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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL EDUCATION LEVELS AND ATTRITION
RATES AMONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NAIROBI COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between parental education levels and attrition rates among students attending private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Specifically the study sought to establish the attrition rates among students in relation to retakes, deferment of semesters and total drop out. In addition the study investigated levels of parental education and its relationship to attrition. The study was informed by Bean's Psychological Theory of Retention (Bean & Eaton, 2000). The study was conducted in Nairobi County because it had the highest number of private universities at the time of the study. The study sample consisted of (N=453) respondents 387 being second year students acquired through random sampling from thirteen private universities, 60 students who had dropped out of university and six faculty members purposefully selected due to their responsibility positions in their respective universities. Data were collected through a paper based questionnaire and a structured interview schedule. The results of the study revealed that majority of the sampled students were between 21 and 25 years of age while a few were aged between 25 and 30 years of age. Students who had retaken exams once were 12.5% of the males and 9% of the females while those who had retaken exams twice were 3% of males and 4% of females. Deferring semesters was reported by 14% of females and 23% of the males respectively while those who had dropped out were 12%. Majority of the parents had high school education. Majority of the students' parents had secondary and university education with less than 5% having no schooling at all. The relationship between parental educational levels and attrition was not statistically significant. The study recommended that students should be well prepared before they enter university so that they register in degree programs that fit well with their personalities and career interests. Parents ought to be sensitized of their roles to support students financially and psychologically so as to eliminate or minimize attrition. Universities should put in place mechanisms to identify students encountering challenges early enough before attrition occurs.

Key words: attrition, deferment of semesters, drop out, examination retaking, parental education, private universities

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Student attrition defined by Tinto (1975) as delayed completion of university studies due to retaking examinations, calling off semesters, academic years or dropping out of degree programs has become an issue of concern that has generated research interests (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Breckner, 2012; Jiranek, 2010; Tinto, 2012). Delaying completion of university degrees or dropping out from university has been associated with negative consequences for individuals, their families and national economies as it causes disappointments, financial setbacks and lowers the chances of entering the preferred job market in a timely manner (Wilkins & Yussof, 2005). Besides having a negative impact on individual students lives, student attrition has an equally

negative impact on the universities as they lose revenue when students fail to complete their degrees or when they take more time to finish the degrees than the prescribed time Cheruiyot, Thurrow and Too (2007). In addition student attrition interferes with the smooth planning by universities as individual students' completion times became unclear. At a national level student attrition is a major cause of wastage of human resources as attested by Mwebi and Simatwa (2013) whose study among students in private universities in Kenya established that 1.7% of students who had been admitted in private universities cycle for 2007/2008 academic year dropped out, translating to 3.2% education wastage with a completion rate of 96.8%. At a national level student attrition translates to the failure to attain prosperity and eradication of poverty as attested by Okwakol and Bunoti (2011) which negates the popular stand that university education becomes is a vehicle for economic growth and development for the country (Kigotho, 2001).

The challenges some students may face and which interfere with timely completion of university studies are explained from many perspectives one of them being inability to navigate age appropriate developmental tasks. Joining university coincides with young adulthood transition which according to Havighurst, (1975) begins from age 18 lasting up to 30 years of age. During this time the young person is expected to separate with parents leaving the protection of the home and school, pursue and complete university education and join the job market in line with careers of choice and even start families for those who chose the marriage option. Whereas many young people are able to make the transition smoothly, there are those who find it a difficult undertaking. For the latter group, taking personal responsibility for both academic and social life for the first time in their lives is daunting. The difficulties that may be encountered in the navigation of this transition could be due to factors intrinsic to the individuals and also the family support systems available. This study has been based on the thesis that there are family factors that provide students the support needed for timely completion of university education and there are those that predispose students to risk of attrition. The parental education levels have been investigated as a factor that may be critical to student retention because of its relationship with availability of resources available to families to enable them to support their university attending offspring (Allen, 1992, Alderson & Morrow, 2006). In the developed world like the United States of America parents' educational levels have been related to university student attrition

mainly among students of color and those from low economic status and among those who are the first in their families to go to university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Stage, 1988).

In Kenya reasons for student attrition could be attributed to socio-cultural dynamics such as family size and the extended family structures World Bank (2009). The nature of the family may have a bearing on resources made available to enable intergenerational education of family members. Families with a background of education are more likely than their counterparts without the benefit of education to support their children through the education ladder and to have a more competitive edge in the labor market unlike the less educated counterparts. Furthermore, attrition models such Tinto (1975) aver that parents' education provides a unique advantage to students' academic attainment. For instance, parents with a university degree may have familiarized the students with university life thus demystifying it whereas parents without university education may be unfamiliar and even condescending to university education expectations (Bui, 2002; Chen, 2005; Nunez & Carroll, 2001). In addition to this, studies in Australia have shown that among students whose parents had an undergraduate degree, a 10% attrition rate was recorded whereas among students whose parents had high school diplomas or lower, 23.4% attrition rate was recorded (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Further to this, other studies have established a relationship between parents' education and children's academic performance with children of highly educated parents being more competent in language and academic performance (McLaughlin & Randolph, 2012) than children of the less educated parents.

