# Relationship between students' family Socio-economic Status, Self esteem

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## ABSTRACT

*The secondary school students' background factors are important in the students' life and may determine the academic outcomes and the levels of self esteem. Self esteem is an important concept in child development and fluctuates as the secondary school student develops an overall view of themselves within the environment they are growing up in. This study sought to establish the relationship between the students' socio-economic status and their self esteem and academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kericho County. This was an Ex Post Facto research that employed a Correlation research design, to determine whether there is a relationship between the students' socio economic status and their self esteem and academic achievement. The population was 9048 form four students enrolled in public secondary schools in the Kericho County from which a representative sample of 384 students and 17 class teachers was obtained. The schools that formed the study units were purposively selected to include only County schools and a stratified sampling technique was used to select the study units to ensure all strata (Single sex and mixed schools) in the population were represented. A questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to collect information on the students' background factors. A self-esteem inventory was used to collect data on self esteem of the students. The research instruments were piloted and tested to establish the reliability using the Cronbach's alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained. Descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test and regression analysis) were used to analyze the data collected. The significant level was set at α =0.05. There was no statically significant relationship between students' family SES and their self- esteem. The study also establishes that although there was a slight difference in levels of self esteem between boys and girls the relationship was not statistically significant. There was no statistically significant relationship between student's family SES and their self esteem. The results imply that teachers need to pay more attention to the girls to ensure they maintained healthy levels of self esteem which would lead to improved psychological stability and better academic outcomes.*

Key Words: *Socio economic status, self esteem, occupation, income*

## 1. Introduction

The secondary school students' background factors are important in the students' life and may determine the academic outcomes and the levels of self esteem. Among the factors that may determine the academic outcomes are the family's socio economic status, family type and the home location. The family Socio economic status is commonly determined by the parental level of education, occupation and income levels. Families with high socio economic status provide their children with more opportunities at home to build academic skills (Ferguson, 2007). Those of low socio economic status are more concerned with providing basic needs and do not put much emphasis on their children's academic achievement. The economic hardships may interfere with the students' ability to concentrate in their school work and hence poor performance (Barry, 2005).

Self esteem has been noted to be a very important aspect of self development because the evaluation of our competencies affects our emotional experiences, future behaviour and long term psychological adjustment. It has been observed that adolescents with favourable self esteem profiles tend to be well adjusted, sociable and conscientious. The self esteem fluctuates as the child develops an overall view of themselves within the environment where they are growing up. This is especially true of students whose persistent low self-esteem often translates to more serious problems linked to low achievement (Berk, 2006). Rowe and Hall (1991) notes further that adolescents' feelings of self worth affect all aspects of their lives and strongly influence the realization of their potential. An adolescent with high self esteem is emotionally stable, mature and can handle lives' challenges better than the adolescent with low self esteem who tends to be more unstable and dependent.

According to Slavin (2006) the state of the home environment, the social norms that govern behaviour in the community the student belongs and the school experiences have been noted to have influence on the self esteem and academic achievement of the student. The role played by the significant others within the student's background in influencing the self esteem and academic achievement cannot be ignored. The level of education of parents contributes substantially in stimulating the achievement orientation in their children with parents with higher education levels being in a better position to impart the virtue of good performance to their children. The constant stressors that accompany poverty reduced parental involvement and hostile living environments profoundly affect the student's self esteem and academic achievement (Berk, 2006). Barry, (2005) further observes that those students who live in high quality neighbourhoods have been observed to perform better in school than their counterparts in low quality neighbourhoods.

Gender differences have been noted with boys' self esteem being affected by the parental support more than the self esteem of girls (Weber, 2001). Other studies have revealed that adults whose lives are characterised by poor mental and physical health, poor economic prospects and higher levels of criminal behaviour were more likely to have had low self-esteem in adolescence than their better adjusted and more competent adult counterparts (Santrock, 2006).

