

## **EXAMINING HOW THE FAMILY-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AFFECTS LEARNERS' DISCIPLINE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KANDARA CONSTITUENCY, MURANG'A COUNTY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the Study:** This study examined how Family-School Environment Affects Learners' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Kandara Constituency, Murang'a County. Family school partnerships are critical factors influencing learners' discipline in every country. In Kenya, school family partnership began way back in the 1980s through the Parent-Teacher Association to enable both the school and the family to partner for the wellbeing of learners. The study adopted Joyce Epstein's family-school partnership theory.

**Statement of the Problem:** Despite the ministry's effort to improve students' discipline, this effort has been frustrated in public secondary schools due to: a lack of parent involvement in school, home and family backgrounds and the role of media and politics. For example, in Kandara Constituency, the discipline of students in public secondary schools is deteriorating and it is not clear whether this has been due to negligence in school-home partnership in the upbringing of students.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a descriptive research design using a mixed-method approach. A convergent parallel mixed-method approach was adopted for the study. The targeted population included public secondary schools, principals, teachers, parents, county directors, and students of the Kandara constituency. Purposive sampling selected ten public secondary schools, ten principals, ten parents, and one County director. Simple random sampling was used to select 30 out of 188 teachers. 120 out of 1200 students were sampled using proportionate sampling. The questionnaire and the interview guide were used as primary data instruments. Instrument reliability was tested using the pre-test method. The retest was done after a time interval of two weeks. Scores from both periods were correlated using a Pearson product-moment formula to identify any present variations. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data derived from the interview guide, focus groups and open-ended items

were thematically analyzed, coded and recorded into narratives and direct quotations to aid the findings of the quantitative data that was collected using questionnaire items. Quantitative data presentation was done using bar graphs and tables.

**Result:** The study established that a conducive family school environment influenced learner behaviour in public secondary school.

**Conclusion:** It was concluded that schools partnering with families were satisfactory variables in influencing the discipline of learners in public secondary schools.

**Recommendation:** The study recommended that similar studies be carried out in the other counties to offer comprehensive discipline attention to enable the educational stakeholders to promote partnership geared toward shaping learners' behaviour in public secondary schools.

**Keywords:** *Family, School-Environment, Learners-Discipline, Public secondary schools*

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## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In a school context, family-school partnerships are characterized as collaborative interactions and activities involving school staff, parents, and other student family members (Epstein, 2011). The importance of the family-school partnership to a learner's discipline at any given time cannot be overstated (Barley, 2017) because of its crucial contribution to a learner's physical and emotional needs for holistic growth and life development.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2005), Family School cooperation establishes collaborative links between families and schools. In such partnerships, families, teachers, and community members work together to satisfy the educational needs of pupils. The family-school collaboration includes parents and teachers working together to help children develop their skills and shared goals and plans that help students achieve. Therefore, it can be stated that family-school partnerships are an essential aspect of students' learning and should be taken seriously in schools.

The concept of family-school partnership dates back to the 1960s. Spry (2002) describes the 1960s as the time when never considered parents as partners in the education of learners. The top-down bureaucratic nature of the educational systems perpetuated the thinking that teachers must know and do everything concerning the development of a learner. This original paradigm of thinking was often referred to as the separation paradigm (Amatea, 2009). Policymakers perpetuated the separation paradigm in the 1960s by making no provision for interacting with parents. During that era, teachers were expected to provide compensatory education whereby the school environment mitigated the negative experiences of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Amatea, 2009).

A shift in thinking was referred to as a remediation paradigm (Jones, 2015). The remediation paradigm was the beginning of policies that included inclusive participation in programs designed for learners with different needs. Teachers were seen as leaders throughout the remedial era. Teachers wielded control, while parents had a supporting role. Their responsibilities include, for example, responding to teacher requests and attending conferences. During this time, the emphasis was on parental inclusion rather than family participation, and there was no concept of partnership or alliance with parents (Jones, 2015). Gordon (2011) acknowledged the role of parents in schools and improved parental involvement in school events in the 1970s. It emphasized the importance

of educators adopting new attitudes toward parents and collaborating with them to improve children's academic achievement.

School systems began to appreciate the added value of shared leadership and the value of parents collaborating with schools. With the newest paradigm shift to partnership and collaboration, school staff members recognized the importance of seeing students and their families as collaborators in the educational process. Instead of using an outsider's perspective on family life, the Gordon concept is now being used in educational systems as a new method that includes the perspectives of all stakeholders. As a result, teachers may now embrace how the school and home interact to influence learners' progress as they develop and move from one stage of life to the next (Sebling, 2012). Consequently, this has been adopted by most school systems across the globe.

