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Influence of Student Motherhood on Academic Performance in Public Universities in Western Kenya

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The challenges of balancing multiple roles of motherhood and learning greatly impact student mothers' academic success. Having student motherhood obligations on top of their academic responsibilities make undergraduate student mothers unique. This uniqueness affects their ability to compete academically with others. The study used the role conflict theory and adopted a mixed-method research design. It adopted a stratified and simple random sampling technique. The researcher derived the desired sample size using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size formulae. Data for the research was collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions, document analysis, and interview schedules. Data was analysed via descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis of the study findings revealed that motherhood influences learning in many ways. Student mothers face challenges such as the inability to balance studies and mothering, childcare difficulties, maternal stress, anxiety, time management, and tiredness. These challenges influence the learning of student mothers, negatively affecting their overall academic achievement. The study recommends the need for a special accommodation facility for student mothers at the university to enable them to study more smoothly. Further research can be carried out on the university management's perception of undergraduate parenthood.

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INTRODUCTION

Student motherhood at the university remains a significant global public concern, affecting more than 6 million female tertiary institution students worldwide. Student motherhood is commonly associated with adverse psychosocial, socioeconomic, and health outcomes (Kensinger & Minnick, 2018). If a woman becomes pregnant unexpectedly while enrolled in the university, raising a child (ren) is considered a full-time job and could be highly difficult (Cabbaging, 2017). A student requires a tremendous amount of time to take care of her learning and childcare roles simultaneously. Becoming a mother as well as a student at the same time is not simple.

Combining motherhood and studying without compromising the activities of either one is a great dilemma for student mothers (Taukeni, 2014). From a scholarly standpoint, having a kid demonstrates that the student's mother lacks the necessary passion and zeal to develop the educationally critical stages (Tladi & Jali, 2014)

Student mothers encounter uncomfortable emotional demands and hear unfhttps://www.rsisinternational.org/journals/ijrsi/submission/index.php/online/submissionsavourable comments from the educational environment, which suggests that education is the emphasis. A discriminatory distribution of learning resources to other students and avoidance behaviours are encouraged by prejudice against student mothers and the labelling of them as unproductive (Nelson et al., 2013). As a result, student mothers avoid bringing their kids along or try to disguise their parental responsibilities (Bukhosini, 2019). However, the central issue is that the number of young mothers is increasing, which is predictably

indicative of the likelihood of the same phenomenon being reflected at public universities in Kenya. From the individual cases of students seen carrying babies on campus or those with babies-related problems, who seek counselling and other assistance, and the growing number of those who vacate hostels due to pregnancy, the number of student mothers seems to rise every year. Most of them, in casual interviews, claim that having babies' mid-course interfered with their studies. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the influence of student motherhood on academic performance in public universities in western Kenya

Statement of the Problem

Balancing multiple roles of student motherhood and learning has significantly impacted student mothers' academic success (Musili, 2018). In Africa, there is a growing number of student mothers enrolled in undergraduate studies. However, about 60% face challenges balancing their tasks and multiple roles (Moreau & Kerner 2012). Having childcare obligations on top of their academic responsibilities makes undergraduate student mothers unique. This uniqueness affects their ability to compete academically with others fairly. As a result, many report challenges related to meeting the requirements of their undergraduate studies. Students have a tremendous amount of responsibility as mothers. The academic world ignores the needs of these student mothers in favour of success, growth, and eternal competition.

Consequently, juggling parenting and academics are not accepted at universities. In Kenya, national figures on student motherhood stand at 18%, with an estimated 40,000 female students between the ages of 17 to 24 giving birth annually. Nationally

and regionally, there are no updated statistics in Kenya showing exactly how many undergraduate student mothers there are in public universities and how the dual roles affect their learning; it is against this that the researcher is curious to establish the influence of student motherhood on academic performance in public universities in western Kenya.

