

**PREFERENCES OF PARENTS ON QUALITY PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN  
ATHI RIVER SUB COUNTY, MACHAKOS COUNTY**

**BY**

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**A RESEACH THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
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## DECLARATION

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**DEDICATION**

To my dear parents John and Sabina; despite the humble background, you instilled in me the desire to learn. You've been my role models, catapults and source of encouragement.

Thank you.

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
DEO	District Education Officer
ECDE	Early Childhood Development and Education
EFA	Education for All
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCST	National Council for Science and Technology
TPR	Teacher Pupil Ratio
UNESCO	United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## ABSTRACT

What constitutes quality preschool education from the perspective of parents? Are there features that they consider inherent in preschool programs perceived to be of good quality? This study was carried out to establish preferences of parents on quality preschool education in Athi river sub-county, Machakos County. The study explored parents' preferred preschool learning conditions, teacher practices and learning competencies children ought to attain at the end of the preschool period. In addition, the study examined the extent to which parents' demographic characteristics influenced their preferences on quality preschool education. The study was guided by the rational choice theory which argues that in principle, rational individuals have perfect knowledge on various issues and it is such knowledge which shapes their preferences. In documenting parental preferences, a descriptive survey design was adopted. The respondents of the study were 114 parents, 14 preschool teachers and 14 head teachers. All the respondents were drawn from 14 public preschools distributed across Lukenya and Athi river divisions of Athi river sub-county. Data collection instruments employed were questionnaires for parents and interview schedules for the preschool teachers and head teachers. To ascertain validity and reliability of instruments, a pilot study was undertaken in one preschool located in Lukenya division. Test retest method was employed to compute reliability measure of instruments using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The reliability coefficient of the subscale items on the learning environment, teacher practices and preferred learning competencies was 0.796, 0.922 and 0.912 respectively. This implies that the instruments were reliable. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) spreadsheet was prepared for entry of quantitative data which was analyzed by running frequencies and doing correlation analysis on various variables. Qualitative data was transcribed, analyzed thematically and reported inform of verbatim quotations and narrations. Findings revealed that nearly all parents preferred preschool classes with lower teacher: child ratios and those equipped with a variety of learning materials and activity corners. On preferred teacher practices, majority of the parents (72.1%) were in favour of teaching literacy and numeracy skills. Basic reading, writing and numeracy skills were rated as the most preferred learning competence at 89.4%, 86.2% and 84.8% respectively. Using a correlation analysis, the study established that there was a statistically significant correlation between highest level of education attained by the parents and their preferences on quality preschool education, ( $r = .568$ ,  $p = < .000$ , with a  $R^2 = 92.516$ ). On the other hand, there was no statistically significant correlation between parents' age ( $r = .126$ ,  $p = < .234$ , with a  $R^2 = 13.69$ ), gender ( $r = .176$ ,  $p = < .091$ , with a  $R^2 = 11.28$ ) and preferences on preschool education. A major conclusion from the study is that majority of parents have a clear and nearly common understanding on what constitutes quality preschool education. The study recommends that parents should be actively involved in formulation and implementation of preschool education policies since they are equally critical stakeholders that can no longer be ignored. In addition, the study recommends that quality assurance officers at district level should encourage preschool teachers to promote holistic development of children instead of emphasizing only in academic areas. Further, the study also recommends further research to establish the impact of parental preferences on preschool curriculum implementation.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT/BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the Background to the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Objectives of the Study and the Research Questions. In addition it outlines Significance of the Study, Delimitations and Limitations of the Study, Assumptions of the Study and the Theoretical Framework that underlies the Study. The remaining sections address the Conceptual Framework and Operational Definition of Terms.

#### **1.2 Background to the Study**

Providing quality preschool education has remained one of the key education sector investment priorities in both developing and developed countries (UNESCO, 2007). This commitment is anchored on empirical evidence which support the position that quality preschool education can make a highly cost-effective contribution, not only to learning in school but also to the overall development of a child. Young children who receive preschool education of good quality are likely to demonstrate better cognitive and language abilities (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). In addition, such children enter school with remarkable Maths and Reading skills and are less likely to repeat grades or drop out of school

before completion of the cycle ((Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta & Mashburn, 2010).

Center based preschool education programs such as PROAPE (ProgramadeAlimentação de Pre-escolar) in Brazil and summer preschool program in Philippines reveal decreased rates of school dropout among participants compared to non-participants. In the United Kingdom, preschool experience has been attributed to children's improved measures of intellectual development, independence, concentration and sociability during the first three years of primary schooling. Likewise, studies in India indicate that children attending preschools develop the emotional self-regulation skills that are needed for learning in primary schools. A study carried out in a disadvantaged district of Nepal established that more than 95% of children who attended preschools transited to primary school, compared to 75% of non-participants; the grade one repetition rate of participants was one-seventh that of nonparticipants; participants also registered significantly higher marks on grade one exams (UNESCO, 2007).

In Kenya, most children who undergo stimulating preschool education programs register a better academic performance and are less likely to repeat classes or drop out of school (Ministry of Education, 2008). Socially, it has been established that learners who go through preschools are happier, self-confident and outgoing. In addition, they are emotionally mature, attentive and patient than their counterparts who fail to through preschools (Cheboi, 1986).

Despite the documented returns from investment in preschool education, Sheridan (2007) warns that the benefits are largely determined by program quality. Indeed, UNESCO (2007) states that badly-run preschools leave children humiliated and diminish their desire and chance to achieve in life. This underscores the necessity of looking at preschool education quality in context.

Researchers (Howes, 1986 & Phillips, 1987) typically assess childcare quality from a child development perspective, adopting indicators of health and safety and developmentally appropriate care in their measures. Therefore, definitions tend to interpret quality preschool education as what is “developmentally appropriate”(Farquhar, Wangmannin Lisa & Sarah, 2006).

In the United States of America, preschool education quality is mainly measured using indicators such children’s physical safety, availability of well trained teachers, teacher-child interactions, nature of the learning materials as well as structural elements such class size and the physical environment (Burchinal, Pianta, Mashburn& Vandergrift, 2010). In Kenya, assessment of key features that influence quality of preschool programs have mainly focused at indicators such as teacher qualifications, class sizes, nature of learning materials, state of physical infrastructure and existence of feeding programs (Abagi, 2008; Indoshi, Murundu&Okwara, 2010 &Nganga, 2009).

It is evident that much emphasis in defining quality preschool education reflects a scientific developmental perspective without reference to parents as key stakeholders.

However, parents are likely to hold different ideas about what constitutes a high-quality preschool since quality is a judgment laden concept that is highly subject to cultural norms (Farquhar, 1993). Indeed, available empirical evidence suggests that this is the case (Lisa & Sarah, 2006).

UNESCO (2005) argues that parental preferences on preschool education greatly matter since parents make various important decisions related to their children's learning in preschools. Such decisions are far reaching particularly in countries where preschools are community managed. In the context of this study, it is important to note that in Kenya most preschools are largely owned and managed by the communities. With devolution of preschool education, parents will even have even greater influence in management of preschools. Notwithstanding this, fewer attempts have been made to establish parents' understanding on what constitutes quality preschool education in Kenya. Much of the existing literature on parental definitions of quality preschool education is based on developed country contexts (Farquhar, 1993).

Establishing parental preferences on quality preschool education will not only extend conceptualization of quality in preschool programs, but also assist in formulation of childcare policies and services that address their interests. This underscored the necessity of this study to establish preferences of parents on quality preschool education in Kenya.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Quality of preschool education is not only a concern to policymakers, practitioners and researchers but also to parents. In countries where preschools are community owned, parents are vital stakeholders and their choices have important ramifications for their children and the entire education system. Therefore, if preschool education quality improvement initiatives are to be successful there is need to understand parent's perceptions of quality early care and education (Ceglowski&Bacigalupa, 2002).

Over time, there has been a shift in parental perceptions regarding childcare preschool education quality. In the United States of America, convenience factors such as cost and location as well as health, safety and warmth of the caregiver and parent-teacher communication have long been important to parents (Emlen, 1999). Recently, the quality of preschool learning environment has also been found to be one of the key features valued by parents (Kim &Fram, 2009).

In another study, Farquhar (1993) examined Paheka (white) and non-Paheka parents in New Zealand and found that qualified staff and positive behaviour management were most important to Paheka parents. On the other hand, non-Paheka parents placed more importance on biculturalism, non-sexist curriculum, outings and excursions as well as parental involvement in decision-making.

Lisa & Sarah (2006) examined parental perspectives on childcare quality among 238 culturally diverse Australian parents. The study established that training of

staff and availability of stimulating materials were the main features used to define quality preschool education programs. Similarly in India, Banga&Jaswal (2001) established that parents consider availability of learning materials key features of quality preschool programs.

It is evident that majority of published studies focusing at parental preferences on quality preschool education are based in developed country contexts. This raises issues of generalizability to developing country contexts. Parent's view of quality preschool education vary according to their age, cultural background and socioeconomic status, as well as the age and gender of their children (Farquhar, 1993).

In Kenya, studies (Kimani, 2013; Swadener, Kabiru&Njenga, 1997) have established that different parents value different aspects of preschool education. At community level, the main concern is children's health and nutrition. In addition, most parents also value preparation for school readiness which are considered as a requirement to join the highly competitive and exam oriented education system.

The existing literature on studies done in Kenya point to the belief that from the parent's perspective, the presence of certain indicators assure high quality preschool education.

However, specifying what constitutes good-quality preschool education as identified by research may vary from parental preferences on the specific

indicators. In addition, generalizability of this findings is limited by the fact that the studies were largely small scale, based on one region with an almost homogeneous population. Thus examining parental preferences on quality preschool education is not only of academic interest, but also critical in addressing preschool education quality concerns in Kenya. It is against this background that this study was undertaken to investigate parents' conceptualization of quality preschool education in Athiriver sub-county, Machakos County. Athi river district was chosen due to its highly cosmopolitan characteristics with a view of capturing the national pattern.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to establish parental preferences on quality preschool education in Athi river sub-county. Specifically, it sought to establish preferences of parents on preschool children's learning environment, preschool teacher practices and competencies that children should achieve at the end of the preschool period. In addition the study also examined the extent to which demographic factors influence parental preferences on quality preschool education.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

- i. To establish parents' preferred learning conditions in preschools perceived to be of good quality in Athi river district

- ii. To find out preferences of parents regarding teacher practices in preschools of good quality in Athi river district
- iii. To document parental preferences on competencies children ought to attain at the end of preschool period.
- iv. To investigate the extent to which demographic factors influence parental preferences on quality preschool education

### **1.6 Research Questions**

- i. What are the parents' preferred learning conditions in preschools perceived to be of good quality in Athi river district?
- ii. What are the parents' preferred preschool teacher practices in Athi river district?
- iii. Which competencies do parents prefer that children ought to attain at the end of the preschool period?
- iv. To what extent do demographic factors influence parental preferences on quality preschool education?

### **1.7 Assumptions of the Study**

The first assumption that underlined this study is that parents understand the needs of their children and the rationale of enrolling them in preschools. Based on this understanding, it was assumed that parents are aware of what constitutes a good quality preschool program based on variables related to the learning environment, teacher practices and children's learning outcomes. The study also

assumed that demographic characteristics of parents influence their preferences on quality preschool education. Lastly, the study assumed that parent's understanding of quality preschool education is reflected through their preferences and such preferences can be scientifically measured.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The study was carried out in Athi river sub-county, Machakos county. The respondents were parents of pre-school children, pre-school teachers and their head teachers. Although Athi river sub-county is relatively cosmopolitan, the findings of this study may not be generalized to other areas due variations in demographic, socio-economic and cultural factors.

The study was completed within a period of one year, therefore adequate collection of data, administration of questionnaires and conducting of interviews. In exploring parental preferences on quality preschool education, the study was narrowed to three main categories of variables. These are the pre-school learning conditions, teacher practices and children's learning competencies. Therefore, its direct applicability to other measures of quality is limited.

### **1.9 Delimitations of the Study**

The concept of quality in preschool education programs is highly multifaceted. In essence, its measurement varies from one context to another and is largely shaped by the philosophical perspectives of the researcher. In this study, quality of preschool education was conceptualized as an outcome of three main categories

of variables addressing the preschool learning environment, teacher practices and children's learning outcomes. Therefore, parental preferences on quality preschool education that were measured by this study may differ from other studies focusing on different variables.