The United States' federal government has emphasized the importance of parental involvement in their children's academic progress and participation in various school activities. Schools urged teachers and parents to communicate often to track students' progress to track students' progress. Various parental participation programs have been designed and executed to increase students' academic progress. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Central Education Department (CED), 17 states have mandated that all districts and schools implement parental engagement programs to improve student conduct and overall outcomes (Levanda, 2011). A report by United Nations (2009) highlighted the need to use the family-school partnership to minimize the escalating incidences of indiscipline cases among the youth.

According to Mahura and Hungi (2016), parent's involvement in the teaching and learning process pushes students to improve their behaviour and academic success. The study noted that learning should not be restricted to student-teacher interaction without the involvement of parents. In Uganda, schools encourage parental involvement, including parenting, volunteering, and decision-making. The involvement of parents has significant value in the improvement of good conduct, school attendance, and the academic performance of pupils.

The Kenya education policy considers the improvement of students' discipline as a strategy to attain quality education guided by its vision 2030 for the achievement and attainment of Sustainable Development Goal IV. However, Sagini Task Force (2017) reported that a lack of role models from home and school, an overburdened school curriculum, a breakdown in communication between students and Administration, teachers' lack of commitment to their jobs, and inadequate teaching/learning facilities are all factors that contribute to student unrest. It was recommended that the involvement of education stakeholders in school matters that concerns a learner's discipline. A report by the Murang'a County government in 2018 indicates that from 2006- to 2018, Murang'a County experienced massive student unrest attributed to the laxity of both family and school in child upbringing. As a result, the present research looks into how the family-school environment affects learners' discipline in public secondary schools in Kandara Constituency, Murang'a County.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

School-home partnership impacts students' discipline and education (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Nyaga, Mwanja & Manyasi, 2017). Gitome, Katola, and Nyabwari (2013) revealed that students' discipline in public secondary schools was positively related to their performance in academics and other aspects such as self-control, respect for parents and teachers, and accountability. Consequently, the ministry of education In Kenya has been working hard to create an environment that encourages students' discipline and curbs school unrest. Despite the ministry's effort to

improve students' discipline, this effort has been frustrated in public secondary schools due to: a lack of parent involvement in school, home and family backgrounds and the role of media and politics. For example, in Kandara Constituency, the discipline of students in public secondary schools is deteriorating and the reasons associated with it are not clear. Some researchers argue that the negligence in school-home partnership and upbringing of students has been the main reasons for indiscipline the of schools. There has also been limited literature relating school-home partnership with students' discipline. These concerns necessitated the current study to assess how the family-school environment affects learners' discipline in public secondary schools in Kandara Constituency, Murang'a County.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

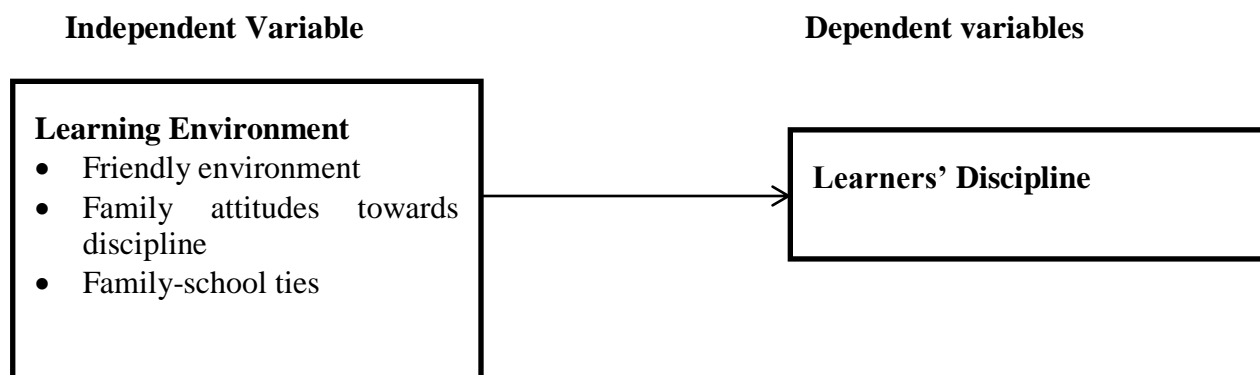


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, Source: Researcher (2022)

### Theoretical Framework

This study used the Family-School Partnership Theory presented by Epstein (1995). The theory states that schools involve families in the education of their students and create and implement efficient two-way communication about school initiatives and student progress. This helps track students' discipline and decision-making, including parents in school governance and gathering. Also, arranging aid and support from classrooms, school programs, and student activities is what volunteering requires. Learning at home: giving families information, ideas, and chances to help learners with academic decisions, assignments, and curriculum-related activities at home.