Objective of the Study

The study sought to investigate the influence of student motherhood on academic performance in public universities in western Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Role Conflict Theory

When the performance of two or more roles overlaps or when one role interferes with the performance of another, it is called role conflict (Maisela & Ross 2018). Roles are principles that guide an individual's activities regarding what should be done and at what level of performance in a given situation. The conflict between roles connected to study and parenthood might emerge due to time constraints, stress, or behaviour (Adofo, 2013). As a result, student mothers in universities have concerns about how they will manage to fulfil both mothering and studentship responsibilities simultaneously, as both are hard, and a student mother may be unable to execute both as required.

The contributions of eminent researchers such as George Herbert Mead, Georg Simmel, Ralph Linton, and Jacob Mareno constitute the foundations of role conflict theory (Goode, 1960). Beyond what these researchers established, there have been further advancements, particularly from understanding roles as identified behaviours to including other issues of status and social environment. Functional, Symbolic interactionism, structural, organisational, and cognitive role conflict theory are the best models for explaining role conflict theory. "Consensus, conformity, role conflict, and role-taking" are four significant features of the role conflict theory.

As a result, the role theory investigates the relationship between studying and motherhood conflict and ways of reducing role conflicts, such as providing counselling services, medical services, and accommodation services at the university. The researcher used role theory to understand better motherhood and its influence on learning among undergraduate student mothers in public universities in western Kenya, resulting in role strain. Overload, role stress, and the pressure to balance parental obligations and studentship due to insufficient resources, particularly time, all contribute to role strain. After disregarding one commitment over the other, prolonged role, tension influences the learning of student mothers. To alleviate role stress, student mothers must decide what is most important to them in managing their dual roles as students and mothers.

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Empirical Literature Review

Female students comprise about 60% of undergraduate and 48% of postgraduate students at Australia's higher education institutions (Bosch, 2013). According to the report, female students at Australia's higher education institutions outnumber and exceed male students academically and enrol in courses formerly thought to be reserved for men. The report shows female students take academic concerns more seriously than their male counterparts.

According to the above scholar's survey, higher learning is more important for female students than for male students. The survey findings show that women in higher education institutions are overwhelmed by exhaustion, a lack of family support, childcare challenges, and time management in balancing studentship and mothering. According to Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Tesfay Asgedom (2016), two variables contribute to the success of student mothers: individual ambition and external support. The individual is responsible for being ambitious, driven, and persistent in balancing academics with mothering. Support comes from the university, the supervisor, and family members for others. Others had to pay for the support explicitly, while others acknowledged receiving help from their neighbours, acquaintances, and fellow students. Because the findings were limited to Australia, the present study will be undertaken at public institutions in Kenya to investigate parenthood and

its impact on learning among student mothers in western Kenya.

Similarly, Alabi (2012) at the University of Kwazulu Natal in Durban, South Africa, studied the lived experiences of postgraduate female students. To investigate doctoral students' experiences, the researchers used a phenomenological study design and explorative qualitative approaches. They came up with several conclusions. The biggest problems faced by student moms at higher education institutions were social-cultural ideas, financial restraints, and traditional role expectations for female students. However, the report does not mention coping mechanisms for balancing dual roles as a mother and a student.

In Ghana, the study on Struggles as well as Coping Strategies of Student Mothers at the University of Cape Coast by. According to Sangawe (2020), student mothers suffer from low attendance, lack of concentration, difficulty-understanding lectures, poor childcare, and financial constraints, which use a mixed methods research methodology. Because of these difficulties, student moms are emotionally, physically, and psychologically unfit, and some choose to abandon their HL studies. Student mothers have a tough time completing proper preparations during exam seasons. According to the survey, student mothers experience dread and anxiety during exams since they cannot learn and concentrate well on their studies. The research offers various solutions for mitigating all unfavourable factors affecting student mothers, such as providing specific accommodations, establishing daycare centres for their children, and cutting tuition prices for them. The study, however, falls short of explaining the coping mechanisms used by students and mothers and investigates student mothers' primary problems in juggling their dual roles in Namibia. The data was acquired utilising a semi-structured interview and a qualitative technique. Thematic analysis was used to examine the study's findings. According to the research, the absence of time to handle parenting and studying is the most significant difficulty.