Parents' conceptualization of quality preschool education varies depending on a number of demographic factors such as age, gender and level of education. This study was carried out in Athi river sub-county with a relatively cosmopolitan population. However, due to variations in demographic, socioeconomic and cultural characteristics generalizability of the findings of this study to other regions is limited.

#### **1.10 Significance of the Study**

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will broaden the contemporary understanding on how different stakeholders conceptualize quality preschool education. Specifically, it will add to the existing literature on what constitutes good quality preschool education from the parent's perspective. In addition, the findings may prompt the need for awareness creation among parents in situations where their preferences on preschool education are likely suffocate children's holistic development. Further, the findings may also push primary education quality assurance officers to demand that preschools promote holistic development of children rather than overemphasizing academic activities.

### 1.11 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the rational choice theory as postulated by Scott (1995). The basic tenet of this theory is that it is not possible for individuals to achieve all preferences; rather, they have to make choices in everyday life. According to the theory, an individual's choice is motivated by wants or goals which express their preferences.

The rational choice theory assumes that individuals will choose actions rationally, based on prioritized preferences and values to maximize benefits or rewards, and minimize costs or risks (Coleman & Fararo; Scott & Zey, in Chia, 2008). Thus, rational individuals have their goals and make their decisions after all rewards and costs have been weighed. In principle, rational individuals have 'perfect knowledge' and use their knowledge in the best way to achieve their goals (Goldthorp & Elster, in Chia, 2008).

Scott (1995) contends that not only does the rational choice theory provide an explanation of an individual action but also becomes the prominent description of social action. The theory attempts to describe the transition between the micro level of individual action and macro level of system behavior. (Abell, 2000; Zey, 1998 in Chia, 2008).

Rational choice theorists also recognize that the threat of punishment or the promise of a reward may motivate people just as much as the punishment or reward itself. The threat of punishment, for example, may call forth appropriate

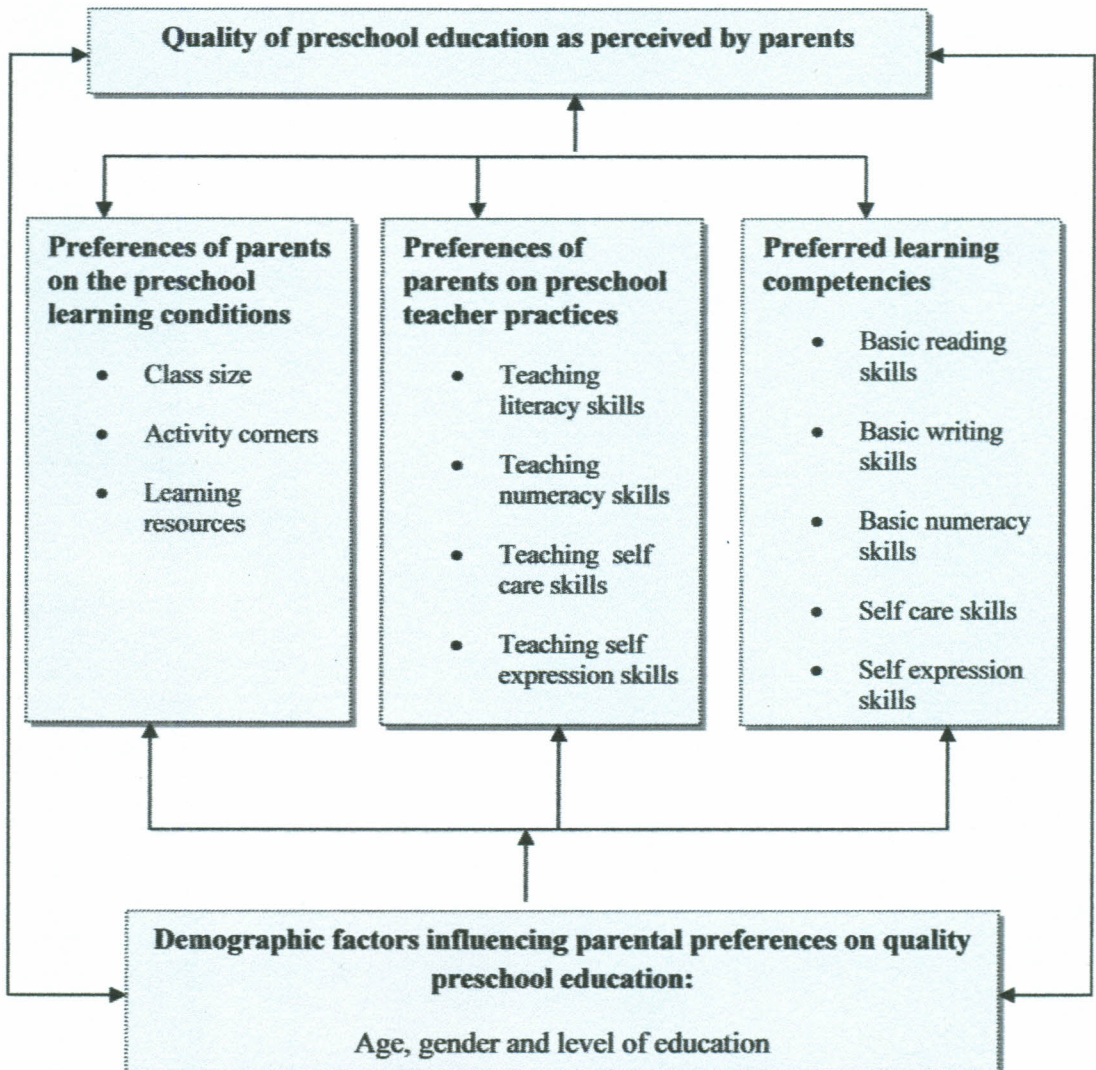
behavior from those who wish to avoid the punishment. Owing to this connection, individuals rapidly recognize that cooperation leads to a shared advantage, even if it does not produce the maximum outcome for any one participant. Consequently, they learn, that cooperation, rather than pure self-interest, is the optimum strategy (Scott, 1995). In the context of this research, it was presumed that parents' understanding of the objectives of preschool education influences their choice of necessary indicators that define preschools of good quality. Such a choice will be reflected on their preferences on organization and implementation of preschool curriculum

In cognizant of what constitutes quality preschool education, parents may attempt to influence preschool practices to suit their preferences. For instance, if they consider acquisition of numeracy skills a vital indicator of quality preschool programs, they may emphasize that children be taught numeracy skills. On the other side, preschool teachers as employees of parents may opt implement curriculum in ways that satisfies their clients. This may be an attempt to minimize punishment (such as termination of contract) and maximize rewards such as praise and pay raise. Based on the rational choice theory, it can be concluded that parental preferences have an implication on nature and organization of preschool curriculum which in turn influences quality of preschool education. Establishing parental preferences on quality preschool education with regard to the learning environment, teacher practices and children's learning outcomes was the rationale behind this study.

## 1.12 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model for this study attempts to measure parental preferences on quality preschool education. The quality of preschool education was conceptualized as an outcome of three domains of interrelated variables addressing the learning environment, teacher practices and children's learning outcomes which are all influenced by parental preferences. The interrelationship of these variables is presented in figure 1.1

**Figure 1.1: Interplay of Factors Influencing Quality of Preschool Education**



Source: synthesized from the literature reviewed

The theoretical debates about definition of quality preschool education programs formed the basis of selection of selection of variables for this study. The independent variable was demographic factors influencing parental preferences on quality preschool education. The dependent variable was the preferences of parents on quality preschool education with reference to the learning environment, teacher practices and children's learning competencies.

### 1.13 Operational Definition of Terms

**Class size:** Total number of children in one preschool class usually attended by one teacher

**Learning competencies:** These are skills parents expect children to have acquired by the end of the preschool period. They include competencies such as basic reading, writing and numeracy skills

**Learning environment:** These are specific attributes that define conditions under which children learn. They include factors such as class size, qualification of teachers and their experience

**Parental preferences:** This refers to aspects that parents' value as essential indicators of a quality preschool education program. It includes aspects related to the preschool learning environment, teacher practices and children's learning outcomes.

**Quality of preschool education:** How well preschool education meets the needs of children as perceived by the parent. It is an outcome of the interplay of the factors related to the learning environment, teacher practices and preferred children's learning competencies.

**Teacher practices:** This refers to the broad content area focused by the teacher in implementing the preschool curriculum. Some of the pre-school teaching approaches include teaching literacy skills, numeracy skills and self care skills.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section presents a critical review of literature on studies addressing issues related to parental preferences on quality preschool education. The chapter is organized around four subsections. Section one reviews studies on parent's preferred learning conditions in perceived quality preschools. Section two presents preferences of parents with regard to preschool teacher practices. In section three, the review presents related studies on competencies parents expect children to achieve at the end of the preschool years. The last section presents summary of the literature review and gaps to be filled by the proposed study. The reviewed themes are drawn from the objectives of the study.

#### 2.2 Parental Preferences on Preschool Learning Conditions

The preschool learning environment is the academic and social context where children interact with peers, teachers, and parents. Within this social context, the environment is viewed as the "third teacher" and understood to be a significant indicator of quality for all early educational experiences (Malaguzzi, 1998).

Due to the dominant role played by parents in setting up their children's learning environment, extensive research has been undertaken to establish parental preferences on quality preschool learning environment. Banga&Jaswal (2001) conducted a study to establish parent-teacher perceptions of early childhood education in Ludhiana city-India. Using random sampling procedure, a representative sample of 300 parents and 20 teachers were drawn from 10 nursery schools in the district. A self-structured interview schedule was designed for collection of data about perception of parents and teachers on various quality indicators of preschool education including qualification of teachers, teacher: child ratios and organization of learning corners.

In the Indiana study, participants were interrogated about a desirable teacher: child ratio in preschools. A wide variation was observed in the perception of teachers and parents. Teachers (35%) preferred higher ratios (1:25) while parents (39%) preferred a 1:15 teacher child ratio. Besides the teacher: child ratio, opinion of participants was sought about importance of learning centers such as the activity corners, doll and block centers to children's learning. Nearly all the participants except 5% of the parents and 2% of the teachers reported that the learning centers were important to preschool children's learning. Although this study established parents' preferred preschool learning conditions, it cannot be generalized to the local context due to differences in culture and socioeconomic status between Kenya and India. Consequently, this study sought to establish preferences of parents on preschool learning conditions.

Lisa & Sarah (2006) examined parental perspectives on childcare quality among 238 culturally diverse Australian parents. Using questionnaires, parents were asked to indicate the relative importance of various preschool education quality features. A summary of the findings is presented in table 2.1

**Table 2.1: Parental Perspectives on Quality Child Care Features**

Quality domain	Rank (%)		
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
Stimulating materials	81.9	5.9	2.5
Learning activities	71.3	14.3	5.5
Staff: child ratios	60.3	28.3	3
Carer training	82.3	8.9	0.4

Source: Sarah and Lisa (2006)

The data indicates that all the four features of child care were at least somewhat important to most parents. Carer training had the highest percentage of very important ratings (82.3%) followed closely by stimulating materials (81.9%). Although this study established on how important various features of preschool children's learning environment were important to parents, no attempt was made to interrogate preferences of parents on each of the features. This underscored the need for this study to document parental preferences on features of preschool children's learning environment.

Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras& Rattray (2000) carried out a study in Scotland to establish parental preferences, knowledge and expectations of their children's preschool education. Using a survey design and purposive sampling technique, 911 parents were selected to participate in the study. Parental preferences were assessed directly by ratings of 24 separate factors. The importance of each factor was rated as 'essential' (1), 'very important' (2), 'quite important' (3) or 'not important' (4). The item on quality of the preschool setting focused on four variables as shown in table 3.2.

**Table 2.2: Important Factors to Consider when Selecting Preschool**

**Provision**

<b>factors</b>	<b>Mean rating</b>
Number of children	1.9
Individual attention	1.8
Play and toys available	1.7
Information and advice	1.9

Source: Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras& Rattray (2000)

In general, the findings indicate that parents considered availability of play materials and toys the most important indicators of a quality preschool setting with a mean rating of 1.7. The number of children and information received from the school were the least important indicators of a quality preschool setting with a mean rating of 1.9. A limitation with this study is that no attempt was made to establish preferences of parents on the same factors. This underscored the

rationale for this study to establish parental preferences on features of preschool children's learning environment.