Community collaboration was studied extensively by Hall and Quinn (2014) and suggested that different schools have used different components under each type of involvement because different schools have varied demands. The weakness found in theory has been covered in the modified model of Epstein (2011). The new theory states that families have substantially contributed to students' learning environment. Parents, schools, and society share a common understanding of and dedication to student education (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The theory recommends and encourages all parties involved to work together to improve students' lives. This theory was adopted in this study because it emphasizes the importance of parents and schools in a child's development. It is assumed that students learn excellent behaviour in family-created, success-oriented learning environments in conjunction with the school. Consequently, if youngsters observe their parents and teachers behaving appropriately, they may decide to follow suit. Furthermore, children are less likely to have positive relationships with others outside of their

family if their parents do not have significant interactions (Scott & Lilja, 2010; Fletcher & Stenberg, 2004; and Mwenda, 2010).

Based on the potential found in the theory, families and schools need to work together effectively. Parents and teachers are responsible for helping their children in terms of discipline. According to Epstein (2009), consultation and collaboration between the family and the school create the atmosphere for a learner's full potential to be realized.

### **Empirical Studies**

The environment plays a vital role in learners' behaviour and personal discipline. It is assumed that a positive environment is likely to create a self-controlled individual, while an environment that is not positive will produce a problematic individual. Chinu, Jinim, and Amaechi (2019) looked into the impact of the school environment on students' achievement in Rivers State technical institutions in Nigeria. The study used a descriptive survey approach and discovered that school structures and location impact students' achievement in Rivers State technical institutions. As a result, the study advised that suitable and congenial classroom buildings be given in public schools to aid in successful teaching and the growth of students.

There have been significant studies in education systems, including the study of Chinu, Jinim and Amaechi (2019) conducted in technical colleges. Despite the comprehensive studies found in the literature on education, there is little information about the involvement of parents in the discipline of students. For example, the study conducted by Langenhof and Komdeur (2018) discovered that the parental environment plays a significant contribution. Parents affect their children through the examples they set, their parenting behaviours such as grooming, and the behaviour they actively encourage their children to correct and approve.

The discipline gained special consideration in education systems and the learning environment. Bailey (2017) examined the influence of the environment on the behaviour and success of learners in Bagwell College. The study employed a qualitative approach and narratives research design. Findings indicated that school conditions, family lives and availability, teacher values, rules and disciplinary tactics, and caring family relationships impacted the learner's discipline. The relationship between society and learning was studied extensively by Freeks (2015). The study found out that secularism, materialism, consumerism, and religious indifference to society affect the discipline of students. Also, the influence of social media was found to affect the youth in the learning process. suji (2017) reported that learners need discipline formation and more role models to be motivated to meet society's demands.

Narvaez and Lapsley (2007) investigated the teaching moral character practices for teacher education. It was suggested that caring schools and classrooms increase social and emotional bonding among learners and positive interpersonal encounters and character development. Similarly, Greenfield, Sheldon and Epstein's (2012) agreed that family and community involvement could help improve the behaviour of learners in Baltimore, USA. The study pointed out that school settings and family dynamics influence the learner's discipline, including parenting, decision-making style, rules and discipline tactics, and caring family ties. However, these studies were conducted in the USA, a country with a different geographical context of African countries including Kenya.

For example, Abiodun and Ojo (2015) assessed learners' socio-economic background and indiscipline in public secondary schools in Nigeria. It was noted that a learner's family background

was essential in developing a learner's academic progress. Mabale (2015) conducted a study to assess the impact of the home learning environment on student discipline management in Kenya public secondary schools. It was discovered that parental support and the learning environment in the home had a good and significant impact on student discipline management in public secondary schools. The study suggested that parents create a pleasant learning atmosphere for their children by providing study rooms, a calm environment, and serving. However, the present study assesses how the family school environment and the discipline of students in Kandara constituency.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey approach used qualitative and quantitative paradigms to assess the problem under study. The basic strategy was a convergent parallel mixed-method approach. According to Creswell (2014), convergent parallel mixed methods are suitable for data collected once using quantitative and qualitative methods. The method allows the merging of findings throughout the study's interpretation phase with equal weight given to both forms of research. The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Kenya's Central Region's Kandara Constituency, Murang'a County. The constituency has recorded instances of student unrest, as noted in the work of Gikungu and Karanja (2014) and Munyao (2018). It is unclear whether such indiscipline among students is attributed to laxity in family-school involvement.

