



Handling orphaned pupils in public primary schools: Views of class teachers in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya

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Abstract

The HIV and AIDS scourge has continued to pose a major challenge to the socio-economic development of Kenya since the infection was first diagnosed in the country in 1984. There has been an upsurge of orphans in Kenya due to the high number of deaths from HIV and AIDS related infections. The pupils orphaned through the HIV/AIDS also access basic primary education as enshrined in the education policies of all governments. Class teachers play a key role in maintaining a balanced social-cultural and academic development of children in primary schools. The aim of the study was to take a look at the challenges class teachers face when dealing with orphaned pupils in public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality. The population consisted of 40 public primary schools with a total of 784 teachers. 228 public primary school teachers were randomly selected for the study. The research design employed was a descriptive survey. The data from a questionnaire was analyzed and presented in tabular form using frequencies and percentages. The findings of the research study showed that the class teachers faced some challenges in managing the orphans in the public primary schools. It was therefore recommended that all teachers in public primary schools are trained in basic counseling skills to enable the orphaned pupils' access help at convenience.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, Orphaned Pupils, Challenges, Performance, School Dropout

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1. Introduction

One of the goals of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) for the launching of the Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS was to provide continued access to education, support and training of orphaned youths (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The school plays a key role in identifying orphans and coordinating a response to the needs and performance of orphans at school. The Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS therefore challenge all educational institutions, relevant government departments, NGOs and donor agencies to cooperate to fight against HIV and AIDS scourge which was surely turning into a socio-economic disaster especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

Primary education continues to experience many challenges such as retention and completion of school by some pupils especially orphans as a result of HIV and AIDS or its related diseases. The impact of HIV and AIDS is felt on education when key actors die out of the scourge (parents and teachers), leaving many school-going aged children orphaned as they lose either one or both parents. This may also impact negatively on enrolment, retention and performance of these pupils.

1.1. Psycho-socio support

Most of the times children orphaned are young with a mean age of about 6.2 years (Mugabe et al., 2002). These children are however required to take on responsibilities far above their ages. They do not only caring for their siblings but also for their parents, the ones they must look up to for love and support. As reported in SAFAIDS (2005), HIV and AIDS has lately become one of the most worrying predicaments be falling many nations and its products, the orphans, especially those orphans who need to work to look after themselves, are the most affected. The psychological demand and effects on the child in this kind of situation cannot be underestimated (Kelly, 2002). These emotional reactions of the pupils like withdrawal and feelings of shame coupled with lack of concentration are likely to affect work at school. Most children may lack basic physical essentials such as proper feeding, clothing, good accommodation, healthcare and basic education as parents and other caretakers within the communities die out HIV and AIDS (Davids et al., 2006). In addition, pupils may suffer from certain psycho-social conditions associated with HIV and AIDS which may affect their academic performance adversely. Davids et al. (2006) further indicated that these conditions may range from children developing fear, experiencing anxiety to stigmatization from friends and the community. If the necessary care and interventions are not put in place, such pupils will be affected by depression and loss of hope (Davids et al., 2006).

The orphans who try to stay in school may lack the material and psychological support they need for success which is very necessary for living a fulfilled life. The challenges of HIV and AIDS scourge on the lives of orphans have direct impact on educational institutions. There is therefore the need to employ appropriate approaches to help the infected and affected learners to cope with the challenges of their status. This demands the empowerment of teachers to enable them handle these issues. In the event of unresolved psychological trauma for these orphans, school performance is likely to be negatively affected by HIV and AIDS and eventually challenge the achievement of Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). In the view of Kelly (2000), not only do children develop dislike for school activities as a result of the stigma they are likely to experience due to AIDS but also equally become agitated, traumatised, and burned up with the feeling of becoming orphaned in the near future. Kelly concluded that such children are more likely to have the feeling that they are not loved, rejected or not even wanted by relatives, friends or the community in general. Under such a situation, academic work may become unattractive to children as they try to deal with psycho-social issues which are a priority to their very existence.

The disclosure of HIV status has been uniquely injurious (Grady, 1992) such as the “social stigma, discrimination, and isolation, as well as the right to attend school” (Boyd-Franklin et al., 1995, p.257). The teacher-pupil situation therefore becomes a special relationship in which the student places trust in the teacher’s expert, knowledge, confidentiality, skills and ability.

