

CHALLENGES FACING ORPHANED STUDENTS AND THE EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN O – LEVEL COMMERCE AT SAMARINGA CLUSTER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of the study was to examine the effects of the challenges faced by orphaned students in academic performance in secondary schools at O-Level. The research design used in this study is a mixed methods research design incorporated both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The population consisted of forty five orphaned students, 30 non-orphaned students, fifteen teachers and three heads of school making a total of ninety one respondents that were used for this study. The research instruments were questionnaire, interview, observations and class test. The findings were that the orphaned students' performance is poor resulting from the challenges they face in their lives. It was also found that the support from the Government and other stakeholders to deal with the challenges facing orphaned students in academic performance is very minimal in relation to the existing number of orphaned students. This can be taken into account that the academic performance of orphaned students does not rely on the provision of school fees only but also depend much on the availability of basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, and psychological help relating to alleviation of traumas of their parental death.

Keywords: Orphan, Academic performance, Orphaned student, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the challenges facing orphaned students and the effect on their academic performance in secondary schools at O-Level. Many scholars seem to have agreed on the definition of orphan though there are some who views it slightly different from others. UNICEF (2015) and its global partners views an orphan as a child who has lost either one aren't or both. Ogina, A. T(2007), defines an orphan as a child who lost both parents and one of his or her parents. According to UNICEF's report on the 15th of June 2015, there were over 132 million orphans in sub –Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in 2005. This large figure represents not only children who have lost both parents but also those who have lost a father but have a surviving mother or have lost mother but have a surviving father. Of these 132 million classified as orphans, 13 million have lost both parents (UNICEF, 2015). Evidence clearly shows that the vast majority of orphans are living with a surviving parent, grandparent or other family member. According to this same source, ninety five per cent of all orphans are over the age of five. UNICEF (2015) proposes that majority of children who have lost a parent continue to live in the care of a surviving parent or family member. In some cases the orphaned child has the responsibility to do house chores for siblings and dead parents. Carol Boker (2011) argue that if children who have lost one to AIDS are often at risk of losing the other parent as

well since HIV may have been transmitted between the couple through sex. The impact of orphan hood can be seen under emotional, physical psychological and sociological perspective.

Rubaha (2008) pointed out that neglect, abuse, lack of parental love, lack of food, high labour demand at home, stigmatised at school because of lack of school uniforms and learning materials to mention but a few are some of the challenges facing orphaned students. Kafwa (2005) argued that compared to non-orphans, orphaned students are more likely to be malnourished, more likely to drop out of school and have limited access to health social services as well as being prone to exploitation. These challenges create emotional stress making the pupils difficult to concentrate and learn in the classroom due to trauma. Hewlett [2006] argued that motivation is the drive of learning and in the case of orphans, since they lack basic needs such as love from parents, good shelter, food and clothes then they will be less motivated to perform well in class. Maslow (2009) argued that for one to be motivated in whatever he or she does, basic needs cited above would have been satisfied. Satisfaction of these needs will enable one to perform to the expected standards. Bettman (2006) pointed out that millions of children of children were experiencing poverty, enormous mental stress from witnessing illness and death of their beloved ones and profound sense of insecurity. The web newsletter (July-September 2007) also wrote that Zimbabwe estimates an orphan population of fifty thousand as a direct result of AIDS. This suggested that the number of orphans could not be accommodated in the extended families. The web also supported the idea when it said the African traditional and social structures which enabled the extended family to immediately adopt any child who lost parents, have been severely disrupted. This leaves orphans badly exposed hence were most likely to be affected in their academic performance. The above have therefore prompted the researchers to investigate the effects of the challenges facing orphaned students on academic performance in commerce subject at O-Level.

The UN estimates that more than half of the children in South Africa live in poverty. The HIV/AIDS epidemic which is sweeping the nation is leaving South Africa with a population of millions of orphans and vulnerable children. 1 in 5 children are orphans in South Africa and it is estimated that these figures will rise to 1 in 3 by 2015 (MRC, 2007). According to Tadesse (2008), challenges faced by orphans and vulnerable children are as follows:

- They experience negative health, social and developmental outcomes resulting in poor school attendance and educational achievement
- They struggle to concentrate during lessons due to stress
- They have a lack of resources to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, education and health care
- They experience higher levels of stigma and bullying at school
- They are at a greater risk of abuse and mistreatment
- They have poor psychological and physical well-being.