The dilemma noticed in the relationship has influenced this study to be conducted in public secondary schools in Kandara Constituency, Murang'a County. The study targeted all public secondary schools in Kandara Constituency and principals, teachers, parents, students, and the TSC County director. The current study used both probability and non-probability sampling strategies to select samples. Ten public secondary schools and ten principals were chosen using purposive sampling. The same sampling method was used to select ten parents and one County Director of education from the country. Simple random sampling was employed to select thirty teachers from Kandara Constituency's public secondary schools. The researcher adopted the formula designed by Yamane in 1967, which caters for the calculation of sample size for proportions (Kasiulevičius, Šapoka & Filipavičiūtė, 2006).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N=Population size

e= level of precision which is constant (0.05)

n=sample size

This study used questionnaires, an interview guide and a focused group discussion guide to collect data. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used to analyze the data in the study. Quantitative data were analyzed, and descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and frequencies were displayed in bar charts, pie charts and tables. The Qualitative data gathered through interviews and open-ended questions were processed and presented as themes, narratives, and direct quotations.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

It discovered that the response rates for respondents were 80% and above, which is recommendable for data analysis (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2013). The study revealed that all the ten principals selected for the study were available for the interviews, making the response rate 100%. Similarly, out of the 30 questionnaires distributed to teachers, 25 (83%) were filled and returned. Some three questionnaires were not returned because the teachers had forgotten them at their homes when the researcher was collecting them. Two teachers did not return the questionnaire because they suffered from COVID-19 and were isolated from school. The TSC County Director was available for the interview hence the 100% response rate. Out of 120 questionnaires distributed to students, 115 were filled and returned, making a response rate of 96%. The questionnaire's return rate for students was less than five questionnaires because two students were sick and failed to fill and return the questionnaires. The three students were on suspension at the time when the researcher collected questionnaires. Out of the ten parents, eight were available for the interviews making a response rate of 80%. Out of the two parents who were not interviewed, one did not want to participate due to unrevealed reasons and another one had lost a relative and could not participate in the study.

**Family-School Environment and Learners' Discipline**

The relationship between the Family-School and learners' environment and the discipline of students are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Family-school environment and learners' discipline**

Statement	SA f (%)	A f (%)	UD f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)
<b>Teachers</b>					
Family school ties are encouraged	13(52.0)	5(20.0)	2 (16.0)	4(16)	1(4.0)
The family-school environment is friendly	1 (4.0)	6 (24.0)	1 (4.0)	10 (40.0)	7(28.0)
The relational trust exists between families and the school	12 (48.0)	7(28.0)	2(8.0)	3(12.0)	1(4.0)
The school has resources available to instil discipline	3(12.0)	2(8.0)	2(8.0)	4(16.0)	14(56.0)
<b>Students</b>					
Family school ties are encouraged	16(13.9)	54(47.0)	20(17.4)	10(8.7)	15 (13.0)
Family school environment is friendly	16 (13.9)	8 (7.0)	12(10.4)	29 (25.2)	50 (43.5)
My family is usually available for school matters	40(34.8)	45 (39.1)	11 (9.6)	7(6.1)	12(10.4)
Relational trust usually exists between my family and school	20 (17.4)	84 (73.0)	3 (2.6)	5(4.3)	3 (2.6)
My family has a positive attitude towards discipline	90(78.3)	3(2.6)	15(13.0)	3(2.6)	4(3.5)

**Source: Researcher (2022)**

The first item was to establish if family school ties are encouraged by teachers. Under this item, the study indicate that 18(72.0%) of the teachers agreed that family-school have good relationship and encouraged. This is vital for a positive school culture because schools that incorporate parents tend to perform better than those that do not incorporate parents. Findings are in line with Mammen (2011) results, which revealed that indiscipline of learners are due to learners' poor involvement of parents in the decision-making processes. About 17(68.0%) of teachers disagreed with the friendly family-school environment. Such an environment cannot be supportive of the excellent behaviour of students. As reported in Chinu, Jinim, and Amaechi (2019) that a suitable and friendly environment is essential for a learner's discipline. It was noticed that congenial classroom buildings be given in public schools to aid in successful teaching and the growth of students.