1.2. The role of the school

The school can play a key role in identifying orphans in school and liaising with other sectors to mobilize a response to the specific needs of individual or groups of orphans. The overall goal is to enroll and retain all school age children in appropriate learning institution and the education sector should avail care and support for all, particularly orphans (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

The support schools and other organizations provide, may enhance the assistance offered to orphans. Schools and communities associated with schools therefore need to identify possible forms of assistance to be provided to the orphans while at school to enhance their participation in school activities and academic performances.

The impact of HIV and AIDS may affect the participation of pupils in school in terms of attendance, performance and retention. The learner’s academic performance is defined by Bell (2012) as cited in Constantino and Ganga (2013) as a measure of how well a student meets standards set out by local government and the institution itself in academic circles. Amato and Booth (2010) added that it can also imply the measure of the extent to which students are doing well in their learning and in class attendance. This means that, performance in academic can be related to the outcome of education. It can be used in measuring the extent to which educational goals and objectives are accomplished by learners, teachers and schools as a whole (Constantino and Ganga, 2013). Pupils may absent themselves from school because of the need for care of a sick member of the family or to work at the market to raise money for basic necessities (Carr-Hill et al., 2000). Due to continuous absenteeism, the likelihood of poor performance is high and pupils may be forced to repeat certain classes. Pupils whose parents die may have their concentration on schoolwork affected. Cases of drop outs may occur due to lack of money to sustain the affected pupils in school, following parental or guardian’s death (Ferguson and Johnston, 1999). A research study done by the Ministry of Health and ORC Macro (2006) found that percentage of pupils dropping out of school as a result of HIV/AIDS was 45% in 1994. In 2004, this number had increased to 53% despite the efforts by the government towards the curbing of the menace.

This study was supported by the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as discussed by Paquette and Ryan (2001). According to Bronfenbrenner, a child's environmental development can be seen as a couple of inter-relating layers such that any situation affecting one of the layers automatically has an effect on the other layers. Bronfenbrenner described these layers as the child's close environmental relations such as the family and the community which includes the school. This implies that any positive or negative changes in the environment have an effect on the academic and social development of the child. Therefore, studies looking at the development of children must not lose sight of the important roles played by the interaction between the child's immediate environment and the larger community as they seemed to exert so much influence on the overall development of the child (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). Bronfenbrenner further reiterated that if these relationships more nurturing, they provide the opportunity for the child to grow and develop well and his performance in academic work will be at its best (Vander et al., 2007). This theory is very much related to the current study because children those parents are affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic will have their development sharply affected through the loss of parental care. In such a situation, the child may have to rely on the larger society for his welfare. The school and more importantly the teachers will have to create an enabling environment to build a balance to support the child's development. In the absence of such support from the school, it is obvious that the smooth development of orphaned pupils as results losing parents to the HIV/AIDS menace will be greatly affected. The school and teachers may therefore be critical to the development of orphans especially in the wake of the loss of parents and parenting. The school may have to provide an opportunity for psycho-social support for the orphans to enable them build the necessary coping strategies to face any psychological trauma they are likely to undergo.

UNICEF (2013) estimated that a total of 17.7 million children worldwide had lost one or both parents to AIDS. Most of these children (15.2 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, an analysis of recent household survey data in 47 countries shows that at least 5 per cent of children in many countries are orphaned as a result of AIDS or other causes. Fifteen countries account for 73 percent of all people living with HIV: South Africa, Nigeria, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, China, Ethiopia, Russia, Brazil and the United States (UNAIDS, 2014). In Lesotho, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, the proportion is likely to rise to more than 20 per cent as indicated by the report. Kenya currently has 1,1million orphans of school-going age (UNICEF, 2013). Statistics from the Ministry of Education showed that there were 1,744 orphaned pupils out of the total population of 9,477 public primary school pupils in the Eldoret Municipality at the time of the study. It is in light of the above discussion that this study takes a look at the challenges of public primary school class teachers as they try to deal with the orphaned pupils in their schools. The study will try to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do class teachers face in dealing with pupils affected by HIV and AIDS in public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality?
2. What are the possible interventions that could be implemented to minimize the challenges, if any, in public primary schools Eldoret Municipality?

2. Methodology

The Eldoret Municipality had 40 public primary schools with accessible population of 784 teachers. This consisted of class teachers and head teachers from all the public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 228 class teachers for study. According to Frankel and Wallen (2000), simple random sampling ensures that each element within the accessible population will be given a chance of fair selection to be part of the study. The descriptive survey design was seen as suitable for the study because it allows the researchers the opportunity to analyse current situations and trends that might have contributed to the challenges encountered by class teachers in an attempt to handle pupils orphaned through HIV/AIDS in their classrooms (Cohen et al., 2000; Sarantakos, 2005).