According to Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) students self esteem functions as a guide to deciding what to be and what to do in the future. It helps the student to understand themselves and therefore control and regulate their behaviours. Mutie and Ndambuki further assert that adolescence is an important time for development of self-esteem, a positive self image or self evaluation. The adolescent compares their real and ideal self and judge themselves by how well they measure up to social standards and expectations and how well they perform. Positive self esteem and high academic achievement can make a difference in determining whether the individual will be happy or unhappy.

Students differ in their socio-economic status. Notably in western societies the most common measure of socio economic status is family income, occupation, parents' educational levels and parents' accomplishment. Secondary school students in Kenya face the same background

challenges noted among the majority of their counterparts in other parts of the world. It has been observed that the youth of Kenya are facing many challenges which include societal disintegration of values and rules. The socio economic disparities that exist between family backgrounds in Kenya could have far reaching influence on how students from the backgrounds perform academically. People with high self-esteem have a clear sense of what their personal qualities are. They think well of themselves, set appropriate goals and use feedback in a self enhancing manner. People with low self esteem on the other hand have less clear self conception and have a poor self esteem (Taylor, Leticia & Sears, 2006).

In Kenya the growing phenomenon of single parenthood, broken families and poverty pose serious challenges in the growth and development of the Kenyan child. It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of the influence the students' background can have on their academic performance. The family characteristics that are part of the background of the students can make a difference in the academic achievement and self esteem of the students.

The exposition captured in the background clearly shows that there is a link between secondary school students' background factors and self esteem. In a society where academic achievement is measured by the quality grades one attains, there is need to determine the relationship between the socio-economic factors of the secondary school students and self esteem. Although studies have linked students' background factors to self esteem. This study therefore sought to establish the relationship between secondary school students' Socio Economic Status and self esteem in Kericho County Kenya.

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study was based on two theoretical conceptions which are The Socio Meter Theory by Mark Leary and Maslow's hierarchy of Needs Theory.

The Socio Meter Theory proposes that the self esteem system evolved as a monitor of social acceptance and that the self esteem motive functions not to maintain self esteem but rather to avoid social devaluation and rejection. Cues indicating that the individual is not adequately valued and accepted by other people's lower self esteem and enhance relational evaluation (Leary, 1999). Leary asserts that people seek self esteem because it facilitates goal achievement and is a subjective feedback about adequacy of the self. The feedback which is self esteem is positive when individuals cope well with circumstances and negative when they avoid threats. Self esteem affects subsequent goal achievement as high self esteem increases coping, while low self esteem leads to further avoidance. Most often the self esteem is lowered by failure, criticism, rejection and other events that have negative implications from relational evaluation. For this study the self esteem of the student may be lowered by failure, rejection and criticism by the significant others that include parents, teachers and members of the peer group.

The importance of a positive self esteem among secondary school students cannot be ignored. As observed earlier, self esteem affects subsequent goal achievement and increases the ability of the individual to cope with challenging circumstances. A secondary school student with a positive self esteem may perform better than one with negative feelings about themselves. The stand point of the socio meter theory is that interpersonal rejection, results in emotional problems, difficulties in relating with others and maladaptive efforts to gain acceptance for example excessive dependency and membership in deviant groups which will in turn interfere with academic achievement and the social wellbeing of the individual. In addition many personal problems lower self esteem because they lead other people to devalue or reject the individual.