Studies on student attrition recognize the complex nature of the dynamics involved such as parental occupation, education and income (Azhar et al, 2013). In addition other studies attribute student attrition to individual characteristics such as sex, age, ability, and past performance of the students (Aslam et al 2012). The current study has investigated the influence of parental education in determining completion rates among university students in private universities. Similar studies have been conducted by Chowa et al., (2006) and Nyarko (2011) who concur that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to be engaged with their university students' education than their less educated counterparts and thus protect against attrition. In addition Cabrera & LaNasa, (2001); Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, (1999) affirm that students

whose parents have attained a degree at higher education level have a lower risk of attrition unlike their counterparts whose parents have not attained such a degree.

Studies conducted in Kenya reveal that parents are more likely to support education of their children in ways that favors those most likely to complete university education (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). Studies elsewhere assert that schools and homes socialize children through inputs such as opportunities, demands and rewards that they provide as well as the intimate and more persistent environment offered by the family (Hong & Ho, 2005). Henderson and Berla (1994) offered contradictory views by asserting that parents social income and social status, are not good predictors of university student outcome, rather it is the extent to which families are able to create a home environment that supports learning, to communicate high and reasonable expectations for their children's achievement and to become involved in children's academic work.

2.1 Statement of the Problem

Student attrition has been identified as a problem faced by universities worldwide in both public and private universities (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan 2009). In this study attrition refers to students dropping out of university or the prolonged stay of students at the universities due to calling semesters off or failing units and retaking them has been identified an issue of major concern. At a personal level it causes discouragement and loss of job opportunities as well inability to meet age related expectations. At the family level student attrition translates in to loss of investment and unrealized expectations as the individual takes longer than necessary to separate from the family and become socially and economically autonomous. The universities encounter challenges caused by lost revenue as well as inability to plan smoothly. Nationally student attrition leads to wastage of human resources, lowered educational levels which have a negative impact on the economy. As such it becomes important to investigate factors that may relate to attrition with a view to coming up with strategies to reduce or eradicate it. Despite decades of attention, attrition has remained one of the least understood areas facing institutions of higher learning, while its detrimental effects are widespread and cannot be ignored. To the student, attrition means reduced opportunities to obtain gainful employment, prosperity and social mobility. To the university, attrition translates into loss of revenue in addition to perceived

failure in increasing the graduate population in the country. This study therefore focused on establishing the levels of attrition, parental education levels and their relationships to attrition among students in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Furthermore existing literature on higher education in Kenya such as (Mwiria, 2007) does not address the interplay between parental education and attrition rates.

2.2 Study objectives

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental education levels and student attrition in private universities in Nairobi County Kenya. The following were the specific objectives:

- i. To establish the attrition the attrition rates in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- ii. To investigate the relationship between parental education levels and attrition among undergraduate students in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This study was informed by Bean's Psychological Theory of Retention (Bean & Eaton, 2000). According to this theory retention rates are determined by factors intrinsic to the individual, experiences the individual brings to the university, interaction with faculty, peers and the university environment. This study identifies the experiences the students bring to the university as critical to retention in particular parental influences which include parental levels of education. Parental levels of education determine levels of engagement as well as resources available to support university education.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on Tinto's Student Integration Model (1994) which views absence of attrition as the degree to which students bond socially and academically within a university. Central to this model is the degree to which each individual is integrated into the social and academic aspects of a university (Kelly, 2008). This framework posits a central role of student interactions with home factors as correlates to student university attrition. Following entry into university the question of whether a student will attain a degree within the stipulated university degree program or not may not be related to one factor but interplay of the variables as depicted in the following figurative representation.