Other difficulties mentioned by 12 were feelings of anger and loneliness, failure to attend lectures and seminars on time, restlessness, failing modules,

and sometimes first-chance tests. According to the findings, there is a need for a support group on campus to encourage and console student mothers who are feeling isolated and lonely.

According to Egenti & Omoruyi (2011), a highly particular and customised media program for comforting women who seek to enhance their education on issues they are expected to face and coping skills should be created. However, there are no known efforts by the author to address the coping techniques used by mothers and students. African researchers have underscored that after university student mothers give birth, it becomes hard for them to embark on their studies due to the role strain of accommodating both academic roles and mothering errands. Similarly, Gordon et al. (2012) noticed that student mothers experience trouble simultaneously struggling to take care of children and create quality time to study and cannot balance their life and studies; instead, they concentrate on one role and sacrifice the other.

Lindokuhle (2017) argues that childbearing between young women may result in academic disappointment as motherhood roles often disrupt their attentiveness. Egenti & Omoru (2011) posed that multiple functions can challenge student mothers since the workload in subjects or courses can be studied all the time, making their learning difficult.

Similarly, Schumacher (2015), in a study in Australian universities, revealed that women in higher learning institutions are overwhelmed by tiredness, low-income family support, childcare difficulties, and time management, balancing studentship and mothering. This had a significant negative impact on the academic performance of the student mothers. The literature on motherhood challenges alongside studentship at an undergraduate level reveals that undergraduate student mothers' difficulties resulting from women's primary role as caregivers and higher education structures pull them away from their schoolwork. Most of the studies reviewed in this section, i.e. (Adofo, 2013; Musili, 2018; Alabi, Dankyi, & Minadzi, 2019; Tauken, 2014) primarily focused only on the postgraduate student, and all these studies lack clarity on motherhood and its influence on the learning of undergraduate

student mothers, especially on academic performance.

Research by Musili (2018) on the experiences of postgraduate student mothers at the University of Nairobi revealed that many of them struggled to balance the multiple role commitments of motherhood and student academics, which may be a problem facing undergraduate student mothers. Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Tesfay Asgedom (2016) contended that it is unlikely possible for a student in a college to engage well in her studies and perform the duties of mothering simultaneously.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-method research design. To better understand a research problem, a mixed-method research design is a process for gathering, analysing, and "mixing" qualitative and quantitative data and methodologies in a single study. The aim was to combine the differing strengths and overlapping quantitative methods' weaknesses with qualitative methods (Maisela 2018).

Research Instrument

Data for the study was collected using interview schedules, questionnaires, document analysis, and focus group discussions.

Target Population

The target population of this research was undergraduate student mothers who became mothers during their undergraduate program. The target population comprised student mothers and Chair of Departments

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Academic performance Based on the Year of Admission For students' mothers who were admitted in 2016, their average performance dropped from 67.643% before becoming a mother to 54.186 after becoming a student mother. For those student mothers who were admitted in 2017, their performance dropped after becoming a mother from an average performance of 56.769% to 44.271%. It was also found that those student mothers admitted in 2018 reduced their average

performance from 65.311% to 48.255%. For those student mothers admitted in 2019, their average performance dropped from 57.370% to 48.430% after becoming a mother. For the students admitted in 2020, it was also found that their average performance dropped from 61.256% to 59.311%

after becoming student mothers. However, for the students admitted in 2021, their data concerning their average performance were not obtained since the data was collected before their performance was released.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents’ academic performance based on the year of admission

Year of Admission	Frequency	Average performance before motherhood	Average performance after motherhood	Deviation in average performance
2016	39	67.643%	54.186%	-13.457%
2017	81	56.769%	44.271%	-12.498%
2018	57	65.311%	48.255%	-17.056%
2019	33	57.370%	48.430%	-8.940%
2020	45	61.256%	59.311%	-1.945%
2021	8	-	-	-

Questionnaire Responses

On the question, *does being a student mother influence your academic attainment?* The respondents noted that their educational attainment had been negatively impacted because they faced the challenge of dividing time to study and the primary responsibilities of motherhood. Multitasking between motherhood and proper preparations for academics is not easy. The limited time to concentrate due to increased disturbance of the child affects their learning.