Maslow's needs hierarchy explains much about motivation. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the most compelling physiological needs-the need for food, water and warmth. When the basic needs

are met, safety needs come into play. The realization that we are generally safe from harm gives us freedom to satisfy love and belongingness needs, the need to be loved and accepted by whatever individual standards we use to gauge acceptance. Out of this acceptance grows a feeling of esteem, a belief that we are not only accepted or loved but also respected for our capabilities (Larsen and Buss, 2010). The socio economic status of the secondary school student may have a relationship with the way the needs outlined by Maslow are met. Students from difficult backgrounds may have difficulty in accessing basic needs and this may interfere with the attainment of a positive self esteem and high academic achievement. Those from advantaged backgrounds will have their basic needs met therefore have a better chance of attaining a positive self esteem and better academic achievement.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The *expost facto study* employed a correlation research design to establish whether there was a relationship between the family Socio economic and self esteem of secondary school students in Kericho County. A correlation research design can be used to answer questions about the existence of the relationship between two or more variables.  In this study the Socio economic status was treated as independent variables while self esteem and academic achievement of the students were the dependent variables. The correlation research design allows a researcher to make predictions from one variable to another with a certain degree of accuracy. A correlation research design would also be suitable where manipulation of variables is not possible (Gravetter & Forzano, 2006).

The study was conducted in Kericho County, made up of former Kericho and Bureti districts. The Kericho County was chosen because of the diversity of students backgrounds as the County secondary schools admit students from various parts of the country. This study targeted the 9048 form four students and their class teachers. According to information from MOE (Rift valley Province, 2011) there are 146 Secondary schools in Kericho County which enrol students from diverse backgrounds within and outside the County.  The form four students were chosen as they were considered to have stayed in the school long enough to provide relevant information for the study.

The study involved the use of a stratified random sampling technique. First the secondary schools within Kericho County were stratified into single sex and co educational schools and proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select the study units. This technique was used to ensure both genders were represented. The proportionate stratified sampling technique also guaranteed that the study sample was representative of the population (Gravetter & Forzano, 2006). Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents who participated in the study. For this study 17 schools (study units) were proportionately sampled to include two boys' schools, three girls' schools and twelve mixed schools from which the actual sample size of 384 students was obtained. The distribution of the sample was done using simple random sampling technique. This technique helped the researcher to ensure every respondent in the sample had an equal chance of being selected.

Two instruments were used to collect data; a questionnaire was used to collect data from the secondary school students participating in the study.  The self esteem self report inventory adapted from the self esteem scale by (Williams, 2000) with questions aimed at obtaining information about the secondary school students' self esteem. In addition to the questionnaire and the self esteem inventory, an interview schedule was used to collect information about the self esteem and students' background from class teachers.

Validity of the instruments was obtained from the analysis of the data actually represent the phenomenon under study (Gravette & Forzano, 2006). The researcher consulted the experts in the

Education and Community Studies ensured the instrument was structured according to the objectives of the study. The instrument was piloted in two schools in the Bomet County. The County has similar characteristics with the County under study and no school from this County was included in the study.  The internal consistency of the instruments was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.74 obtained was considered acceptable. According to Cozby (2009) a reliability coefficient of above 0.7 was acceptable.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data obtained.  The data was coded, keyed and analyzed. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V. 21) was used. Descriptive statistical techniques were also used to describe how the items related. The relationship between socio economic status and self esteem was analyzed using t-test and multiple regressions were used.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1 Relationships between family SES and student's self esteem
The study sought to establish whether there was a statistically significant relationship between students' family SES self esteem and academic achievement.  The indicators of family SES for the study were parental level of education, occupation and income level.

### 3.2 Distribution of Respondent by Socio Economic status
The distribution of respondents by the family Socio Economic Status was varied during the study represented by three levels as summarized in Table 1. From the results majority of the respondents was from low socio Economic status 290 (72.6%), with 19% from middle SES and the least only 7.5% come from families with high Socio Economic status.