Kolthari(2012) argues that one of the major influences affecting orphans and vulnerable children is their access to the child grant. Every child is entitled to a child grant however, many orphans and vulnerable children don't have the correct paperwork in place in order to access it. according to Griffiths [2005] the childcare advocates work with the families to gain their grants and ensure that their rights are understood.

Keeping the orphans and vulnerable children in education is also a key role of the childcare advocates. According to Children on the Brink (2010), orphans and vulnerable children are more likely to live in temporary households, moving from place to place and disrupting their schooling. They often need additional support to cope with the emotional demands of having lost their parents. Orphans and vulnerable children are less likely to attend school or miss it so it is vital for the childcare advocates to maintain consistency within their schooling and educational needs. The childcare advocates have access

to hardship funds to help provide school uniforms and work closely with the schools to monitor the children's education and emotional needs.

Sadly, according to Maguwe (2012), many orphans and vulnerable children are at risk of abuse from families members and locals within the community as they are seen as easy targets. Rape and sexual violence amongst orphans and vulnerable children is on the rise within South Africa, fuelled by increasing levels of poverty. The childcare advocates follow the children's cases who have been raped, they report them to the police and follow the cases through to conviction.

Research Hypothesis

The only research hypothesis generated for this study states that;

“There is no significant difference between the performances of orphan and non-orphan students after been taught under the same mode of instruction in Commerce.”

Research Questions

The following were the research questions in this study:

- 1.) Are there any challenges been faced by O-Level orphaned students at Samaringa cluster secondary schools?
- 2.) Which criteria do teachers use to identify orphaned students in the classroom?
- 3.) What are the roles played by teachers in dealing with challenges facing orphaned students on academic performance in Samaringa cluster secondary schools?
- 4.) Are there any strategies put in place by the teachers to ensure that orphaned students are learning effectively as non-orphaned students in Samaringa cluster secondary school?

Research Design

The researcher used a mixed method research design. This is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research design. This is justified on the proposition that mixed method research design allows the researcher to gather in-depth information about the subject matter as proposed by Ary and Jacobs (2010). Ary and Jacobs (2010) argue that mixed method research provides stronger evidence for conclusion through collaboration of findings and a combination of different methods; it may produce more complete understanding of a phenomenon. The use of the two designs act as a check and balance against bias and generalization of results through qualitative methods especially in determining whether there is a significant difference in the performance of orphan and non-orphan students taught under the same mode of instruction in Commerce.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of 287 orphaned and 30 non-orphaned students doing ordinary level commerce, 15 teachers and 3 heads of school in three secondary schools at Samaringa cluster. Purposive sampling was done to select participants who were finally the respondents in the study. This includes forty five orphaned students, 30 non-orphaned students, fifteen teachers and three heads of school making a total of ninety one respondents that were used for this study.

Data Collection Instruments

In carrying out this research, the questionnaire, interviews, observations and class test were used to facilitate soliciting of information on the effects of the challenges facing orphaned students in academic

performance in secondary schools at O-Level. The questionnaire was administered to all the respondents with the exemption of the thirty non-orphaned students and thirty eight respondents were interviewed, consisting of all the three school heads, fifteen teachers and twenty orphaned students. The interviews complemented the data collected from the questionnaire. Class test was conducted in Commerce after instruction and observation was carried out.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was very suitable for the study because information could be sourced from the respondents at the same time. It therefore saved time as compared to other methods like. Survey questions were designed in such a way that they were simple to answer by the respondents in so much that their time was not wasted in responding to the questionnaire at all. Questionnaires were used because some of the data required could not be gathered through face to face interviews. The questionnaires were used to source data from caregivers of the orphans, orphaned students themselves, and teachers and the Open ended section of the questionnaires allowed the respondents to explain their feelings without restrictions. On capturing data through the questionnaire, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used. The method was efficient in that it was user friendly since the respondents did not labour much to supply required data which would also be very easy to capture during the next stage of data collection.