“Being a student mother has affected my academic performance. My general performance has dropped. At times, I am stressed so much. I do not attend lectures because being a student mother, thus affecting my academic performance”.

The question, *“Explain how you balance student motherhood and academic studies?”* The respondents noted that they have to create extra time. Get to study when the child is asleep or when you have someone to help; you take care of them. Additionally, they noted that they plan their timetable so that if they know they have classes the following day, they look for a person who will take care of their child so that they attend classes. Child cleanliness is done in the evening after classes so that they do not affect their class attendance, though most of the time, this planning fails when

the child gets sick or lacks somebody to take care of them.

“I plan my timetable so that if I know I have classes the following day, I look for a person who will take care of my child so that I attend classes. I do child cleanliness in the evening after classes daily so that it will not affect my class attendance. “You have to create extra time. Get to study when the child is asleep or when you have someone to take care of them”.

On the question *in your own words, how did student motherhood affect your academic performance?* The key informants noted that student mothers miss some lectures and seminars because they have to attend to other obligations and duties of mothering. Being absent in lectures negatively impacts their performance, and they have no other option. Some of them come late to the lectures because of their childcare demands or abstain from lectures for some time. As a result, stress arises from the need for baby care. These challenges impede student mothers learning and, subsequently, their academic performance.

“It is hard for student mothers to concentrate well on their studies and attend seminars, lectures, or group discussions if they live far away from the lecture room or practical labs for sciences students. It is even worse in instances when our babies are sick when we

are required to stay at home and look after our babies”.

On the question, *how do childcare difficulties affect your ability to compete fairly with other students?* The responders indicated that their cohorts had advanced significantly if they were not on campus. These student mothers had to pick up various groups and lecturers, and there often seemed to be a disconnect. Confusion resulted from the misplaced or unclear course material and the merger of CATs and Exams that various teachers graded. Some grades are challenging to locate, especially on paper, depending on the lecturer’s attitude. Due to these delays, it was challenging for these student mothers to compete equally with other students. Several student mothers come to campus when special exams are extremely close, the review is hindered, and students do poorly. The fact that some of the course material is covered in their absence makes this situation worse.

On the question, *how do disruptions of the child affect your concentration on your academic assignments outside the school?* The respondents noted that they struggle at least to have some time to focus on their studies. Additionally, they contended that they ought to substitute for roles of being a student, a mother, and vice versa. However, it is not always simple to combine the two. However, they insisted that they would not leave their children for the sake of their studies.

“With a baby around me, there is the implication to my studies...motherhood roles often disrupt my concentration. I cannot sit and study for long hours as I did before becoming a mother. It is quite a great challenge”.

“At home, I often fall asleep after taking care of my child and send him to bed because I get exhausted and do not have enough time to work on my assignments. For that reason, I prefer to work on campus because I will not do anything with my baby around at home”.

Interview and Focus Group Discussions Findings

From the focus group discussions, *how does having a child affect a student’s studies and academic achievement?* The respondents noted that the continued missing classes due to motherhood responsibilities had affected their academic performance. Most times, when a continuous assessment was given at random, and coincidentally the student mothers were away from school, they missed the CAT marks, which affected their academic performance. Additionally, owing to the frequently missed classes, the student mothers faced challenges undertaking the main exams or the CATs since it was always difficult to catch up or understand what they missed when the lecturer was teaching.