Recently, Moige (2012) assessed parent's level of satisfaction with the quality of preschool education in Lang'ata district-Kenya. The level of satisfaction was measured with reference to a set of six independent variables including availability of adequate physical facilities, teaching learning materials, availability of qualified teachers and the teacher child ratio. It was established that the type of curriculum offered attracted the greatest levels of satisfaction from parents while the teacher: child ratio attracted the lowest level of satisfaction. Although this study made important contributions to the literature on parental satisfaction with quality of preschool education in Kenya, no attempt was made to first establish parent's perspectives on the relative importance of the variables examined in influencing quality of preschool education. Such an investigation is imperative in an attempt to understand parental perspectives on what constitutes quality preschool education. It is on this basis that this study sought to establish preferences of parents with regard to preschool children's learning environment.

### **2.3 Parental Preferences on Preschool Teacher Practices**

In recent years, more research and attention has been paid to the linkages between preschool teacher practices and quality of preschool education. A common finding is that beliefs and practices of teachers have been found to significantly influence quality of preschool education services. Supporting this

finding, Stipek & Byler (1997) established that early childhood teachers who held stronger beliefs in basic-skill practices, such as highly structured, teacher-directed instruction, were less likely to endorse child-centered practices. In contrast, early childhood teachers who have stronger beliefs in a child-centered curriculum also value child independence and self-esteem.

Since the quality of education largely depends on the quality of teachers (Osei, 2006), researchers have taken a keen interest to establish factors influencing teacher practices at every level of the education system. Neeru, Sumati and Rishta (2004) investigated parental concepts about preschool education among 50 parents in Jammu region and Kashmir state in India. In an item that examined the teaching methodology that was preferred by the parents, data revealed that more than half of the mothers (70%) and fathers (67%) preferred books for teaching preschoolers whereas less than half of the mothers (30%) and fathers (33%) were against using books as they thought play-way is the best approach for teaching basics to a preschool child. Parents who preferred books for their preschool child were in favor of teaching 3R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) in preschools. Although this study established parental preferences on preschool teacher practices, it cannot be generalized to the Kenyan context because it was carried out in a different setting. Hence this study sought to interrogate parental preferences on preschool teacher practices in Kenya.

Chia (2008) investigated factors that influenced parent's choice of preschool in Taiwan. A total of 18 parents were selected to participate in the study while data

collection methods involved diaries completed before the children started school and in-depth interviews. On a variable that focused on academic learning as one of the factors that determined choice of preschools, parents reported that they expected preschools to teach their children reading and writing skills. In addition, parents reported that;

*A good preschool could provide various activities and teaching materials which could not be provided by an average family. Jun, Hsu, Ling, Ming, Chen, Sing, Siao, Shieh and Jeng believed that in a preschool children could learn basic cognitive knowledge, including literacy, numeric and other subjects, as well as self- management, (Chia, 2008, p. 19).*

According to the parents, pre-school education should cover basic academic skills such as simple reading, writing and calculating skills. In addition, thirteen parents in the research expected their children to learn English in preschool (Chia, 2008). Although this study established parental preferences on preschool teacher practices, it cannot be generalized to the Kenyan situation since it was carried out in a different country context. In addition, the findings are based on a small sample size hence cannot be generalized to a bigger and heterogeneous population. This underlined the need for this study to establish parental preferences on preschool teacher practices in Kenya.

Locally, Ndegwa (2005) investigated factors influencing preschool teacher's attitude towards child centered and teacher centered teaching methods in Nairobi. Using an ex post facto design, a sample of 162 preschool teachers was selected to

participate in the study using cluster sampling technique. The study revealed that selection of the teaching methods used by preschool teachers was mainly determined by teacher's academic level, age, professional training and teaching experience. In another study, Aila (2000) sought to establish the relationship between teachers' experience and use of teaching aids in Asego Division, Homa Bay district. It was established that the use of teaching aids declined with teacher's experience. In addition, it was revealed that as teachers grew older, the use of teaching aids diminished.

In another study, Ng'asike (2004) investigated teacher's use of play as a medium for bridging preschool children's Mathematical experiences in Kasarani division. Adopting an ex post facto research design, the study established that academic qualifications did not improve preschool teacher's use of play teaching strategies. It is evident that the three studies examined factors influencing pre-school teacher practices in Kenya. However, the studies did not explore parental preferences on preschool teacher practices yet there is evident that parent's preferences influence teacher practices (Farquhar, 1993). This underscored the importance of this study to investigate parental preferences on preschool teacher practices.

#### **2.4 Parents Preferred Preschool Children's Learning Competencies**

The core objective of preschool education in Kenya is to provide a holistic and integrated programme that meets the children's cognitive, social, moral, spiritual, emotional and physical needs (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2005). The ECDE policy states that curriculum activities should be organized as

stipulated under the preschool education syllabus published by Kenya Institute of Education. In addition, learning should be child centered, holistic in nature and incorporate basic life skills. Further, the language of the catchment area should be used in all preschool centres with gradual introduction of other languages once children join primary school (GoK, 2006). Therefore, affective education, life education and moral education are the cornerstones of preschool education.

In spite of the policy guidelines emphasizing a holistic approach in implementation of the preschool education curriculum in Kenya, some studies have revealed wide gaps between policy and pedagogical practices. For instance, an ECDE policy review by UNESCO (2005) established;

*Many ECD Centres place so much emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills that they are essentially "early primary education" centres, rather than ECD Centres. Many ECD classrooms including those for those aged three years have the children arrayed in rows of chairs and desks, facing the teacher standing at a blackboard. Child-centered pedagogical methods exist, but mostly in a handful of private services in urban areas (UNESCO, 2005, p. 14).*

Educational researchers have tried to find out underlying factors attributed to the gaps between policy and pedagogical practices in implementation of preschool curriculum. Recent empirical evidence indicates that parental pressure on teachers is one of the factors contributing pedagogical deviations in preschools

(Chia, 2008;Banga&Jaswal). Owing to the strong linkage between parental perceptions on children's learning outcomes and practices in preschool settings, attempts have been made to establish parental preferences on competencies children should attain at the end of the preschool period.

Fouziya and Sarika (2009) assessed parental perception towards preschool education imparted at early childhood education centres in Kashmir, India. Using snow ball sampling technique, 200 parents who had enrolled their children in preschools, kindergarten, Balwadis or Anganwadis were selected to participate in the study. The item on parental perceptions about skills acquired in ECDE centers focused on 8 variables. The findings are presented in table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Parental Perceptions on Skills Pcquired in the ECDE Centers**

Skills	Anganwadi parents	Preschool parents	Total	%
Develop pre-literacy skills	38	-	38	19
Develop communication skills	-	32	32	16
Eating habit	-	12	12	6
Cultivate good hygiene habits	29	22	51	25.5
Develop confidence	10	17	27	13.5
Activeness	10	-	10	5
Fine motor development	13	-	13	6.5
Social development	-	17	17	8.5
Total	100	100	200	100

Source: Fouziya and Sarika (2009)

The data reveals that most parents (25.5%) considered acquisition of good hygiene habits as the most important skill imparted at the ECDE centers. In addition, a significant number of parents (19% and 16%) indicated that preschools should help children develop pre-literacy and communication skill respectively. Only a low proportion of parents (5% and 6.5% respectively) cited activeness and fine motor development as important skills acquired in preschools.

Banga and Jaswal (2001) assessed competencies parents preferred their children to attain at the end of the preschool period. The findings are presented in table 2.4.

**Table 2.4: Parents' preferred preschool learning competencies**

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>
Recite poems	12
Recite stories	10
Develop concept of colour, shape, size	13
Puzzle solving	9
Elementary drawing	12
General confidence	19
Basic eye-hand coordination	12
General social etiquette	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Banga and Jaswal (2001)

The data reveals that majority of parents (19%) considered general confidence as the most important skill children should achieve at the end of the preschool period. Development of concepts of color, shape size and acquisition of social etiquette skills were also considered important competencies as reported by 13% of the parents. Acquisition of puzzle solving skills was considered a less important competence as cited by only 9% of the parents.

Petrie and Holloway (2006) carried out a qualitative study to establish mothers' views about their role in their children's education and their expectations of their child's preschool in San Francisco area, USA. Using voluntary sampling procedure, 16 mothers were selected to participate in the study. Almost all of the mothers who talked about their expectations viewed the preschool as a place where their child would develop social skills. On learning related skills, only 30% of the mothers had expectations related to the development of academic skills. Within the academic category, mothers hoped that the school would help their children learn such skills as number and letter recognition and how to write their names.

From the reviewed studies, it is evident that parents hold some preferences regarding specific competencies they expect their children to acquire at the end of the preschool period. However, the findings may not be generalized to the Kenyan context since all the studies were carried out in a middle income and developed country contexts. In addition, due to cross country cultural differences, there might be a variation on parental preferences on competencies children

should attain at the end of the preschool period. Consequently, this study sought find out parental preferences on competencies children should attain at the end of the preschool period in Kenya.

## **2.5 Demographic Factors Influencing Parental Preferences on Quality Preschool Education**

Findings from various studies have established that parent's demographic characteristics significantly influence their preferences on quality preschool education. Specifically, demographic variables related to the parents' ethnicity, educational level, family income, occupation and cultural beliefs have been established to be vital in influencing parent's preferences in their children's education (Fetalvero, 2010).

In looking at minority parents' decision making in choosing types of child care, Hirshberg, Huang and Fuller in Fetalvero (2010) found that in USA, parents' ethnicity, education, hours of employment, and family income predicts parents' propensity to choose non-parental child care. Similarly, Rose and Elicker in Fetalvero (2010) found that the association between ethnicity and child care decisions disappears once maternal education and income are added in the equation. They found that parents with more education tend to consider play-based curricula and care-giver warmth their greatest priority. In addition, The study discovered that mothers with lower income place more importance on low-cost care, whereas middle-income mothers prefer middle-cost care that are near

their place of work and residence compared to parents with the higher income levels.

Besides parent's level of education and family income, socioeconomic status (SES) of parents have been found to be significant in influencing their preferences on preschool education. For instance, a study by Delaney (2006) in Texas, USA discovered that minority and lower-SES parents are more likely than white and high-SES parents to consider academic factors as the most important and fundamental criteria by which to judge a school. Thus, belonging to a particular ethnic group and socio-economic level suggests differences in values, belief systems, ideologies, and parenting orientations among others that subsequently result in differences in parenting practices, behaviours, and decisions in their children's education.

The reviewed studies have established that the demographic characteristics of parents significantly influence their preferences on quality preschool education. However, all the reviewed studies are based in developed country contexts and thus may not be generalized to a developing country context. In addition, little attention has been paid to other demographic characteristics like age and gender of parents which may equally influence parental preferences of quality preschool education. Consequently, this study sought to establish the extent to which parent's demographic factors (age, gender and level of education) influence their preferences of quality preschool education.

## 2.6 Summary of the Literature Reviewed

The reviewed literature is based on three themes that were drawn from the objectives of the study. The first theme has focused on related studies about parental preferences on preschool learning conditions. Although there were some divergent perspectives, the literature revealed that most parents consider teacher: pupil ratios and availability of learning resources vital indicators of quality preschool education programs. Similarly, there were divergent viewpoints regarding parental preferences on the preschool learning conditions. Summing up, the following can be deduced from the reviewed studies

- No attempt has been made to first establish if parents consider the learning environment a key determinant of preschool education quality
- Little effort has been made to find out parental preferences on various features of the preschool learning environment

In light of the limitations outlined, this study sought to establish parental preferences on various aspects of the preschool learning environment. In addition, it also sought to find out the importance attached by parents on various aspects of the preschool learning environment.

In the second theme, the review mainly focused on related studies about parental preferences on preschool teacher practices. The wider literature revealed that parents prefer teaching of academic, self care and self expression skills. Locally,

the reviewed studies mainly focused on impact of teacher's academic qualification, training and experience in influencing preschool teacher practices. Thus there has been little attention to establish preferences of parents on preschool teacher practices. Although, the existing literature attempted to address the theme, most of the studies (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Neeru, Sumati and Risha, 2004 & Chia, 2008) are based on developed country contexts. This raises issues of generalizability to developing country contexts. Parent's view of quality preschool education vary according to their age, cultural background and socioeconomic status, as well as the age and gender of their children (Farquhar, 1993).