Interviews

Face to face interviews were conducted with the three head of schools during the administering of questionnaires at the schools. The interviews made the collection of primary data possible and any areas which were not clear were explained in the process which improved the prospects of quality information. The following data were collected during the interviews; data on the performance, number, selection criteria of orphaned students and the general welfare of orphaned students in their respective school.

Observation

The researchers used direct observation whereby behaviour of students that relates to problem situation was directly observed. It was simply purposive reflection while teaching a lesson of 35 minutes. During sporting activities time researchers also managed to observe the behaviour of the students when outside the classroom. This enabled the researcher to understand the extent of socialisation of the orphaned students. All observations were recorded without the knowledge of the students.

Class test

The researchers conducted a test after an instruction in Commerce in order to compare the performance of the orphaned and non-orphaned students to verify whether there is a significant difference in the students' performance using a t-test statistical analysis technique.

Discussion and interpretation

These are presented in relation to the only one hypothesis and the four research questions using the data collected through the questionnaires, interviews, observation and the test carried out with the respondents, the hypothesis and the four research questions will be discussed below one after the other.

Research Hypothesis

The only research hypothesis generated for this study states that; “There is no significant difference between the performances of orphan and non-orphan students after been taught under the same mode of instruction in Commerce.”

Table 1: T-test of Difference between Scores of Group A and Scores of Group B

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	t-value
Group A (Orphaned students)	30	7	4.47	1.73
Group B (non-orphaned students)	30	12	4.34	

Significant at 0.05

The hypothesis states that, “There is no significant difference between the performances of orphan and non-orphan students after been taught under the same mode of instruction in Commerce.” The t-test statistical technique was used to test this hypothesis. Since the test of significance calculated (t_c) which is 3.64 is greater than the t-value ($t(18, 0.05) = 1.73$), the afore-mentioned hypothesis is rejected. A significant difference exists as indicated by the result on table 4.1 between the performance of orphaned and non-orphaned students taught Commerce under the mode if instruction. The result therefore confirms that there is a significant difference between the achievements of Group A (Orphaned students) and Group B (non-orphaned students). To support this findings in terms of the students mean score, Group A mean score ($\bar{X} = 7$) was lower than the Group B mean ($\bar{X} = 12$). This indicates that non- orphaned students performed better than orphaned students.

Research Question 1 which states that:

“Are there any challenges facing Orphaned Students at Secondary in Samaringa cluster”?

Responses from orphaned students and teachers in the 3 schools were used to answer this question as shown on Table 2 below. Data was collected using questionnaires administered to the orphaned students and teachers.

Table 2: Challenges Facing Orphaned Students

Challenges	No of Respondents	% of respondents
Lack of food	52	87
High labour demand	48	80
Lack of parental love	58	97
Lack of school uniforms	54	90
Lack of learning materials	56	93

On table 2, it shows that the greater proportion of orphans have the challenges of lacking adequate food, school uniforms, learning materials, parental love and high labour demand. The highest need being lacked by the orphaned students is lack of parental love followed by lack of learning materials and so on. Lack of parental love causes psychological traumas and sociological effects to a child whilst high labour demand and lack of food have physical impacts. Most orphaned students do not have school uniforms and this causes them to be stigmatised by others at school. 90 % of them lack school uniforms and 93% lacks learning materials.

Research Question 2 which states that:

“Which criteria do teachers use to identify orphaned students in the classroom”?

Table 3 below shows data collected from Heads of 3 secondary schools in the cluster and this data answered the question above. Data was collected through interviews with the respective heads of schools.

Table 3 Criterion used by Teachers and Heads of Schools to Orphaned Students for Identification.

Criteria	Number of heads	% of heads
Good academic performers	1	33,3
Single and double orphaned	3	100
Chosen by the Sponsors'	3	100

The table above shows that most orphaned students are selected using their current academic performance as the criteria although one head of school is using the criteria of good academic performance. Being either single or double orphaned is the criteria being used all the heads but the data collected through the interview shows that these heads shall soon use the academic performance criteria since some of the beneficiaries shows no seriousness with school work hence will appear as if resources are being wasted and it will be better to channel them towards those students who have potentials to perform better academically. However the argument that can be put forward is that the poor performance of most of these orphaned students academically is as a result of the challenges they are facing hence challenges have to be firstly attended to. All the 3 heads agreed that sponsors to a greater extend use their own criteria to select their beneficiaries.