### Table 1: Respondent Socio Economic status

| SES | N | % | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low Economic Status | 290 | 72.6 | 3.98 | 0.44 |
| Middle Economic Status | 79 | 19.0 | 4.00 | 0.40 |
| High Economic Status | 30 | 7.5 | 4.03 | 0.32 |
| **Total** | **399** | **100** | **3.99** | **0.42** |

### 3.3 Self esteem and Students Gender
The results from this study indicate that there was a slight difference in mean self esteem for the two genders.  The mean for girls was found out to be slightly lower than that of boys.  The calculated t-value is 0.950 and this was not significant at $p>0.05$ since the significance level was 0.652. According to Berk (2006) girls score slightly lower than boys in overall sense of self worth partly because on many instances they have no confidence in their physical appearance. Most of the secondary school students are going through late adolescence and their physical appearance means a lot to them hence the role it plays in shaping the self esteem.  The argument by Berk (2006) confirms the findings of this study.
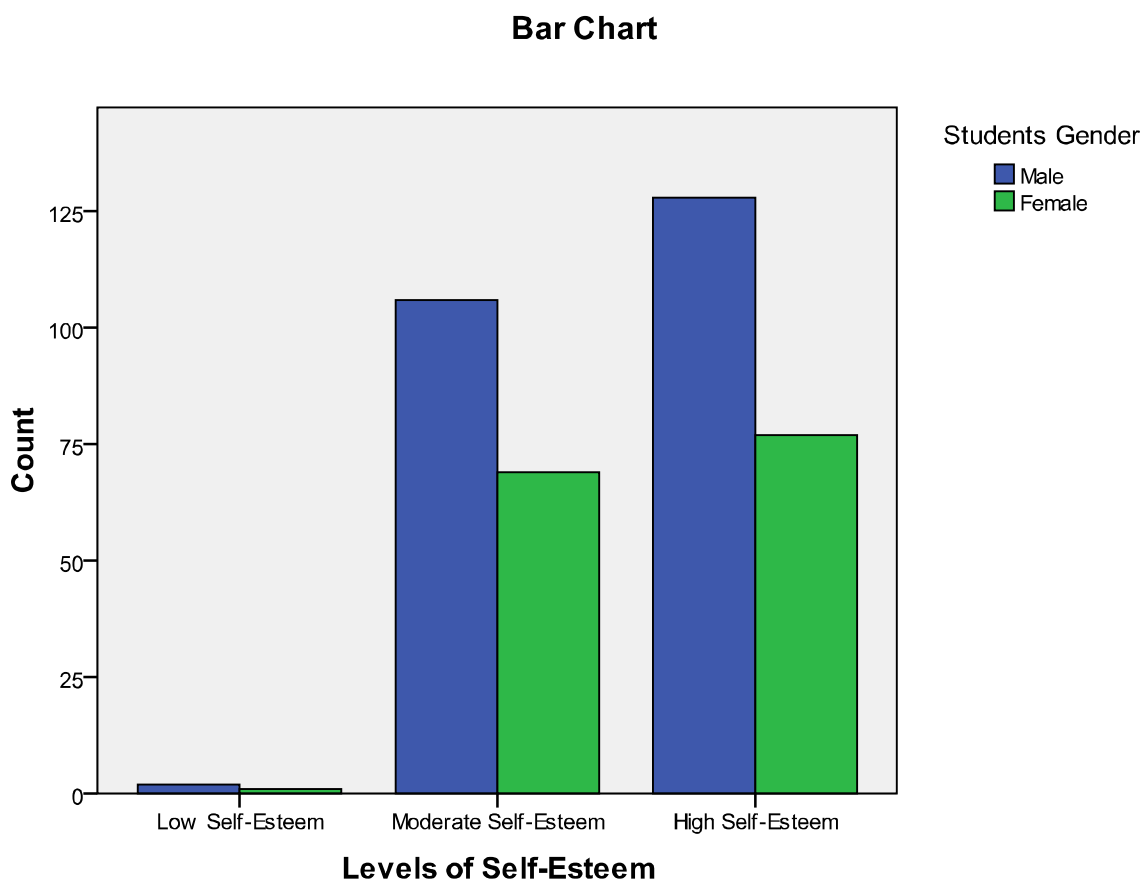
## Bar Chart