2.1. Research instrument

A questionnaire was used to gather information from the class teachers in public primary schools in the Eldoret Municipality. The questionnaire was developed through the extensive use of literature and consultations with fellow researchers. The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot testing to ensure that the items used were consistent with the aim of seeking answers to the research questions of this study. An alpha coefficient of 0.79 was deemed well enough for researchers to consider the instrument as reliable (Vogt, 1999). The return rate for the questionnaire was of 82 %.

3. Results and discussions

To answer the research questions, the class teachers' views were sought on the challenges they faced in terms of attendance, performance and cases of dropouts among orphaned pupils in public primary schools in the Eldoret Municipality. The information on data covering the attendance of orphans was examined and analyzed. The views of class teachers as reflected by their responses on the questionnaire dealing with this aspect were examined, analyzed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Class Attendance by Orphans

Attendance	Frequency	Percentage
Above average	13	7
Average	84	46
Below average	86	47
Total	183	100

Majority of the class teachers responded that the attendance of orphaned pupils in their schools was generally average or below average as shown in Table 1. This finding confirms the assertion by Carr-Hill et al. (2000) that pupils may absent themselves from school because of the need for the care of a sick member of the family or to work to raise money for basic necessities. Kelly (2000) supports this by adding that most

children absent themselves from school when they experience stigmatization from their friends as a result of AIDS epidemic and they are likely to lose concentration on academic work.

Based on this assumption, the study went further to find out from the participants some of the reasons that can be related to the low attendance to school among the orphaned pupils. The responses from the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Some Reasons for Low Attendance to School among Orphans

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of food	183	100
Lack of parental support	158	86
Lack of uniforms	115	63
Sickness	85	46
Lack of educational materials	43	23

As shown in Table 2, almost all the respondents indicated that lack of food in the home is the main reason why the attendance of most orphans fluctuates. This is supported by Kenrick et al. (2010), who consider physiological needs as the most important of all the other needs. Therefore one of the greatest of the needs of an orphan is likely to be food. Other factors such as lack of parental support and lack of school uniforms showed 86% and 63% respectively. This finding is in line with the view Davids et al. (2006) who claimed that pupils are most likely to experience situations like hunger, lack of good accommodation, clothing, healthcare and eventually good education if they continually lose their parents and guardians to HIV/AIDS and related diseases. The implication is that these orphaned choose between going to school and finding sources and means to satisfy their basic needs. They therefore end up compromising with school attendance.

The participants were asked to state their views on the academic performance of the orphaned pupils as compared with their classmates. Their views were analyzed and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Rate of Academic Performance of Orphans

Rate (out of 100%)	Frequency	Percentage
Above 50	4	2
50 and below	179	98

As observed in Table 3, majority of the respondents (98%) indicated that the orphaned pupils in their class were either average or below average academically. Again Davids et al. (2006) confirmed the above findings when they indicated that as children, many orphans suffer from anxiety, stigmatization and fear of the unknown. This means that their academic performance will be negatively affected if they are not supported appropriately by the school and the community.

The study sought the opinions of the respondents on the possible causes of the low academic performance among the orphaned pupils. The views of the participants were summarized and presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Reason for Low Performance among Orphans

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of parental love, care, Support and guidance	116	63
Lack of basic necessities (shelter, conducive home environment)	90	49
Discrimination by peers and others	68	37
Lack of emotional/moral support	66	36
Poor health/ sickness	52	28
Withdrawal /isolation	40	22
Unsupervised work (lack of attention from home)	28	15
Lack of educational items and material support	28	15
Stigmatization	12	7
Lack of financial support	10	6
Peer pressure	6	3

From Table 4, it is clear that many factors contribute to the low performance of orphans in public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality. More than half of the respondents (63%) indicated that most orphans suffer from lack of parental love, care, support and guidance. This is followed by the general lack of basic necessities such as shelter and conducive home environment for learning purposes (49%) and discrimination by peers and other people followed closely with 36%. Some of the other reasons cited include poor health and sickness, effect of withdrawal and isolation and many others as indicated in Table 4. As indicated by Kelly (2000), the effects of psychological demands on such children must not be underrated and it is likely to affect their concentration and performance at school. In addition this finding supports Bronfenbrenner's proposal that any change in the child's immediate environment has an effect on his overall development.