These mothers also noted that the frequent disruptions by the babies at their residences consistently reduced their concentration, affecting their studies, and negatively affecting their general performance. Taking too much time with the child also reduces their time for doing assignments. These respondents also noted that missing marks in some units due to their absence from classes forced them to re-do the units at another time away from the normal exam times, which felt weird, and due to the negative attitude about the situation, they always faced challenges competing with others academically. Divided attention due to the dual role always caused poor performance by these mothers. The inability to participate in group work with fellow students also affected their academic performance. Student mothers are always forced not to attend classes when either the babies fall sick or when the scheduled clinics days reach, which also affects their academic performance

“Being a student mother has affected me. It has led to a drop in my academic performance since I have to concentrate on my child’s wellbeing. In some exams, I am not able to attain the grade I was yearning for due to responsibilities as a student mother, and this has caused my grades to keep dropping”

The critical respondents on the question of *how having a child affect a student’s studies and academic achievement* observed that prolonged absence from campus due to motherhood responsibilities meant finding their partners having progressed much. These students had to catch up

with various groups and teachers, and there often seemed to be a gap in their understanding. Confusion resulted from the misplaced or unclear course material and the merger of CATs and Exams that various teachers graded. Some grades are challenging to locate, especially on paper, depending on the lecturer’s attitude. Due to these delays, some of the student mothers missed their graduation when they should have graduated. When special exams are extremely close, the review is impaired, and they do horribly; some student mothers come to campus. The fact that some of the course material is covered in their absence makes this situation worse.

From the above statistical findings, revelations from key stakeholders, and responses from Focus group discussions, it is evident that student motherhood has a significant influence on academic performance and unattended classes result from student mothers visiting post-natal clinics. Student mothers opt for the latter to improve the wellbeing of their babies; however, not all states that student mothers fail to attend classes and seminars due to inconvenient times they are conducted, the irrelevance of the topic, and failure to understand the content being treated in seminars.

“In my office, I have been faced by several student mothers asking permission not to attend some lectures because of attending clinics visit for their babies... I have also been faced more than once to provide a justification that a student had officially asked to be away, and that is why they missed a CAT and now want to be given a make-up CAT”.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test of Independence

	Value	Df	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.145 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	40.687	16	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.592	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	263		

From *Table 2*, it was established that student motherhood affected students’ academic performance. This is so since the p-values were found to be below the significance value of 0.05. It was also complimented by the computed chi-

The findings above imply that student mothers often miss some lectures and seminars because they must attend to other obligations and duties of mothering. Being absent from lectures has negative consequences on students’ performance. Some of them come late to the lectures because of childcare demands. All these challenges impede student mothers learning and, subsequently, their level of performance. This study’s findings corroborate Musili’s (2018) study, which argues that mothering students must choose between lectures and attending post-natal clinics. Most

Correlation Analysis

The strength and direction of the relationship among psychosocial effects, students’ motherhood, class attendance, and academic performance were tested using Pearson product-moment correlation. The correlation values range from -1 to +1. A value of +1 indicates a positive relationship, -1 indicates a negative relationship, and a value of 0 indicates no relationship. Two-tail test at a 95% significance level was used to test the correlation coefficient. Therefore, p-values less than 0.05 were deemed significant, while values above them were found insignificant.

Influence of Student Motherhood on Academic Performance

The chi-square test of independence tested the association between student motherhood and academic performance. The findings were as shown in *Table 2*

square values, which were more than the critical chi-square of 5.99.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the statistical findings, revelations from critical stakeholders and responses from Focus group discussions, it is evident that student motherhood greatly influences academic performance. A correlation analysis was run to test the relationship between the psychosocial effects of student motherhood on class academic performance. It was established that student motherhood affected the academic performance of students. This is so since the p-values were found to be below the significance value of 0.05. It was also complimented by the computed chi-square values, which was more than the critical chi-square of 5.99, indicating a significant association between student motherhood and Academic performance. Poor academic performance of student mothers is attributed to low-class attendance, missing scheduled CATS, and lack of completion of assignments and tests given in class. When this issue is addressed, the academic performance of the student mothers will improve drastically. On matters like special permission to be away because of lack of fees, illness, or other relevant social engagements, the process should be made more accessible and, if possible, done online. Copies of deferment forms for students to fill that facilitate university readmission should be easier to access. Numerous challenges as well as missing associations in the student mothers' issues can, and should, be addressed by the respective universities.

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