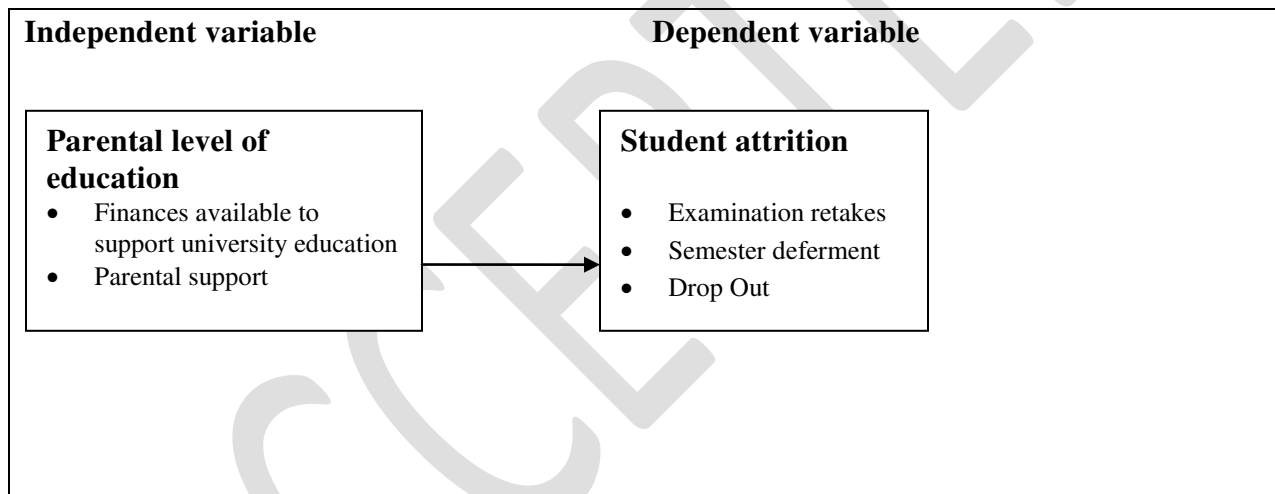


Figure 1: Relationship between parental education and attrition

3.1 Research Methodology

The study was conducted in Nairobi County because it had the highest number of private universities at the time of the study and also because it is a cosmopolitan environment with the greatest representation of people from many Kenyan ethnic groups. The study sample consisted of (N=387) students acquired through random sampling from second year students drawn from thirteen private universities in Nairobi County. The sample also included 60 students who had dropped out of university and who were accessed through the snowballing technique. Six faculty members were selected due to their responsibility positions in their respective universities.

Quantitative data was collected through paper based questionnaires developed by the researchers while qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews.

3.2 Findings of the study

3.2.1 Demographic data

Demographic characteristics of interest to the study were gender and age of the students under investigation.

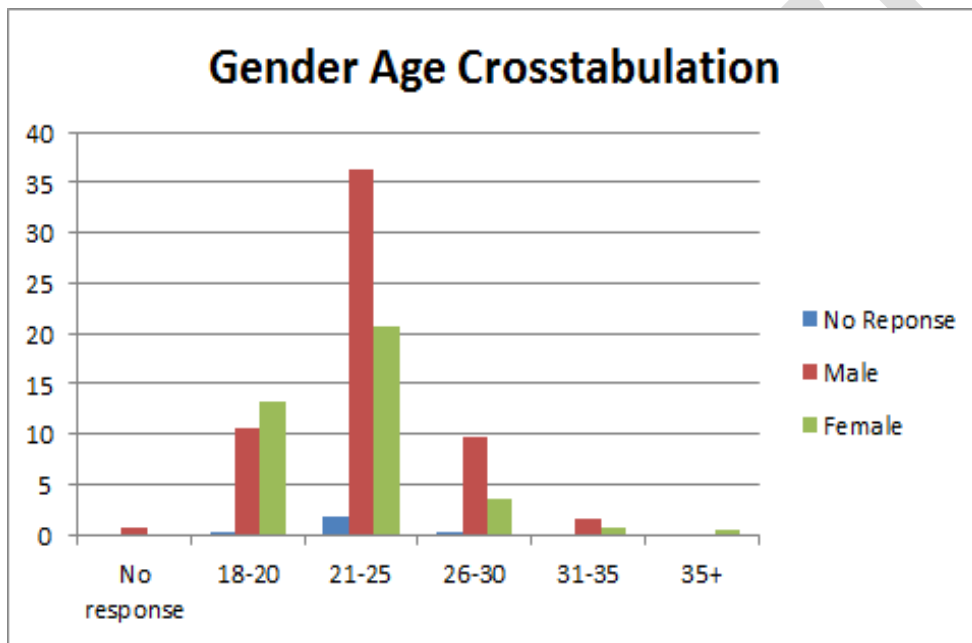


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age and Gender

The study revealed that more males attend university than females (60% men) and (40% women). This distribution agrees with the survey by the United Nations Education and Cultural Organization (2011) showed that there were 59% males transitioning to university as compared to 41% females. The age ranges for both males and females were between 21 years and 25 years while 2 % of all respondents were between 18 years and 20 years of age while approximately 14 % of the respondents were between 25 years and 30 years.