Research question 3 which states that:

“What are the roles played by the teacher in dealing with challenges facing orphaned students in the cluster”?

The data collected through questionnaires from sampled teachers in the 3 schools answers the above question.

Table 5 below shows the number and qualifications of the teachers who responded to the questionnaires administered.

Qualification	Number of Teachers	%
Temporary	0	0
Dip in Ed	11	73,3
Degree	4	26,7

According to Table 5 above, most teachers teaching the subject of commerce at O- Level is diploma in Education holders and the lower percentage has degrees. The composition of the teachers with diplomas is 73, 3 % and those with degrees are 26, 7 %. These teachers from the 3 schools said they educate non-orphaned students about what it means to be an orphan and the challenges thereto. This will help to reduce cases of labelling and stigmatisation. The orphans will also improve on socialisation when they feel accepted by their peers and teachers. Teachers also take the role to guide and counsel the orphaned students so that they easily fit and mix with non-orphaned students. In addition to the above teachers also recommends to the school administrators orphaned students who really need assistance. Some Orphaned students are better cared by their caregivers than others. The teacher Qualifications indicates that the teachers can efficiently perform the roles since they are qualified and have done guidance and counselling at college.

Research Question 4 which states that:

“Are there strategies put in place by the teachers to ensure that Orphaned Students are learning effectively as non-orphaned students?”

The data on this research question was collected through Questionnaires administered to the sampled teachers in the 3 schools in the cluster. All the teachers who responded to the questionnaires considered guidance and counselling session to both orphaned and non-orphaned students as the best strategy to assist orphaned students and the method is being applied.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study and data analysis, it was found out that most of the teachers in schools did not have a well-established scheme to identify and provide academic and financial support to orphaned students in their respective classes. This has been seen from the students' performances which are still poor. The study noted that most of the orphaned students and teachers agreed on the existence of challenges facing orphaned students on academic performance. Most of the teachers in the cluster need to establish a plan of action for the enhancement of a good academic performance to orphaned students. Heads of schools in the cluster should establish a strategy to support the orphaned students financially or make close connection with educational stakeholders and Non-Governmental Organisations to support the orphaned students. This might lead to positive result in the secondary schools and the results will include good academic performance, freedom to learn and speculative more academic issues. It can make orphaned students behave well in the class and outside the school environment. They will also become active towards learning. The study also found out that there are very little efforts made by educational stakeholders and the government to eradicate the challenges facing orphaned students and to foster academic performance of orphaned students in secondary schools. This was proved by the interviews made with the Heads of schools concerning support of the educational stakeholders and the government to orphaned students in secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the conclusion stated above, the following recommendations are suggested. The teachers should find a means of identifying orphaned students in classes so that they provide necessary support especially psychological help related to trauma of parental death. The process of identification should be carefully done because some students may flush back their good times with their parents. Teachers should also educate non-orphaned students about the challenges normally faced by orphaned students and thus they should not undermine the orphaned students. This will create awareness to other students about the t feeling and bad pain resulting from being an orphan. It will also eliminate any trace of discrimination among students. Heads of schools should establish a scheme to identify needy orphaned students in their schools and take necessary actions to ensure that orphaned are learning better without any restrictions. This should follow official procedures so as to avoid provision for non-orphaned students. Record about the number and names of orphaned students should well be kept for future reference.

Teachers should also play their roles to encourage the orphaned students to learn and provide necessary academic support when appropriate. Orphaned students need love and care in order to make them eager to learn. Orphaned students should be involved in class activities, sports, and games thus they may not feel isolated from the society. Their self-esteem will be raised through achievement of some tasks. The ministry of education and their stakeholders should plan and establish regular seminars to enable teachers to be equipped with skills and tactics to deal with the challenges facing orphaned students in

academic performance. Also necessary support in teaching and learning materials should be provided to enhance the academic performance of orphaned students.

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