The third theme focused on preferences of parents on what competencies children should attain at the end of the preschool period. The reviewed studies (Chia, 2008; Fouziya&Sarika, 2009, Banga&Jaswal, 2001& Petrie &Halloway, 2006) established that parents predominantly expect their children to graduate from preschools with some basic literacy and numeracy skills. Other skills parents expect their children to acquire at the end of the preschool period include communication skills, fine motor coordination skills and self-care skills. Regrettably, nearly all the reviewed studies were mainly conducted in middle income countries hence limiting generalizability of the findings to the Kenyan context. Fewer studies have been undertaken in Kenya to document preferences of parents on what competencies children should attain at the end of the preschool period. This underlined the need for this study to assess preferences of

parents regarding competencies they expect their children to attain at the end of the preschool period.

The last theme explored studies that have been done to establish demographic factors that influence parent's preferences on quality preschool education. A key finding from the reviewed studies (Hirshberg, Huang & Fuller in Fetalvero, 2010 & Delaney, 2006) is that preferences of parents on their children's education are closely linked to their educational level, income, race and socioeconomic status. However, the findings cannot be generalized to the Kenyan context since most of the studies were conducted in developed county contexts. In addition, the findings are based on small samples thus limiting their generalizability to a wider heterogeneous population. This study sought to generate local evidence on the extent to which demographic characteristics of parents influence their preferences on quality preschool education.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological issues that pertain to this study. Specifically, it addresses the Research Design, Variables of the Study, Location of the Study, Target Population, Sampling Procedure and Sample Size. Subsequent sections describe the Instruments used, Pilot Study, Data Collection Techniques, Data Analysis and finally the Logistical and Ethical Considerations.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. Survey designs are used to collect information from or about people, to describe, compare or explain their knowledge, beliefs, feelings, values or behavior (Fink in Ogola, 2010). This study sought to assess parental preferences on quality preschool education. The selection of this design was informed by other similar studies which have assessed preferences and perceptions of parents on preschool education (Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras & Rattray, 2000; Vidali 2006; Fouziya & Sarika, 2009). In addition, the study fits within the confines of survey design since it sought to document parent's beliefs about quality preschool education.

### **3.2.1 The Variables**

There were two main categories of variables that were of concern in this study. The independent variable was demographic factors which influence parental preferences on quality preschool education. This constituted of age, gender and highest level of education attained by the parents. This information was captured on the background section of the parents' questionnaire.

The dependent variable for this study was preferences of parents on quality preschool education with regard to the preschool learning conditions, teacher practices and children's learning competencies. The parental preferences was measured as summarized in table 3.1

**Table 3.1 Measurement of Dependent Variables**

Indicator	Variables that were measured
Preschool learning conditions	Preferences of the parents with regard to the preschool class size, activity corners and learning resources. Parents were asked to indicate their preferences on the three categories of variables.
Teacher practices	Parent's preferred teacher practice with regard to: Teaching literacy skills, teaching numeracy skills, teaching self-care skills and teaching self-expression skills.
Children's learning competencies	Preferred learning competencies children ought to attain with regard to: Basic reading skills, basic writing skills, basic numeracy skills, self-care skills and self-expression skills.

### 3.3 Location of the Study

The study was carried out in Athi river sub-county of Machakos County. Athiriver borders Nairobi County to the west and covers and extends to Muthwani-Lukenya and Kyumbi to the east where it borders Machakos Municipal Council. Due to its relatively industrial nature and proximity to Nairobi, Athi river is one of the cosmopolitan sub-counties experiencing a rapid population growth. In addition, it is an exceptionally diverse district in many dimensions. From the socioeconomic perspective, the sub-county is a home to the ultra-poor, poor and middle class. Majority of the ultra-poor and poor people live

in the expansive Sofia, Kasoitu and Slota slums while the middle class people live in rich suburb estates such as Site, Highrise and Acacia.

A significant proportion of urban residents in Athi river town engage in small scale business while others work as casual laborers in the industries. In the rural parts of Athiriver, majority of the population are involved in subsistence agriculture, sand harvesting and quarrying. The combination of factors presented here makes Athiriver the ideal choice of location for this study since quality of preschool education may be affected as teachers struggle to meet demands of various parents. Specifically, the researcher intended to collect information from parents of diverse backgrounds with a view of making the study as representative as possible. Specifically, it sought to collect data from various categories of parents such as the rich and the poor, well-educated and lowly educated parents and lastly parents from rural and urban settings as well.

### **3.4 Target Population**

The target population of this study comprised of parents with children in public preschools in Athi river sub-county, preschool teachers and head teachers of the primary schools where preschools are attached to. The preschools were used as entry points to sample parents, preschool teachers and head teachers. Athi River sub-county is subdivided into Lukenya and Athi river Athi river divisions. Data from the office of the sub-county education officer indicate that there were 44 public preschools and 52 preschool teachers distributed across the two divisions. In addition, there are 44 head teachers of primary schools where the preschools

are attached to. Table 3.2 presents a summary of the target population for this study.

**Table 3.2: Distribution of Public Preschools in Athi river sub-county**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Number of pre-schools</b>	<b>Number of pre-school teachers</b>	<b>Number of head teachers</b>
Athi river	24	28	24
Lukenya	20	24	20
Total	44	52	44

Source: Athi river sub-county education office

### 3.5 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

#### 3.5.1 Sampling Technique

In selecting participants for this study, stratified random sampling technique was applied. This technique was selected to ensure that sample selection bias was minimized hence have a sample that adequately represents the two divisions (Athi river and Lukenya). All public preschools in Athi river sub-county were numbered in a continuous sequence from the first to the last by sub-county. The preschools that participated in the study were randomly selected using computer generated random numbers. At school level, the preschool register was used to select learners for the purpose of selecting parents that participated in the study. A list of all children enrolled in the preschool was first obtained. Then the children whose parents were engaged in the study were systematically selected

using a table of random numbers generated by the researcher using excel RAND function. .

### 3.5.2 Sample Size

There were 44 public preschools in Athi river district distributed across 2 divisions. Gay (1981) suggests that when the population is small (usually less than 100), a minimum of 20% should be selected as the sample size. However, for a large population (usually more than 100) the minimum sample size should be 20% of the population. Since the number of public preschools in Athi River is less than 100, a total of 14 preschools were selected to participate in this study (representing 31.81% of the population). At school level, 10% of the parents were selected to participate in the study. In each preschool, 1 teacher was selected to participate in the study. All the head teachers in preschools visited participated in the study. Table 3.3 summarizes the sample size for this study.

**Table 3.3: Categories of the Sample Size**

Sample category	Sample size	
	Athi river division	Lukenya division
Preschools	9	5
Parents	63	51
Teachers	8	6
Head teachers	8	6

### **3.6 Research Instruments**

A questionnaire for parents and an interview schedule for preschool teachers and head teachers were prepared for this study.

#### **3.6.1 Questionnaire for Parents**

The questionnaire was used to capture parental preferences on quality preschool education and their demographic information. To achieve this, a quantitative measure of 12 variables was exclusively developed for this study. The variables fitted into one of the 3 vital determinants of quality in preschool education programs; preschool learning environment; preschool teacher practices; preferred learning competencies.

The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections. Section A collected parents' demographic information. Section B, C and D collected information about preferences of parents on quality preschool education with reference to the preschool learning environment, preschool teacher practices and preferred learning competencies.

#### **3.6.2 Interview Schedule for Head Teachers**

The head teacher's interview schedule was designed to collect qualitative data about preferences of parents on quality preschool education from the perspective of head teachers. The participants were asked to share their perceptions on how important parents perceive each of the 12 variables influencing quality of preschool education. In addition, they were probed on preferences of parents on

quality preschool education with reference to the preschool learning environment, preschool teacher practices and preferred learning competencies.

### **3.6.3 Interview Schedule for Preschool Teachers**

This instrument was used to collect information about parental preferences on quality preschool education from the teacher's perspective. It contained all the main items covered by the head teacher's interview schedule for triangulation purposes.

## **3.7 Pilot Study**

To enhance validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was necessary. The instruments were pretested in one preschool that was not part of the sampled ones within Athi river district. Pilot data was collected through self-administered questionnaires to the parents. Note taking and recording of the verbatim was used to collect interview data. The pilot study was instrumental in testing clarity of the items with a view of improving them before start of the actual data collection. In addition, pilot data helped in conducting dummy analysis to establish if the data collected would provide answers to the research questions. The analysis helped in restructuring of instruments to enhance their validity and reliability.

### **3.7.1 Validity of the Study Instruments**

Creswell (1998) defines validity as the extent to which an empirical measure is able to reflect the authentic meaning of a particular concept. There are various

types of validity in Social Science research. In this study, content validity was of utmost relevancy. Fraenkel and Warren in Ogola (2010) assert that content validity of an instrument can be addressed through expert critique and judgment. To ascertain content validity of the instruments, expert opinion was sought from supervisors and other education experts within the department of Early Childhood Education. Comments received were incorporated into the final draft of the instruments. In addition, findings from the pilot study were used to further enhance validity through restructuring of items where necessary.

### **3.7.2 Reliability of the Study Instruments**

This study used test retest method to ascertain reliability of the instruments. The questionnaire for parents was administered to the same group of parents two times within a period of two weeks. In computing reliability of the questionnaire, internal consistency was measured. Usually, reliability is computed on one scale; meaning the group of items that are measuring the same concept are computed together. In this study, reliability was run for sub-scales since the parent's questionnaire tested different concepts. The reliability coefficient of the instruments was computed on SPSS using the coefficient alpha as proposed by Cronbach's in Fraenkel and Wallen (2000). The coefficient alpha generates measures of internal consistency ranging from 0 to 1.0 and the acceptable threshold was 0.7 and above. Except for section A which examined parents' preferences on the learning environment, other subsections had coefficients higher than .090 which was rated highly reliable. The reliability coefficient for parents' preferences on the learning environment was .796 which was considered

reasonable. The overall Cronbach's alpha for preferred teacher practices was .912 while that for preferred learning competencies was .922. This implies the instrument was very reliable.

### **3.8 Data Collection Techniques**

Research clearance letter was first sought from the Kenyatta University graduate school for processing of the research permit. The letter was presented to the National Council for Science and Technology for processing of the research permit before commencement of data collection. In line with the stipulations of the National council for science and technology, a copy of the research permit was presented to the county director of education before proceeding to the schools. Most of the questionnaires were sent to the parents through their children. However, the preschool teacher also gave the questionnaires to the parents in the afternoon when they came to school to pick their children. Some parents, especially those with low levels of education were invited to the school and guided by the preschool teacher on how to respond to the questions. In the questionnaire, respondents were requested to respond to the variables in two ways; first, they were asked to share their perceptions on how important each variable was in influencing quality of preschool education in a four point scale. Then they were asked to share their preferences on each of the variables. Collection of filled questionnaires started a week after their administration.

Interview with head teachers and preschool teachers was conducted by the researcher. Notes were taken during the interview and the verbatim recorded for

later transcription. Transcription of interviews early helps the researcher to be more aware of the emerging themes and allows them to be referred to in a more direct way in later interviews (Bryman, 2004). Transcription of each interview in this study was done immediately after field work in order to ensure that any missing information was followed up before commencement of analysis.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

An SPSS spreadsheet was prepared for entry of quantitative data that was collected through the questionnaire. All the data was coded where necessary and entered in the spreadsheet. Upon completion of entry, the data was cleaned to eliminate wrong or inappropriate entries in preparation for analysis. Preferences of parents on each item were calculated by running the frequencies on each variable. cross item comparisons was done to establish differences in preference per item.

To establish the extent to which demographic factors influenced parental preferences, a multiple regression analysis was done using age, gender and highest level of education as independent variables. The dependent variable on parental preferences was computed on SPSS by adding up likert items about preferences on teacher practices and children's learning outcomes respectively. This generated two continuous dependent variables.

Qualitative data was transcribed and analyzed thematically. Each transcript was first examined to interpret its meaning in order to find suitable theme for it. All

the emerging sub-themes were collapsed into the following two themes that were of primary focus in this study.

- Importance attached by parents to each of the variables influencing quality of preschool education
- Parental preferences on each of the variables under investigation.

### **3.10 Logistical and Ethical Considerations**

Once the research permit was secured, it was presented to the county commissioner and county director of education in line with the National Council for Science and technology requirements. The researcher visited the sampled schools for general introduction and planning of logistics for data collection. Preschool teachers in the sampled schools were requested to facilitate sending of the questionnaires to the parents. Anonymity of the head teachers, teachers and parents who participated in the study was observed. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study in order to obtain their consent in line with research ethics.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATIONS OF FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings, interpretations and discussions according to the study objectives. The chapter is divided into four sections. Each section addresses the following objectives that underlined this study:

- i. To establish parents' preferred learning conditions in preschools perceived to be of good quality in Athi river sub-county
- ii. To find out preferences of parents regarding teacher practices in preschools of good quality in Athi river sub-county
- iii. To document parental preferences on competencies children ought to attain at the end of preschool period.
- iv. To investigate the extent to which demographic factors influence parental preferences on quality preschool education

#### 4.2 General and Demographic Information

This section presents general information about the study, respondents' demographic characteristics and the response rates.