However, 19(78.0%) of teachers agreed that relational trust exists between families and the school and said that such a relationship helps build and maintain school-family relationships. About 18(72.0%) teachers disagreed with the school's statement that the school has resources available to instil discipline. It is worth noting that t learners lacking resources are likely to be undisciplined because resources are needed to contain them at home and school. Resources such as books enhance the completion of the assignment. Playing fields and sports equipment allow the learners to participate in school activities that engage them, such as games.

The findings from students revealed that 54(47.0%) agreed with the statement that family-school ties are encouraged. This could be because of the frequent information from the school administration that is passed on to parents through students encouraging parents to participate in school activities and functions such as parents' meetings and conferences. Lemmer (2012) stated that parent-teacher conferences are the most common way for parents and teachers to communicate directly. About 79(68.7%) students disagreed with the family-school environment due to insufficient resources such as classrooms. As noted by Chinu, Jinim, and Amaechi (2019), suitable and pleasant classroom buildings are needed in public schools to aid in successful teaching and the growth of students.

The statement that my family is usually available in school matters was agreed upon by most students 85(73.9%). This is important because increased parental involvement results in increased student success and an improved school climate. It was noted that 84 (73.0%) of the students agreed that relational trust usually exists between their families and schools. Relational trust between families and schools allows parents to benefit by becoming more confident about the value of their school involvement. Parents develop a greater appreciation for the vital role in their children's education. The statement that my family has a positive attitude towards discipline is strongly agreed upon by most students 90(78.3%). This indicates that families appreciate the benefit of disciplined students, as confirmed by Abiodun and Ojo (2015) that students' family background and their attitude toward discipline are essential in learners' development.

The study stipulates that the teachers agreed with the students that relational trust usually exists between families and schools, leading to easy shaping of students' behaviours. In research by Bailey (2017), it was established that caring family relationships impacted the learner's discipline. Further, a related study in Kakamega, Kenya, by Mabale (2015) established that parental support and the learning environment at home significantly impacted students' discipline in public secondary schools.

The students were further asked to respond to open-ended questions by stating where they felt comfortable. Most of the students stated that they are more comfortable at home than at school.



To most students, being at school is associated with stress. Regarding whether parents regularly visit the school, most of the students stated that their parents do not usually go to school even when invited because they are busy with their work at home. One parent narrated that:

*"There is a lack of effective communication in our school. As a parent, we are not regularly called to participate in matters that concern our children. We are only called when there is a big problem. We need to be regularly called to discuss matters that concern the welfare of our children."* (Parent B, 18<sup>th</sup> / February / 2022).

Similarly, on the question of how often parents participate in school activities, one parent stated that: *"The work I do is a challenge. I cannot even get time to attend school activities even when invited by the school principal"* (Parent C, 18<sup>th</sup> / February / 2022). On the same note of parental participation, a principal in an interview narrated: *"parents are usually called for meetings to discuss the discipline of students, but very few turn up for meetings"* (principal A, 18<sup>th</sup> / February / 2022).

A county director agreed with the principal stating that few parents attend meetings arranged by the schools. In response to an open-ended question concerning how often they attend conferences with parents, it was established that teachers and parents do not often attend the conferences together, limiting the occasions when they interact to discuss matters concerning students' welfare. These findings point to a possibility that there is no serious engagement of parents in school matters concerning the discipline of students. Therefore, the findings suggest a great need to strengthen family-school partnerships to improve students' behaviours in public secondary schools in the Kandara Constituency.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study established that the family and the school environments are essential sites for learner discipline. Parents of Kandara public secondary schools were found to be less involved in matters that affect the discipline of the learners, such as attendance of school meetings and defining the mode of operations that help curb indiscipline cases in secondary schools. It was also concluded that limited resources such as playing fields and sports equipment in school and books for students to read contribute to students' indiscipline in public secondary school because resources such as books allow learners to be engaged in reading and completing assignments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, through the County director of education, have a regular and closer monitoring policy of discipline of learners in public secondary schools. Further, the school administration should emphasize frequent Family-School Partnership for learner discipline. Schools' Administration should make sure that guidance and counselling of learners are offered in their schools to help learners to value discipline and encourage them to develop self-control and respect and see the need to build on a better future. Further, the Schools Administration should work with parents and teachers to emphasize the importance of partnership in enhancing learner discipline both in schools and at home. There is a need for educational planners and curriculum developers to provide learning materials and activities that help learners to be able to cope with life's demands and challenges. The researcher recommends that further studies be carried out in the following areas: A study on the influence of media in fostering learners' discipline in Murang'a County. This would help people suggest strategies to use media constructively as learners and shape their discipline. A similar study on the family-school

environment and learners' discipline in public schools in other constituencies' can be carried out to understand the magnitude of the problem in the country.

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