

## **The Role of Home Background on Academic Achievement at Grade Seven Level in Mount Darwin Schools in Mashonaland Central Province of Zimbabwe**

**Rittah Kasowe**

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Education: Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

### **\*Corresponding Author:**

Rittah Kasowe

Email: [tshabalalathembinkosi@yahoo.com](mailto:tshabalalathembinkosi@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract:** The aim of this present study was to examine the relationship between home background and academic achievement of Grade seven pupils in Mount Darwin District in northern Zimbabwe. The quantitative methodology was used and a population of all the Grade seven teachers in the district. A sample of 100 teachers randomly selected was used. Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire. The study revealed that the majority of the children came from economically sound home backgrounds with parents who had high levels of literacy. The parents were also able to provide educational and material support to their children and thus the children performed very well. The study recommends that parents should be more involved in the education of their children.

**Keywords:** Home background, academic achievement, urban schools, grade seven, province, relationship.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Educators have long been interested in understanding the relationship between the background of children and their academic performance [1]. This is because the academic performance of children at school is influenced directly or indirectly by their home background. The family exerts a profound influence on the response of the child to school [2]. The environment that is, the provision of learning materials at home, father's occupational group, parents' education level, material care and a number of socializing agents play a crucial role in the academic performance of pupils [3]. In Zimbabwe for example, like in most developing countries, malnutrition and poor living conditions may have an influence by limiting the child's concentration at school [4]. Most Grade seven teachers who produce poor results in public examinations attribute these results to the negative influence of the children's background on their school performance [5]. Nyagura and Riddele [6] argue that the variation in student achievement is attributed to the student attended and to a greater extent, the type of the home background the student comes from. Poor housing and overcrowding cannot only seriously impede the child's homework but even his/her opportunity for reading and constructive play [7]. It is therefore important for teachers to understand the different backgrounds of their pupils so that they may appreciate some of the challenges they are going through. This study therefore, examined the relationship between home background and academic achievement at Grade seven levels in Zimbabwean primary schools.

### **Statement of the problem**

The performance of pupils in their academic work is the concern of not just teachers and school administrators, but that of other stakeholders as well. It, therefore, becomes a worrisome situation if children's performance in their academic work is persistently below expected standards.

### **Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between home background and academic achievement of pupils at Grade seven and establish effective strategies of promoting parental involvement in the education of their children.

### **Research objectives**

The research had the following objectives:

- To establish the extent to which family characteristics influence pupils' performance.
- To examine the extent to which social class, beliefs and values influence the child's academic performance.
- To proffer suggestions for creating more conducive home backgrounds that promotes academic achievement of children.

### **Research questions**

The research was guided by the following questions:

- How does the family's characteristic influence pupils' performance?

- To what extent do social class, beliefs and values affect the child's academic achievement?
- How can schools create more conducive home backgrounds that promote academic achievement?

### Review of related literature

Children's positions in school and society are determined in large part by their family background [8]. According to Ballantine [9] one half to two thirds of student achievement variance is directly related to home variables such as socio-economic level, and family processes are better predictors of positive achievements and grades than all other variables. Family and students aspirations for the future are another aspect of the influence of class, racial or ethnic background [10]. Parents who set high standards and have aspirations for their children than those who do not [11].

Kaur [12] conducted a survey in which parents were asked questions about their aspirations of their children, the parents' own aspirations, interest in academic activities, pressure for achievements in school, rewards for educational achievements, knowledge of the educational progress of their children and preparation and planning for their children's attainment of educational goals. An overall measure of this parental achievement orientation was found to be highly correlated with the child's achievement in school [12]. Deutsch [13] suggests that the suitability of the home environment for the development of cognitive skills entails parental inspirations, interest in academic activities, knowledge of educational progress of their children and preparation and planning for their children's attainment of educational goals.

There is a great deal of evidence that socio-economic status has a considerable effect on academic achievement and studies in the United States show that amongst the students who went to college, those of high ability and high socio-economic status were likely to graduate from college, and much more likely to go or enter a graduate or a professional school [14]. Cole *et al.* [15] concluded that a positive family environment is most likely to encourage a favourable response to school and a good academic performance. A relationship between social class background and educational achievement was established that is, children from high class perform extremely well as compared with those from average and poor background [16].

Where virtually everyone enjoys an adequate basic income and good housing, the material environment of the home was of less importance in the differentiating between successful and unsuccessful

child, than difference in the size of the family and the educational attitudes and ambitions of the parents [14]. Cameron [16] also found that scarcity of such things as magazines, books, toys and other similar objects in the family were found to impoverish the visual environment of a child, hence drawing back the child's scope led to the conclusion that children raised in severely restricted environments frequently perform poorly in schools. Berk [11] suggests that children succeed in large part because of their family background and what parents do to support their children in their education and this includes guidelines about after school and week-end activities, television watching, homework and other school-related decisions.

In another study, Banks [14] considered the effects of school social structure and social climate on student achievement and found that the school can make a difference in academic achievement. High achievement performance standards set by teachers also generate greater effort on homework [14]. The school therefore, can influence the home environment in many ways to motivate both pupils and parents to participate in academic activities to improve the performance of the pupils [10].