#### **4.2.1 General Information about the Study**

In collecting information about parental preferences on quality preschool education, parents were selected from 14 preschools distributed across Lukenya and Athi river divisions of Athi river sub-county. In Lukenya division, 41 parents responded to the questionnaire out of the total target of 51 parents. This represented a response rate of 80.39%. In Athi river division, the response rate was 88.89%; 56 parents responded to the questionnaire out of the total target of 63. In total, 96 parents responded to the questionnaire out of the 114 that was administered. This represented a response rate of 84.21% which surpasses the 60% and 70% return rate threshold rated as good and very good respectively (Babbie, 1990). Nearly all the questionnaires returned were dully filled. However, there were fewer cases of missing data.

#### **4.2.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Parents**

In collecting the demographic data of parents, information about their gender, age and level of education was sought in the questionnaires. Table 4.1 summarizes the parents' demographic characteristics.

**Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Parents**

Demographic Variable	N=96	
	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	58	60.4
Male	37	39.6
<b>Age range</b>		
Below 20 years	6	7.3
21-30	29	32.2
31-40	40	41.7
Above 40	18	18.8
<b>Highest level of education</b>		
primary and below	28	29.16
completed secondary	33	34.36
Diploma	24	25
degree and above	9	9.36
others	1	2.12

The findings indicate that majority of the parents were female. The ratio of females to males in the total sample was 58 female (60.4%) to 37 male (39.6%).

In terms of age, majority of the parents were in the age range of 31-40 years. This represented 41.7% of the total number of parents who participated in the study. Parents below 20 years formed the lowest proportion of the total number of participants. This category accounted for 7.3% of the parents. Comparatively, the findings indicate that majority of the parents were relatively young as 78.2% of them were below the age of 40 years.

Regarding highest level of education, the findings indicate that majority of the parents (34.36%) had at least completed secondary education. However, the proportion of parents with primary level of education and below was also relatively higher (29.16%). Cumulatively, 68.72% of the parents had either completed secondary, diploma, degree and above.

### **4.3 Parents' Preferred Pre-school Learning Conditions**

The preschool learning conditions are largely viewed as the “third teacher” and understood to be a significant indicator of quality for all early educational experiences. Consequently, the first task of this study was to find out preferences of parents on learning conditions in preschools considered to be of good quality. The objective was stated as;

*To establish parents' preferred learning conditions in preschools perceived to be of good quality in Athi river district*

To achieve the objective, the researcher used four variables. These are perceptions of parents on whether the learning environment is important in influencing quality of preschool education, parents' rating on importance of the learning environment, parents' rating on the learning environment factors and preferences of parents on the preschool learning environment.

In collecting information about the variables, a four point likert scale was used. The first item on the likert scale sought to find out if parents considered nature of the learning environment an important factor that influences quality of preschool education. This was a dichotomous variable where parents were expected to

respond by indicating either yes or no. Analysis of this variable was done by running frequencies on the two options.

The second variable was built from the first one. For the participants that indicated yes, they were subjected to a four point Likert scale that measured their perceptions on the degree to which the learning environment influenced the quality of preschool education. Participants were expected to select one of the four options that were provided namely; somewhat important, important, very important and not sure.

The third variable contained a list of three factors commonly used in measuring quality of the preschool learning environment. The factors were teacher: child ratio, activity corners and learning materials. Using a four point scale, parents were asked to give their perceptions on the degree to which the factors influenced the quality of preschool education.

The last variable examined preferences of parents on the three factors associated with preschool learning environment; teacher: child ratio, activity corners and learning materials. In each item, four options were provided and parents were asked to indicate their preferences by ticking one option.

#### **4.3.1 The Nature of Learning Environment and Quality of Preschool Education**

This item sought to find out if parents considered the nature of the learning environment a major factor that influences quality of preschool education. The results are presented in table 4.2.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	93	96.9
	No	3	3.1
	Total	96	100.0

**Table 4.2: Parents' Perceptions on Importance of the Preschool Learning Environment**

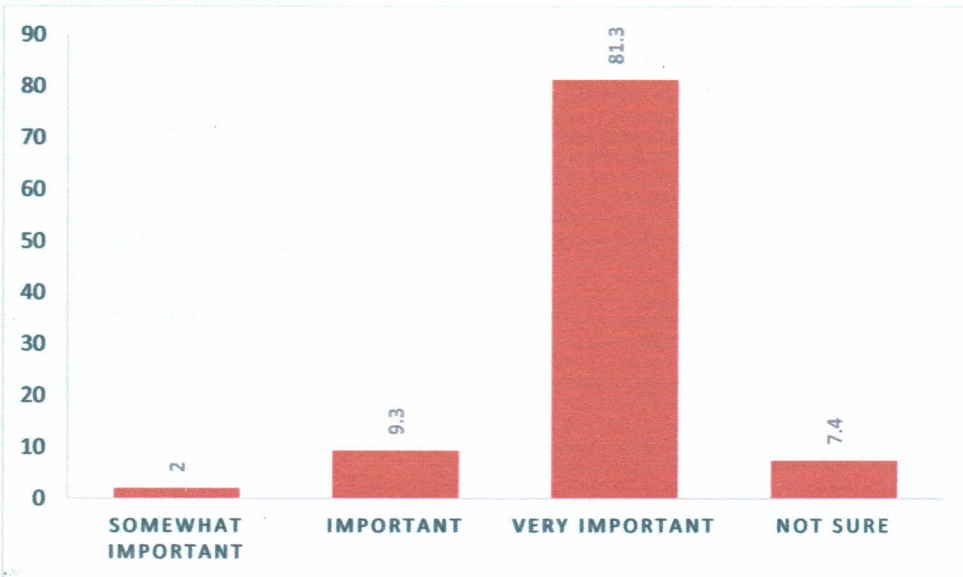
The findings indicate that nearly all the respondents (96.9%) perceived the learning environment as an important component that influences quality of preschool education. In support of this finding, one of the head teachers reported that;

*Most parents appreciate that the learning environment is important. In fact some of them even prepare for us materials such as small balls, sacks and charts. When we ask children to bring empty packets of unga, the parents quickly give them because they know we have shop corners in the classroom (Head teacher, school 1).*

The findings generally indicate an appreciation by parents that quality of preschool education is as good as the learning conditions. This is consistent with the literature review particularly Banga&Jaswal (2001) study which established that nearly all the parents consider the nature of the learning environment an important determinant of preschool education quality.

In another item the study examined perceptions of parent on how important the learning environment is in influencing quality of preschool education. To achieve this four options were provided namely somewhat important, important, very important and not sure. Parents responded to this item by selecting one of the four options. Analysis was done by running frequencies on parents' responses to the four options. The findings are presented in figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1: Parent's Rating of the Importance of the Preschool Learning Environment**



As figure 4.1 shows that majority of the respondents (81.3%) reported that the learning environment is a very important factor in influencing quality of preschool education. Fewer respondents (7.4%) reported that they were not sure of the importance of the learning environment in influencing quality of preschool education. The high value attached by parents on the importance of the learning environment in influencing preschool education quality was also confirmed by one of the teachers who reported that;

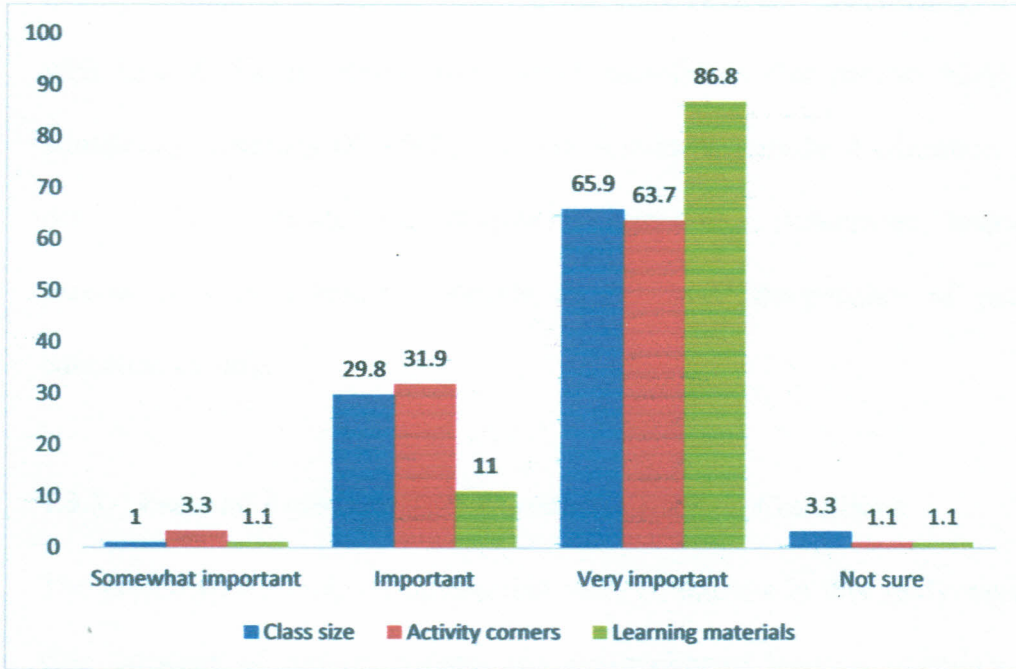
*“Parents, especially those from urban centers take the learning environment very seriously. Some can even transfer their children to private preschools which have better learning environments than us”,  
(teacher, school 3)*

A key inference from the findings is that majority of parents consider the learning environment an important determinant of preschool education quality. This was consistent across data collected from both the questionnaire and the interviews. This finding agrees with the study by Fetalvero(2010) which found that most parents consider various aspects of the learning environment largely influenced quality of preschool education.

#### **4.3.2 Importance of Learning Environment and Quality of Preschool Education**

To establish parents' ratings on the importance of the preschool learning environment factors, the researcher used a four point scale. The items that were included in the scale are class size, activity corners and learning materials. Parents were expected to rate importance of the three items using one of the four rating options that were provided. The findings are presented in figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.2: Parent's Rating of the Preschool Learning Environment Factors**



The findings indicate that majority of the parents rated each of the three factors as “very important” in influencing quality of preschool education. Comparatively, learning materials received the highest percentages of very important ratings (86.8%). This may probably be attributed to the widely held belief that material resources at school level are considered a critical part of effective instruction and ultimately improved children’s learning outcomes. Parental emphasis on availability of learning materials in preschools was also confirmed by one teacher who reported that;

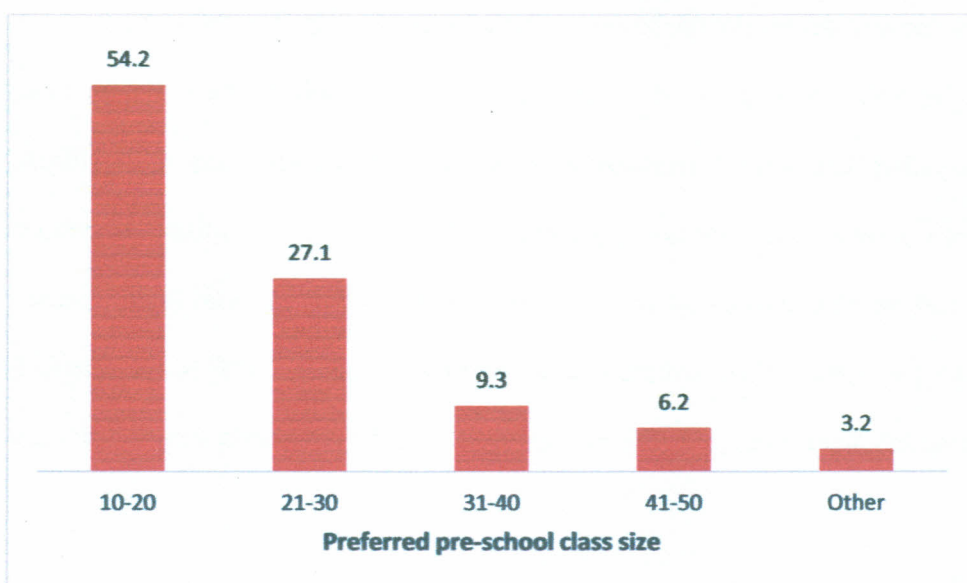
*“Our parents love the learning materials a lot...Some even request us to lend them the materials to use them to teach their children over the weekend... Others also approach us to give them the activity books for their own private reading to see what children should learn at preschool level”, (Teacher, school 11)*

The high rating of learning materials as a very important preschool education quality domain is consistent with the literature review. Specifically, it agrees with Lisa & Sarah (2004) study which established that parents highly rated stimulating materials (81.9%) as a very important preschool education quality domain. This indicates that despite socioeconomic differences, majority of parents consider learning materials an important determinant of preschool education quality.