On the issue of the rate of school drop-out among the orphaned pupils, Table 5 showed some of the causes as given by the participants.

Table 5. Causes of School Drop-Outs among Orphans

Statement	Frequency	Percentages
Lack of proper parental love, care, support and guidance	52	28
Guardians' failure to provide needs	40	22
Absenteeism	38	21
Sickness and poor health	37	20
Lack of food	28	15

Statement	Frequency	Percentages
Lack basic needs (uniforms, bags, shelter)	28	15
Poor or low performance	26	14
Pregnancy (early marriages)	17	9
Lack of educational materials	11	6

As indicated in Table 5, the main cause dropouts among the HIV and AIDS orphaned pupils is the lack of proper parental love, care, support and guidance as reported by 52 (28%) of the respondents. Twenty percent of the respondents cited sickness and poor health reported by the orphans. A study by Juma (2003) in Vihiga District confirms that dropout rates are caused by health factors including the impact of HIV/AIDS and other diseases as well. The guardians' failure to provide basic school needs followed with 22%. Constant absenteeism by pupils was another cited reason with 38 (21%) respondents submitting to this. Of significant note was the reason due to pregnancy or early marriages affecting only the girl child as indicated by 17(9%) of the respondents confirming Siringi's (2002) and Olweya's (1996) assertions that this problem still plagues primary school education.

It was important to establish whether or not there was support provided to the orphaned pupils in public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality by the agencies involved in primary education. The class teachers' views were sought on the forms of assistance the school, the governmental organizations religious bodies and NGOs provided to the orphans. The views are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Provision of Care and Support for Orphans

Agency	Frequency	Percentage
No support	115	63
School	5	3
Rescue Centre	24	13
Am path	13	7
Scripture union	13	7
The Catholic Church	13	7
TOTAL	183	100

In Table 6, it is clear that there was significantly no support rendered to equip the class teachers with effective skills in handling the needs of orphaned pupils in public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality. Only 68 (37%) out of the 183 respondents indicated some form of support from the Rescue Centre, Ampath (a local NGO), Scripture Union and the Catholic Church. As observed from the findings, Bennell et al. (2009) also indicated that the efforts made by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO), civil society and other stake holders in most countries in trying to conduct campaigns focused on rescuing the children from the effects of HIV and AIDS menace seemed not be yielding the best results as their benefits can hardly be felt at school level as portrayed in the findings of this study.

The researchers sought to establish some of the possible interventions which if implemented, could minimize the challenges and improve the situation of orphaned pupils in public primary schools in Eldoret Municipality. The results from the participants are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Suggestions for Improvement

Statement	Frequenc y	Percenta ge
Provision of lunch in schools	171	93.3
Employment of full time teacher counselors especially in big schools	109	60
Enhance guidance and counseling through training and in-service of all class teachers	85	46.7
Provision of facilities (guidance and counseling rooms) and material on HIV and AIDS	61	33.3
Mobilize care and support from NGO's, donors and well-wishers	37	20

The suggestion given by class teachers to minimize the challenges facing them, as presented in Table 7, indicates that 171(93%) requested that lunch programme should be started in all schools to enable the orphaned pupils to stay in school which will also lead to improved academic performance at school. The need to have a full time teacher counselor ranked second with 109 (60%) of the respondents admitting to this fact. Enhancement of training is another aspect that can facilitate effectiveness in the handling of the needs of the orphans in schools as indicated in Table 7 (47 % of the responses). 61(33%) of the participants also called for the provision of facilities such as guidance and counseling rooms and teaching and learning materials on HIV and AIDS while 37 (20%) of them felt mobilizing care and support from NGOs, donors and well-wishers could also help deal with the problems.

4. Conclusions

It can be concluded from the results that the class teachers faced some problems in handling the orphaned pupils in their classrooms. This ranged from poor attendance to school, poor academic performance and cases of school dropouts. In view of the findings, the following recommendations are:

- a) The provision of lunch in all public primary schools will be of great benefit since hungry pupils cannot concentrate in class and often are either sickly or experience poor academic performance.
- b) The government can furnish some public schools with boarding facilities for orphans where they are fed and cared for.
- c) All the class teachers must be taken through special training skills so as to equip them with necessary basic skills to help them deal effectively with the challenges.

- d) Full time teacher counselors can be posted to take care of the orphans in a cluster of schools.

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