared to other schools?

2. What are the main factors influencing the performance of your students?

3. What do you see as the role of family socioeconomic status in academic performance of students?

4. What do you suggest that schools could do to improve performance of students?