#### 4.3.3 Parental Preferences on Preschool Learning Conditions

The preschool learning conditions that were of interest in this study were class size, presence of activity corners and availability of learning materials in the classroom. In measuring parental preferences on the teacher: class size, five rating options were provided. Parents were expected to select the preferred option. Analysis of the findings is presented in figure 4.3

**Figure 4.3: Parents' Preferred Preschool Class Size**



The findings indicate that over half of the parents (54.2%) preferred a preschool class size of 10-20 learners. On the other hand, nearly a third of the parents (27.1%) preferred a class size with 21-30 learners while 6.2% preferred a class size of 41-50 learners. Generally, these findings point towards parental preferences on small preschool class sizes which is considered manageable. In confirming parental preference of small class size, one of the teachers reported the following during the interview;

*“Parents take the class size seriously. Like in our class here, they complain that we don’t have enough teachers. They say this class has many learners and ask how the teacher will reach all the learners. But luckily, we have been promised an additional teacher by the council. They like classes with a teacher: child ratio of about 1: 20”, (teacher, school 14)*

These findings are in line with the literature review about parental preferences on the teacher: child ratio. It particularly confirms Banga&Jaswal (2001) study which was carried out in India and found that parents preferred a lower preschool teacher: child ratio of 1:15. However, preferences of parents on the teacher: child ratio in this study is slightly higher than that of the cited study. This may be attributed to the socioeconomic differences between Kenya and India since parents in wealthy countries are able to hire more teachers and maintain a lower teacher: pupil ratio. In addition, the differences may be attributed to the fact that Banga&Jaswal (2010) study was carried out in a predominantly urban population associated with elite parents. Such parents can afford to take their children to

costly and well-staffed urban preschools characterized by lower teacher: child ratios.

In another item, the study examined perceptions of parents on whether availability of activity corners was an important determinant of preschool education quality. Parents were expected to select one of the four options that were provided namely strongly agree, agree, disagree and don't know. The findings are presented in figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.4: Perceptions of Parents on Importance of Classroom Activity Corners**

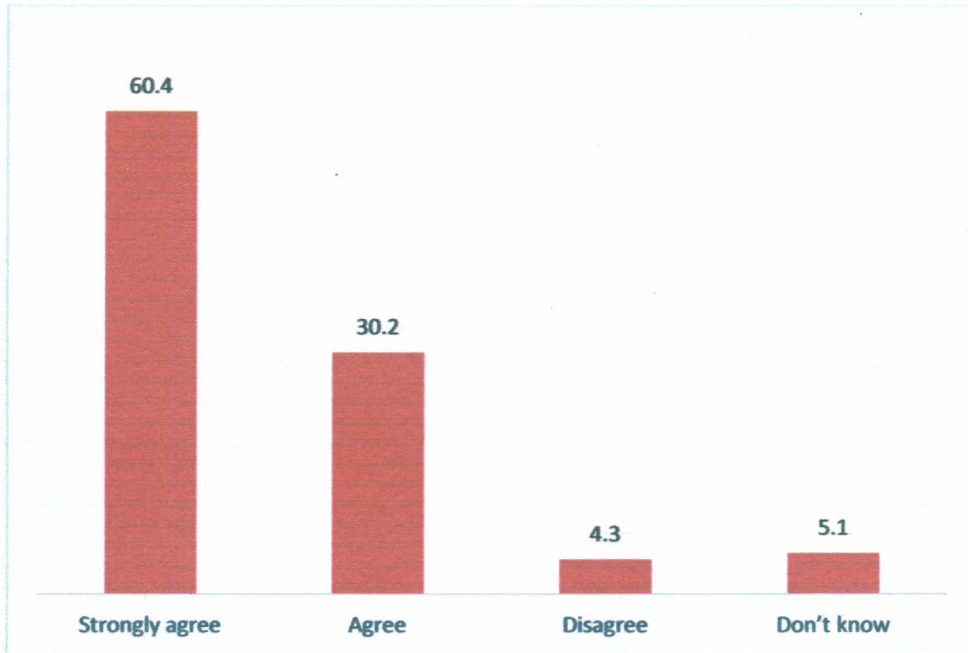


Figure 4.4 shows that majority of the parents (60.4%) strongly agreed that preschool classrooms of good quality should have well equipped activity corners. On the other hand, fewer parents (4.3%) disagreed that availability of well-equipped activity corners is a key component of quality preschool classrooms. Parental emphasis on equipping preschool classrooms with activity corners as established in this study agrees with Benga&Jaswal (2010) study which established that 95% of the parents consider availability of activity corners a key determinant of quality preschool education.

The last item under learning conditions examined preferences of parents on the learning materials. Parents were expected to indicate the extent to which they considered learning materials important determinants of preschool education quality. The findings are presented in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Parent's Rating on Importance of Pre-school Learning Materials**

<b>Pre-school learning materials are important</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly agree	61	63.5
Agree	29	30.2
Disagree	5	5.2
Don't know	1	1.1
Total	96	100

The findings revealed that majority of the parents (63.5%) strongly agreed that learning materials are important determinants of preschool education quality. Fewer parents (5.2%) disagreed that learning materials are important determinants of preschool education quality. In general, it is evident that majority of the parents consider learning materials a very important component of preschool classrooms considered to be of good quality. This finding is in line with the literature review (Sarah & Lisa, 2006) which established that majority of parents (71.3%) often consider the learning materials very important aspects of quality preschool programs. The findings are also in agreement with Chia (2008) study which found out parents considered availability of learning materials an important factor when selecting preschools for their children.

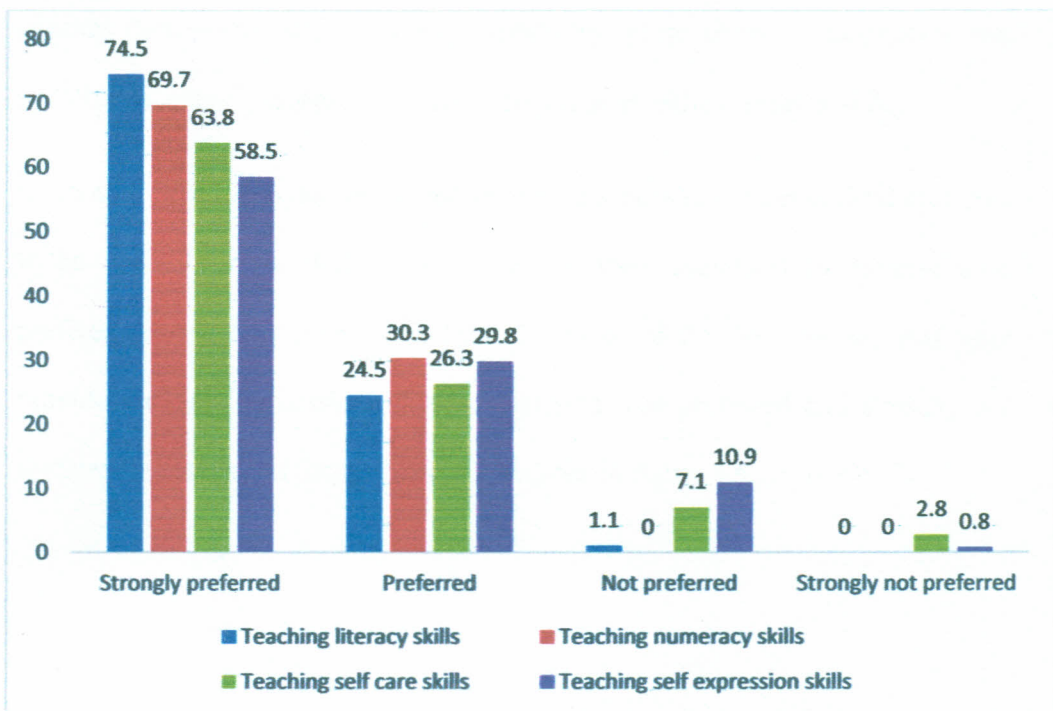
#### 4.4 Preferences of Parents on Preschool Teacher Practices

The second objective of this study was to find out parents' preferred preschool teacher practices. The objective was stated as;

*To find out preferences of parents regarding teacher practices in preschools of good quality.*

To achieve the objective, the study focused on four instructional areas namely; teaching literacy skills, teaching numeracy skills, teaching self care skills and teaching self expression skills. Using a four point scale, the researcher asked parents to rate the importance of the four instructional areas to their children's learning and development. The findings are presented in figure 4.5.

**Figure 4.5: Parents' Rating of Pre-school Teacher Practices**



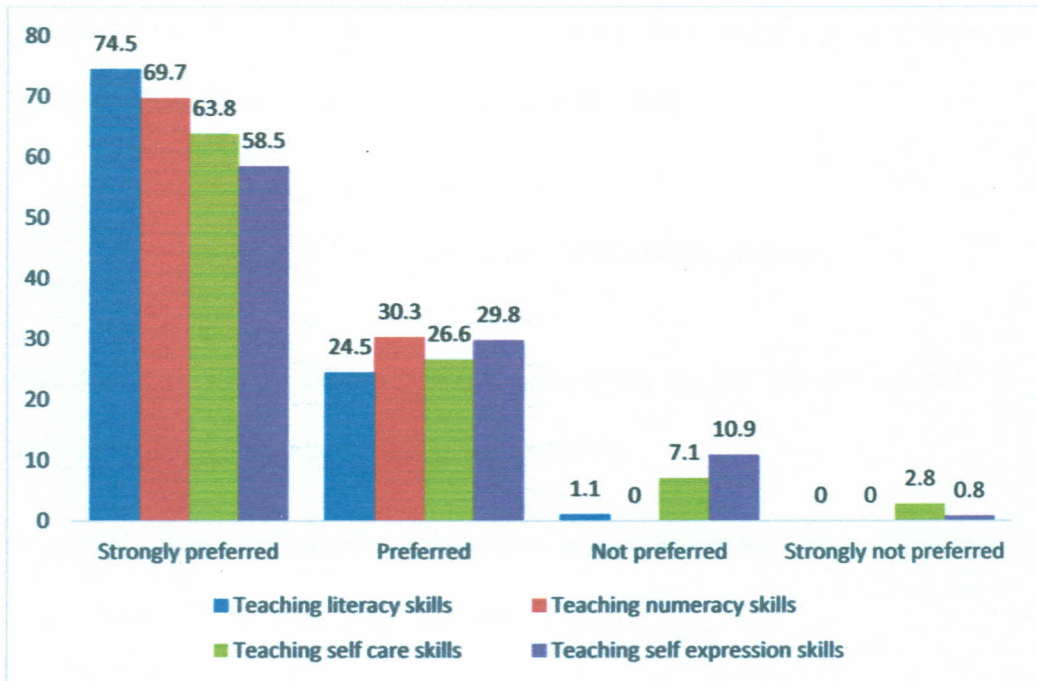
The findings indicate that majority of the parents rated all the four preschool practices “very important”. Comparatively, teaching self-expression skills received the highest “very important” rating (78.2%). Teaching self-care skills was equally highly rated (70.3%). Parental emphasis on self-expression skills was confirmed by one of the teachers who reported that;

*Most parents desire their children to develop self-expression skills. You know at times some children are brought here who cannot even talk. However, parents expect us to work hard and enable the child speak and express himself at the end of the term, (Head teacher, school).*

The head teacher interview confirmed parental responses on the questionnaire that self-expression ability is one of the most important learning outcomes at preschool level. This may be attributed to the fact that during the preschool period, children’s language ability is still limited. Anxious to hear their children express themselves independently, parents are more likely to emphasize that preschool teacher’s instruction should also focus at self-expression skills.