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative methodology. The quantitative methodology was chosen for its ability to enable this study's findings to be generalized to other districts [17]. The quantitative methodology was also found to be useful in this study because it enabled the researcher to investigate 100 teachers' perceptions on the relationship between home background and academic performance of pupils. The study settled for the survey research design. The use of the survey research design enabled the researcher to gather widespread perceptions of respondents in regard to the studied phenomenon [18]. The study used simple random sampling to select the 100 Grade seven teachers because it permitted every teacher to have an equal change of participating in the study [19]. The researcher used a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was chosen because as Borg and Gall [20] observe, it has the ability to reach many respondents who live at widely dispersed addresses and preserves anonymity which encourages greater honesty. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the selected respondents at their schools and collected them after two weeks. The questionnaire produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine the link between home background and academic performance of Grade seven pupils in Zimbabwe.

**Presentation of Data**

The information on table 1 above shows that there were more female teachers (55%) than male teachers (45%). The statistical significance of this information is that it confirms Makoni (2012)'s findings that revealed that most urban schools in Zimbabwe had female teachers than male ones.

The health record in table 2 reveals that most pupils (69%) have no knew record of being attacked by the common diseases that affect children especially those who are not immunized. Only a few reported attacks by various diseases at one time or the other.

Information on table 3 above shows that 66% of the pupils have three meals a day. Those who have one meal a day constituted 15% of the respondents.

The majority of parents and guardians of children in the schools understudy were literate (92%). A few of the parents were said to be either semi-literate or totally illiterate (6% and 2% respectively).

Table 5 above shows that the majority of parents (85%) assisted their children with homework and those who did not assist their children with homework constituted 15%.

The performance of pupils as shown on table 6 above reveals that most pupils were said to be performing above average (71%). Those who were average performers were indicated to be 15% of the respondents and those who were said to be below average constituted 14% of the respondents.

**Table-1: Composition of sample by gender (N=100)**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	45	45
Female	55	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-2: Teachers' responses on the health background of their pupils (N=100)**

Health Record	Number of children once attacked	Percentage
Bilharzia	8	8
Malaria	5	5
Kwashiorkor	5	5
Measles	6	6
Tuberculosis	3	3
Tetanus	4	4
Number of recorded disease	69	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-3: Teachers' responses on the frequency of meals by their pupils at home (N=100)**

Meals per day	Number of children	Percentage
More than 3 meals	10	10
3 meals	66	66
2 meals	9	9
1 meal	15	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-4: Teachers' responses on the literacy levels of parents / guardians of their children (N=100)**

Literacy level	Number of children	Percentage
Literate	92	92
Semi-literate	6	6
Illiterate	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-5: Teachers' responses on educational assistance children receive at home (N=100)**

Responses	Number of children	Percentage
Homework assisted	85	85
Homework unassisted	15	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-6: Teachers’ responses on performance of children they taught (N=100)**

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Below average	14	14
Average	15	15
Above average	71	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**DISCUSSION**

Information from the study revealed that most pupils have no record of being attacked by common diseases. Most of the pupils were also immunized from various diseases that attack children. As Banks [14] postulates, common conditions of poor health and nutrition can affect education in a number of ways; first, children’s health and nutrition has an impact on their access to school; second children’s school readiness can be affected by their health and nutrition and this may have knock-on-effects for their educational achievement and attainment particularly where effects of disease and poor nutrition on brain development persist as cognitive impairments or emotional problems throughout the school-age years.

The study also revealed that the majority of children have three meals a day. This means that children in the schools understudy have access to food adequately. This is a positive development as food plays a very important role in the growth of a child’s cognitive abilities. Berk [11] states that access to food is essential to optimal development and function in children and adults and there is evidence that a poor diet associated with high fat sugar and processed food content in early childhood may be associated with small reduction in intelligence quotient in later childhood; while, a healthy diet, associated with high intakes of nutrient rich foods may be associated with small increases in intelligence quotient.

The bulk of parents in this study assist their children with homework. As Berk [11] observes, children succeed in large part because of their family background and what parents do to support their children in their education and this includes guidelines about after school and week end activities, television watching, homework and other school-related decision. This dovetails with observations by Deutsch [13] who suggests that the suitability of the home environment for the development of cognitive skills entails parental inspirations, interest in academic activities, and knowledge of educational progress of their children’s attainment of educational goals.

Most children were said to be performing above average. The study also revealed that the bulk of the parents are literate. As Banks [14] postulates, a positive family environment is most likely to encourage a favourable response to school and a good academic

performance. A relationship between social class background and educational achievement was established that is, children from high class perform extremely well as compared with those from average and poor background.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Given the background of the above findings, the researcher makes the following conclusions:

- Most pupils have not been attacked by common diseases due to the fact that they benefit from various immunization programmes.
- The majority of children have three meals a day which implies that they have adequate food supplies.
- Most parents assist their children with homework.
- Most children were said to be performing above average in their academic work and the bulk of the parents were literate.

**Recommendations**

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher would like to make some recommendations: Parents and guardians are encouraged to maintain the positive contribution they are making to education through the support of their children. The children are receiving adequate meals and medication. Parents also help their children with homework and as a result, children are performing very well in their academic work. Heads of schools are also implored to continue encouraging parents to maintain this positive support for the high performance of their children in school work.

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