**Figure 1 Students' Gender and Levels of Self esteem**

**Table 2: Mean Self esteem and Students Gender**

|  | Students Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean Self-esteem | Male | 245 | 4.0088 | .43670 | .950 | 397 | .343 |
|  | Female | 154 | 3.9675 | .39898 |  |  |  |

### 3.4 Secondary School Students Family SES and Their Self Esteem

The findings indicate that there was a statically significant relationship between the students self esteem and their mother's occupation with a significance level of 0.028 which is significant at $P < 0.05$. The parental level of education did not have a statistically significant relationship with the students self esteem. The significance of the father level of education is 0.614 and for the mothers is 0.941 which was not statically significant at $P > 0.05$. Notably adolescence is a period of dramatic change that often set the stage for variation in feelings of self worth. Rhodes, Roffman Redaly and Fredrikser (2004) argue that a range of influences appear to determine the direction of

change in self esteem in adolescents. Social class which is determined by parental levels of education and occupation has been identified to shape the adolescence self esteem. The secondary school and students in this study may have placed very little value lo parental level of education and hence the minimal relationship with level of self esteem. In this study majority of students had parents who had attained only college level education there was very little variation, the uniformity could have contributed to the similarity ion levels of self esteem among the students.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis Results on Parental level of education, Occupation and Students Self esteem**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.524 | .318 | | 11.079 | .000 |
| | Father's Education Level | .023 | .046 | .053 | .506 | .614 |
| | Mother's Occupation | .023 | .010 | .184 | 2.200 | .029 |
| | Father's Occupation | .008 | .010 | .065 | .813 | .417 |
| | Mothers Employment | .214 | .201 | .103 | 1.063 | .290 |
| | Fathers Employment | .038 | .339 | .011 | .113 | .910 |
| | Mother's Education Level | .003 | .045 | .008 | .074 | .941 |

a. Dependent Variable: Mean Self-esteem

The findings indicate that the majority of the students had a high self esteem with very minimal variations between student from middle and high family SES and only slight variation for students from low family SES. According to Santrock (2009) students from economically advantaged students tend to have high self esteem since there are more acceptable to their peers. The results also indicate that a good percentage of the respondents come from families with low SES and hence the uniformity in their self esteem. The result indicates that majority of the respondent (72.6%) came from low SES families. The result also indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between student's socioeconomic background and their self esteem. The significance is at .473 which is not statistically significant. The findings therefore imply that the family SES of the students does not influence their self esteem. According to Santrock (2009) family socioeconomic variation can play a role in shaping the self esteem of the students. Santrock further observed that children of low SES background tend to have a lower self esteem than their counterparts from high SES families.

Parents can play a crucial role in shaping a child's self esteem (Shaffer, 2005). Adolescents with high self esteem tend to have parents who are warm and supportive, who set clear standards for them to live up to and engage them in some decision making. Such parents also encourage the children to be self reliant but put clear limits on their actions. Santrock (2010) identified parents who work long hours under stressful work environments are likely to be more irritable when they get home and may not have time for their children and this may negatively influence their self esteem.

## 4. CONCLUSION

There was no statistically significant relationship between students' family SES and their self-esteem. The study also established that although there was a slight difference in levels of self esteem between boys and girls the relationship was not statistically significant. The family SES does not influence self esteem of the students. These findings imply that although the students' family SES was not linked to levels of self esteem, educationists should pay more attention to students from low SES families to ensure their self esteem was not affected by their socio economic background.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings the researcher came up with the following recommendation which can help improve levels of self esteem and subsequently the general wellbeing of the students and academic performance.

- The Government should allocate more funds to secondary schools to help support students from low income families. It should be noted that many students who are unable to clear their schools fees are always out of schools looking for same and this may compromise their academic achievement.
- Schools should put in place remedial programmmes to help the students who are always out of school because of non payment of fees.
- There is need to establish functioning guidance and counseling departments especially in mixed schools. Such department would help deal with the problems faced by students from difficult backgrounds.

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