In another item, the study examined teacher practices that parents most preferred to be applied in preschool classes. Parents were requested to indicate their preference on a four point scale by ticking one of the four options that were provided namely; strongly preferred, preferred, not preferred and strongly not preferred. Analysis of the findings is presented in figure 4.6.

**Figure 4.6: Parents' Preferred Teaching Practices**



On strongly preferred rating, it is evident that majority of the parents (74.5%) were in favor of teaching of literacy skills in preschools considered to be of good quality. On the other hand, teaching self-expression skills in preschools received the lowest rating (58.5%) strongly preferred rating. Comparatively, the findings confirm that majority of the parents were in favor of teaching literacy and numeracy skills as the two approaches received an average approval rating of 72.1%. Strong preference for literacy and numeracy teaching is also amplified by the fact that none of the parents indicated that they don't prefer the two approaches. These findings are congruent with Chia (2008) study in Taiwan which found out that parents expected preschool education to cover basic academic skills such as simple reading, writing and calculating skills.

Parental emphasis on teaching of literacy and numeracy skills as established in this study is also in line with Neeru, Sumati&Rishta (2004) study carried out in Kashmir state, India and found out that majority of preschool parents favored teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic in preschools.

#### **4.5 Parental Preferences on Pre-school Children's Learning Competencies**

The third objective of this study was to investigate parents' preferred preschool children's learning competencies. It was stated as;

*To document parental preferences on competencies children ought to attain at the end of preschool period.*

To achieve the objective, the study focused on five main learning competencies namely; basic reading skills, basic writing skills, basic numeracy skills, basic self-care skills and basic self-expression skills. First, parents were asked to give their rating on how important the competencies are to their children's learning and development on a four point scale. They were expected to select one of the four options that were provided along each competence namely; somewhat important, important, very important and don't know. The findings are presented in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Parent's Rating of Pre-school Learning Competencies**

Teaching practice	Your rating on how important the competencies are:			
	Somewhat important (%)	Important (%)	Very important (%)	Don't know (%)
Basic reading skills	0	34.1	63.8	1.1
Basic writing skills	0	25.0	73.4	1.6
Basic numeracy skills	1.1	33.0	64.9	2.1
Basic self care skills	3.3	35.9	58.7	2.2
Self expression skills	1.1	31.5	65.2	2.2

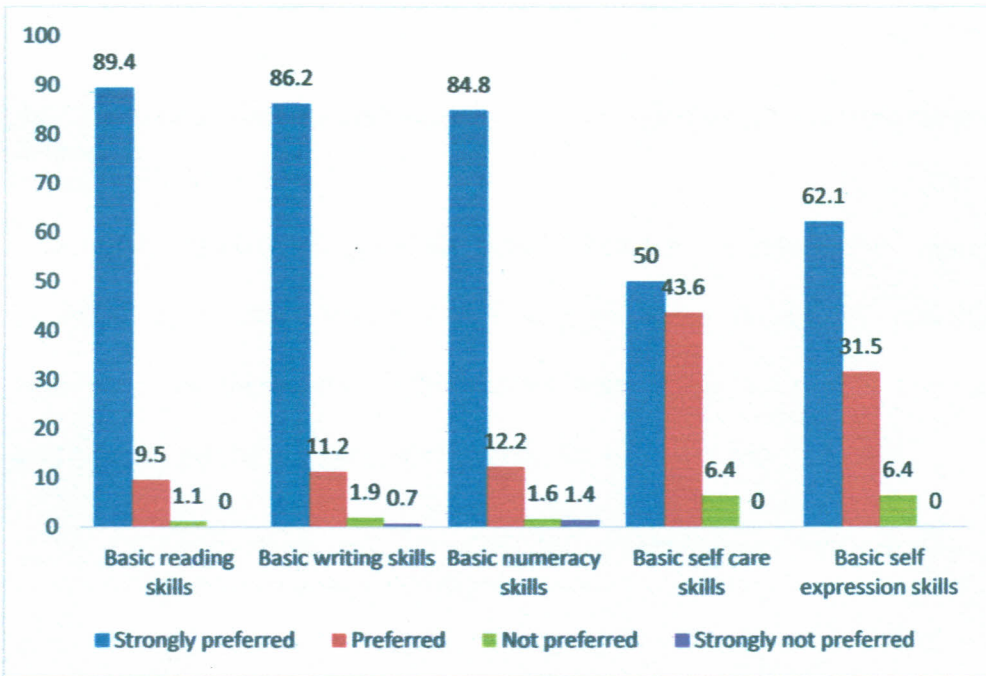
The findings showed that majority of the parents rated all the five competencies as very important. Comparatively, the basic writing skills competence was given the highest very important rating (73.4%). Basic reading skills and basic numeracy skills equally received a high very important rating of 63.8% and 64.9% respectively. On the other hand, basic self care skills received the lowest very important (58.7%) rating by the parents. In support of this finding, one of the participants noted the following during the interview;

*“From my experience, most parents are always concerned with children's writing and numeracy ability. They always check children's books each day. When they notice a child is taking too long master simple writing skills, they often come here to complain and find out why”, (preschool teacher, school 7).*

Parental ratings on the importance of the five skills examined in this study slightly differ from the literature review. For instance, Fouziya and Sarika (2009) study that examined parental perceptions on skills acquired in preschools established that 19% of the parents were in favor of pre-literacy skills. However, in this study, literacy which encompasses both reading and writing skills received an average rating of 68.6%. The high rating of literacy skills in this study may be attributed to methodological differences in data analysis. In this study, response ratings on each skill were calculated independent of each other. Thus, the response ratings on each skill carried a maximum possible score of 100%. On the other hand, in Fouziya&Sarika (2009) study, the percentage approval rating on each skill was computed relative to responses on other skills. Therefore, all the skills had a cumulative rating of 100%.

Parents' preferred learning competencies that children should attain at the end of the preschool period were also examined. Participants were expected to rate their preferences on the five learning competencies selecting one of the four options that were provided namely; strongly preferred, preferred, not preferred and strongly not preferred. A summary of the findings is presented in figure 4.7.

**Figure 4.7: Parents' Preferred Learning Competencies**



The findings indicate that majority of the parents strongly preferred their children to acquire basic reading skills (89.4%) and basic writing skills (86.2%) at the end of the preschool period. Acquisition of basic numeracy skills was also highly rated as 84.8% of the parents indicated that they strongly preferred it. On the other hand, basic self care skills received the lowest strongly preferred rating (50%).

Comparatively, majority of the parents indicated a strong preference towards acquisition of basic reading, basic writing and basic numeracy skills. The three sets of competencies received an average strongly preferred rating of 86.8%. This finding supports conclusions from the reviewed studies which found out that parents consider reading, writing and arithmetic skills as the most important skills

imparted in preschools (Chia, 2008; Fouziya&Sarika, 2009; Petrie &Halloway, 2006).

#### **4.6 Parents' Demographic Factors and their Preferences on Pre-school Education**

The fourth objective of this study was to find out the relationship between parents' demographic factors and their preferences on quality preschool education. The three demographic factors were of interest to this study are parent's age, gender and level of education. The objective was stated as;

*To investigate the extent to which demographic factors influence parental preferences on quality preschool education*

To achieve the objective, two continuous variables on parental preferences were computed by summing up the likert scale items on preferred teacher practices and children's learning competencies. The new dependent variables represented parental preferences on teacher practices and preferred children's learning competencies respectively.

To examine the relationship between parents' demographic factors and their preferences on preschool education, a correlation analysis was conducted in three steps. Thisinvolvedbivariate correlation between demographic factors (age, gender and highest level of education) and parents' preferred children's learning competencies.Before running the correlation analysis, a diagnostic test involving a scatter plot was conducted to test on normality of the data. The ages of participants were reasonably spread out indicating a normal distribution.

Findings of the correlation analysis to assess the relationship between parent's gender and their preferred preschool teaching practices are presented in table 4.5

**Table 4.5: Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Age	Preferred_teaching_ practice_sum
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.126
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.234
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	62.154	13.692
	Covariance	.691	-.152
Preferred_teaching_practic e_sum	Pearson Correlation	.126	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.234	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	13.692	189.758
	Covariance	.152	2.108

a. Listwise N=96

The results of the correlation analysis indicate that there was no statistically significant correlation between parents' age and their preferred preschool teaching practice, ( $r = .126$ ,  $p = < .234$ , with a  $R^2 = 13.69$ ). This implies that the age of parents did not predict their preferred preschool teaching practices.

A correlation analysis of parents' sex and preferred teaching practices was also conducted. The findings are presented in table 4.6

Table 4.6: Correlations<sup>a</sup>

		Sex	Preferred_teaching_practice_sum
Sex	Pearson Correlation	1	.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.091
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	22.280	11.280
	Covariance	.242	.123
Preferred_teaching_practice_sum	Pearson Correlation	.176	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.091	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	11.280	184.280
	Covariance	.123	2.003

a. Listwise N=96

The correlational analysis findings indicate that there was no statistically significant correlation between parents' sex and their preferred preschool teaching practice, ( $r = .176$ ,  $p = < .091$ , with a  $R^2 = 11.28$ ). This implies that the sex of parents did not predict their preferred preschool teaching practices.

In the third correlational analysis, the relationship between parents' level of education and their preferred teaching practices was examined. The findings are presented in table 4.7

**Table 4.7: Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Highest Level of Education	Preferred_teaching_practice_sum
Highest Level of Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	92.516	76.419
	Covariance	1.006	.831
Preferred_teaching_practice_sum	Pearson Correlation	.568**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	76.419	195.570
	Covariance	.831	2.126

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

a. Listwise N=96

Table 4.7 indicates that there was a statistically significant correlation between the highest level of education attained by the parents and their preferred teaching practices, ( $r = .568$ ,  $p = < .000$ , with a  $R^2 = 92.516$ ). This implies that the highest level of education attained by the parents predicted their preferred pre-school teaching practice.

Summing up, the findings of this study indicate that there was no significant correlation between age, gender of parents and their preferred preschool teaching practices. On the other hand, highest level of education attained by the parents was found to be positively correlated with their preferred preschool teaching practices. These findings are in line with the literature review which found out that parents' level of education significantly influenced their preferences on

preschool education (Delaney, 2006; Hirshberg, Huang and Fuller in Fetalvero, 2006). However, unlike the reviewed studies, this study did not collect data about parents' socioeconomic status, occupation and ethnicity which have all been found to be significantly related with parental preference on preschool education.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS, RECCOMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the Conclusion and Implications based on the findings. The Recommendations are also made to different stakeholders based on the findings. The chapter also provides Suggestions for further studies.

#### 5.2 Summary of the Findings

The focus of the study was parental preferences on quality preschool education. Specifically, it aimed at finding out parents' preferences on the preschool learning environment and teaching practices that should be applied in preschools perceived to be of good quality. In addition, the study interrogated preferences of parents on learning competencies children should attain at the end of the preschool period. Lastly, an attempt was made to establish the extent to which the preferences of parents were influenced by their demographic characteristics.

##### 5.2.1 Parents' Preferred Preschool Learning Conditions

In examining the parents' preferred preschool learning conditions, the study mainly focused at three variables. These are preferences on the class size, learning materials and the classroom activity corners. Parents were first asked to indicate if they considered the learning environment an important factor that

influences quality of preschool education. Nearly all the parents (96.9%) indicated that the learning environment is an important factor that influences quality of preschool education.

In another item, the study examined parent's preferred preschool class size. The findings established that over half of the parents (55.9%) preferred a preschool class size of 10-20 learners. On the other hand, 28% of the parents preferred a classroom with a teacher: child ratio of 1:21-30. Only 4.3% of the parents preferred a high teacher: child ratio of 41-50. Parental preference of learner classes was confirmed by one of the teachers who reported that parents often protested against bigger classes.

On availability of activity corners, 63% of the parents strongly agreed that a quality preschool classroom should have well equipped activity corners. Similarly, availability of learning materials received a considerable approval rating from the parents. On this, 64.2% of the parents indicated that availability of a variety of learning materials is a very important determinant of quality preschool education.

### **5.2.2 Parents' Preferred Pre-school Teacher Practices**

The study also examined parents' preferred preschool teacher practices. Four main practices were of interest to this study; teaching literacy skills; teaching numeracy skills; teaching self expression skills and finally self expression skills. In general, majority of the parents rated the four teaching practices very

important to their children's learning. Comparatively, teaching self expression skills received the highest "very important" rating (78.2%).

In an item that explored their preferred teaching approach, 74.5% of the parents preferred teaching of literacy skills in preschools. Teaching of numeracy and self care skills received an approval rating of 69.7% and 63.8% respectively.

### **5.2.3 Parents' Preferred Preschool Children's Learning Competencies**

Five main learning competencies were of interest in this study; basic reading skills, basic writing skills, basic numeracy skills, basic self care skills and basic self expression skills. On an item that examined perceptions of parents on importance of the five skills to their children's learning, nearly all the parents rated the competencies "very important" to their children's later learning.

On the preferred learning competence, majority of the parents (89.4%) strongly preferred acquisition of basic reading skills. Masterly of basic writing and basic numeracy skills also received a high rating. 86.2% of the parents strongly preferred basic writing skills while 84.8% strongly preferred basic numeracy skills.

### **5.2.4 Parents' Demographic Characteristics and their Preferences on Preschool Education**

Information about parents' age, gender and level of education was collected in this study. A correlation analysis found that highest level of education attained was statistically significant in predicting preferences of parents on quality preschool education, ( $r = .568, p = < .000$ , with a  $R^2 = 92.516$ ). On the

other hand, the findings revealed that there was statistically no significant correlation between age of the parents ( $r = .126, p = < .234$ , with a  $R^2 = 13.69$ ) and their preferences on preschool education. Similarly, the analysis established that there was no statistically significant correlation ( $r = .176, p = < .091$ , with a  $R^2 = 11.28$ ) between gender of parents and their preferences on preschool education.

### 5.3 Conclusions

This study has generated new information about parents' conceptualization of quality preschool education in Kenya. Central to this finding is the recognition that the learning environment is a vital determinant of preschool education quality. The findings also suggest that preference of parents on quality preschool education differs due to demographic differences particularly gender and level of education attained.

Based on the responses from various participants who took part in this study, it's evident that parents understand well what preschools should offer to their children. Nearly all parents are emphatic with teaching of reading, writing and basic arithmetic skills. They consider the three skills vital to their children's learning and an important indicator of preschool education quality. This underscores the importance of reflecting parental expectations in preschool policy development and service improvement.

On preschool education inputs, the study revealed that parents strongly desire their children to attend classrooms with low teacher: child ratios. In addition, they desire the classrooms to be equipped well with learning materials and necessary

activity corners. Therefore even in situations where promoting access is the main government agenda, there should be a balance between access and quality. More importantly, preschool education services provided should take into considerations the parents' expectations.

Parents' conceptualization of quality preschool education in this study was closely related with their preferences. For instance, features that they rated as very important were the ones that were rated as strongly preferred. This implies that parent's understanding of what constitutes quality preschool education is most likely to influence implementation of the curriculum and more so teacher practices. Therefore, even as various agencies attempt to meet national and international standards, contextual needs of parents should also be of primary consideration.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations were made:

### **5.4.1 Policy Recommendations**

- i. The study established that parents prefer preschool classes with a variety of learning materials and activity corners. In addition they prefer small class sizes which are considered manageable. Therefore, ensure continued community support of preschool programs, attempts should be made to address parental concerns on the learning environment. In addition, necessary learning materials should be provided to all preschools.

- ii. Majority of the parents as established in this study are in favour of teaching of literacy and numeracy skills in the preschools. To ensure that other aspects of children's development is not ignored, quality assurance officers should emphasize on holistic approach to implementation of preschool curriculum. Teachers should be encouraged not to ignore other essential developmental domains such physical and socio-emotional aspects.
- iii. There is need for sensitization of parents about the philosophy of preschool education. This will help them embrace the broader concept preschools as centres for children's holistic development as opposed to classes for learning literacy and numeracy skills.
- iv. Quality assurance officers at local level should be encouraged to do holistic assessments during school visits. Non-examinable skills should also be part of the school monitoring tool to check the extent to which preschools are promoting all-round development of children.

#### **5.4.2 Suggestions for Further Research**

Due to the scope of this study, some gaps emerged which require further research in the following areas;

- This study only focused at three main aspects of preschool education. There is need to undertake another study and include more variables with a view of generating more information about parents' conceptualization of quality preschool education.

- A similar study should be carried out in other areas with a view of generating more information about parent's conceptualization of quality preschool education in Kenya.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Questionnaire for Parents

I am carrying out a study to establish parental preferences on quality preschool education in Athi river district. You have been selected as one of the respondents representing the preschool where your child is enrolled. The purpose of this questionnaire is to seek information from you as a parent about your beliefs on what constitutes quality preschool education. Please note that there is no right or wrong answer; only your honest opinion is sought. The information you provide will be used for academic purposes only. Your identity and information you provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality. I will be grateful if you participate in this study by completing the questionnaire.

#### **Instructions**

Please tick (✓) as appropriate in the bracket/table

#### **SECTION A: RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

1. How old are you? Below 20 years { }    21-30 { }    31-39 { }    Above  
40 { }

2. Your sex: Female { }    Male { }

3. What is your highest level of education? Primary and below { } Completed  
Secondary { } Diploma { } Degree and above { } other qualification  
(Specify).....

**SECTION B: PREFERENCES ON THE PRE-SCCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

1. Do you consider the preschool learning environment an important factor that influences quality of preschool education your child receives?

{ } Yes { } No

2. If yes in 1, how important?

{ } Somewhat important { } Important { } Very important { } Not sure

3. The table below contains a list of 3 factors associated with the preschool learning environment. Kindly indicate your feeling about how important they are in influencing quality of preschool education your child receives. Please tick as appropriate.

Factor	Your rating on how important the factors are			
	Not important	Important	Very important	Don't know
Teacher: child ratio				
Activity corners				
Learning materials				

4. What will be your preference with regard to the above factors in a preschool that you consider to be of good quality? A good quality preschool should meet the following conditions;

- i. Have a teacher to child ratio of: 1: 10-20 { } 1: 21-30 { } 1: 31-40 { }  
1: 41-50 { } Other (Specify).....

- ii. Have well equipped activity corners: Strongly agree { } Agree { }  
Disagree { } Don't know { }
- iii. Have a variety of learning materials: Strongly agree { } Agree { }  
Disagree { } Don't know { }

**SECTION C: PARENTAL PREFERENCES ON PRE-SCHOOL  
TEACHER PRACTICES**

1. The table below contains 3 types of preschool teacher practices that may be observed in a classroom setting. Kindly indicate how important is it for the teacher to implement the practices in preschools you consider to be of good quality. Please tick as appropriate.

Factor	Your rating on how important the practices are			
	Not important	Important	Very important	Don't know
Teaching literacy skills				
Teaching numeracy skills				
Teaching self care skills				
Teaching self expression skills				

2. The table below contains a set of four teaching practices that are normally applied in preschool classrooms. Please indicate your preferred teaching practice.

Teaching practice	Strongly preferred	Preferred	Not preferred	Strongly not preferred
Teaching literacy skills				
Teaching numeracy skills				
Teaching self-care skills				
Teaching self-expression skills				

**SECTION D: PREFERENCES ON PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S LEARNING COMPETENCIES**

1. The table below contains a set of competencies that children may attain as a result of school exposure. How important is it for children to attain the competencies at the end of the preschool period? Please tick as appropriate

Learning competencies	Your rating on how important the competencies are			
	Not important	Important	Very important	Don't know
Basic reading skills				
Basic writing skills				
Basic numeracy skills				
Basic self-care skills				
Basic self-expression skills				

2. Children's learning outcomes is one of the key indicators used to measure quality of education. The table below contains a set of competencies that children should achieve at the end of the preschool period. Please indicate your preference on the indicators that should be attained by children at the end of the preschool period.

Learning competencies	Strongly preferred	Preferred	Not preferred	Strongly not preferred
Basic reading skills				
Basic writing skills				
Basic numeracy skills				
Basic self-care skills				
Basic self-expression skills				

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.**

## **Appendix II: Interview Schedule for Head Teachers**

1. How do parents perceive the quality of preschool education offered in this school? (Probe reasons to the perceptions given)
2. Do parents consider preschool learning environment an important indicator of good quality preschool education? What about the following features of the preschool learning environment (Teacher child ratio, classroom activity corners and learning resources)
3. What are their preferences with regard to the learning environment features in 2 above?
4. Do parents consider teacher practices an important determinant of quality in preschool education programs?
5. Which practices do they insist that be applied in preschools? (Probe on: Teaching literacy skills, teaching numeracy skills, teaching self-care skills, giving homework and teaching self-expression skills).
6. Do parents appraise quality of preschools based on competencies children attain at the end of the preschool period?
7. Which competency (ies) do parents most desire that their children attain at the end of the preschool period? (Basic reading skills, basic writing skills, basic numeracy skills, self-care skills and self-expression skills)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**

### **Appendix III: Interview Schedule for Pre-school Teachers**

1. What criteria do parents use to judge quality of preschool education their child receives here?
2. From your interaction with parents, do they consider the preschool learning environment an important feature of quality preschool programs? If yes, to what extent do they consider the following features as important determinants quality in preschool programs (Teacher: child ratio, classroom activity corners and learning resources).
3. What are their preferences with regard to the preschool learning environment features in 2 above?
4. Do parents consider the classroom practices you apply important determinants of quality preschool education? If yes which practice do they prefer that you apply? (Probe on: Teaching literacy skills, teaching numeracy skills, teaching self-care skills and teaching self-expression skills).
5. Do parents judge quality of preschools based on competencies their children attain at the end of the preschool period?
6. If yes in 5, which competency (ies) do parents prefer most that their children attain at the end of the preschool period? (Basic reading skills, basic writing skills, basic numeracy skills, self-care skills and self-expression skills)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**

**KENYATTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

## Appendix VI: Athi River Sub-County Public Preschools

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Telegrams: "SCHOOLING" Athi-River  
OFFICE,  
Telephone:



DISTRICT EDUCATION

P.O BOX 114  
ATHI-RIVER

When replying please quote

REF:

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- SCHOOL
1. KASUITU
  2. ATHI RIVER
  3. KWAMBOO
  4. MAVOKO
  5. NGALALYA
  6. KYUMBI
  7. MUTHWANI
  8. IVOVOANI
  9. KINANIE
  10. OLOSHAIKI
  11. KAMULU
  12. KATANI
  13. KALIMANI
  14. ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISS
  15. KAAANI
  16. NGELANI
  17. MATHATANI
  18. NDOVOINI
  19. WATHIA
  20. MITATINI
  21. KAJANI
  22. SEME
  23. MLOLONGO
  24. NTHULUNI
  25. MT. VIEW
  26. IVALINI
  27. GITHUNGURI
  28. KAVOMBONI
  29. DAYSTAR MULANDI
  30. ST. PAUL
  31. KMC DEB
  32. KWAKALUSYA
  33. NZOIANI
  34. KWAMANG'ELI

Public ECDE Centres

1. Kasuitu
2. Athi River
3. Imani
4. Kwambo
5. Mavoko
6. Ngulalya
7. Kyumbi
8. ABC Kyumbi
9. Kiasi
10. Muthwani
11. Kilimani
12. Bethuel
13. Angelas
14. Ivovoani
15. Kinanie
16. Kimong'o
17. Oloshaike
18. Kamuly
19. Katani
20. Kalimani
21. St. Francis of Assisi
22. Kaani
23. Ngelani
24. Mathatani
26. Wathia
27. Mitatini
28. Seme
30. Mlolongo
31. Nthuluni
32. Mt. View
33. Ivalini
34. Githunguri
35. Kavomboni
36. Daystar
37. St Paul
38. KMC
39. Kwakalusya
40. Nzoiani
41. Kwamangeli
42. ABC Ndovoini
43. SIKIA
44. Kaani
- new UP Commys
- By Kimau
2. Ngel II
3. Sabaki
4. Sheet cotton
5. 10 + new

## Appendix VII: Research Permit



### NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,  
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P.O. Box 30623-00100  
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref. No.

Date:

**NACOSTI/P/14/4863/1059**

**9<sup>th</sup> April, 2014**

Donvan Obangi Amenyia  
Kenyatta University  
P.O.Box 43844-00100  
NAIROBI.

#### RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on "*Parental preferences on quality preschool education in Athi River District, Machakos County.*" I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Machakos County** for a period ending **31<sup>st</sup> December, 2014.**

You are advised to report to the **County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Machakos County** before embarking on the research project.

On completion of the research, you are expected to submit **two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf** of the research report/thesis to our office.

*Said Hussein*  
**SAID HUSSEIN**  
FOR: SECRETARY/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner  
The County Director of Education  
Machakos County.

*National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation is ISO 9001: 2008 Certified*