Students are expected to join university between the age ranges of 18 and 21 years. Hence when they are in their second year of study they should be between 21 and 25 years in line with study

findings. The small number of students (14 %) who were between 25 and 30 years could be as result of delayed university entrance.

3.2.2 Student Attrition Rates in Private Universities in Nairobi County

The purpose of this objective was to investigate the student attrition rates among students in private universities in Nairobi County. To achieve this, students responded to questionnaire items that required them to state if they had repeated examinations or deferred semesters. Students also responded to the items that asked them to report if they knew of students who had dropped out from the university.

Retaking examinations

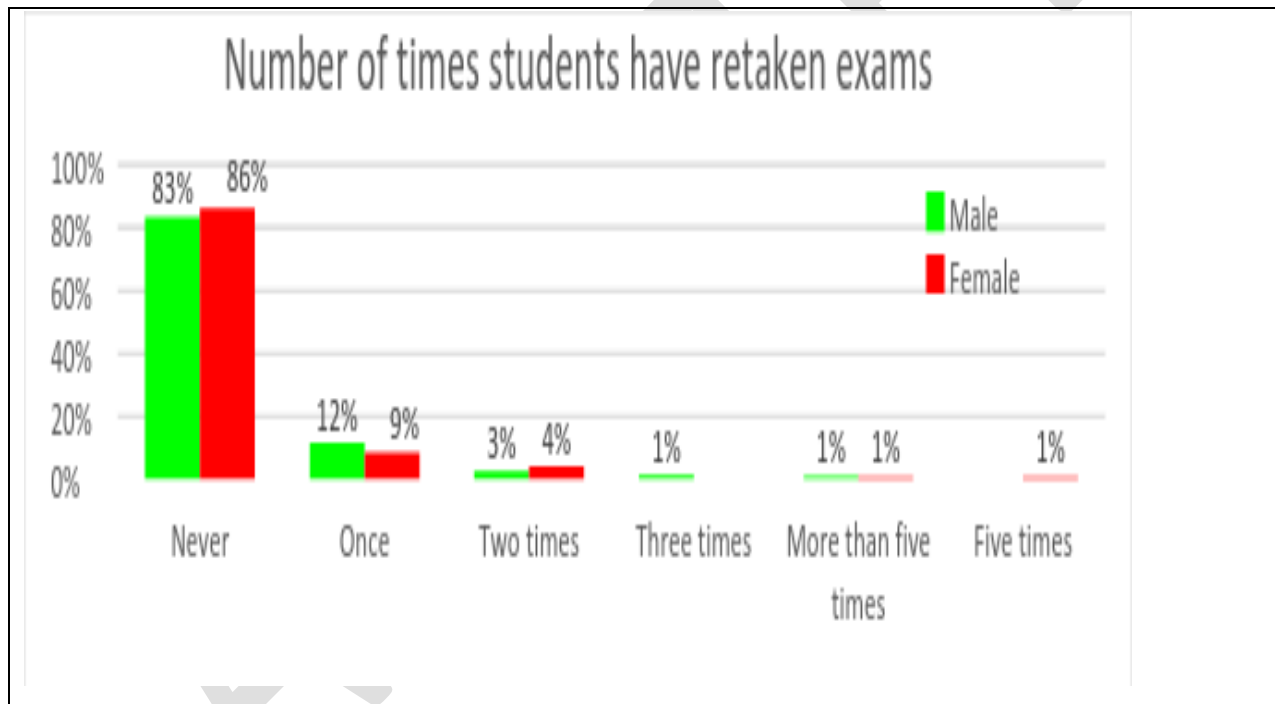


Figure 3: percentage of students who had retaken examinations by age and gender

The findings revealed that 83% of the male students and 86% of the female students had never retaken an examination as shown in figure 3. However, there was a small percentage of 12% of male students and 9% of female students sampled who reported having had to retake an examination once and 3% of males and 4% of females having retaken examinations twice. This gives a total of 15% males and 13% females who have had retakes in examinations. Although in

very small percentages there were students who reported retaking examination up to three, four or five times.

3.2.3 Deferment of semesters

Deferment of semesters arises when a student is unqualified to continue to a progressive year due to requirements as laid down by individual universities. This could arise out of poor academic performance manifested by failed examinations or by failure to fulfill all requirements of a semester by not attending classes. A student could also voluntarily defer a semester by applying and obtaining academic leave as per regulations of different universities. Deferment of a semester has the implication that a student does not progress with a cohort and may take much longer to finish a degree than the prescribed time in a university.

As a measure of attrition the students responded to the items on the number of times they had deferred a semester. The results are as shown in figure 4.

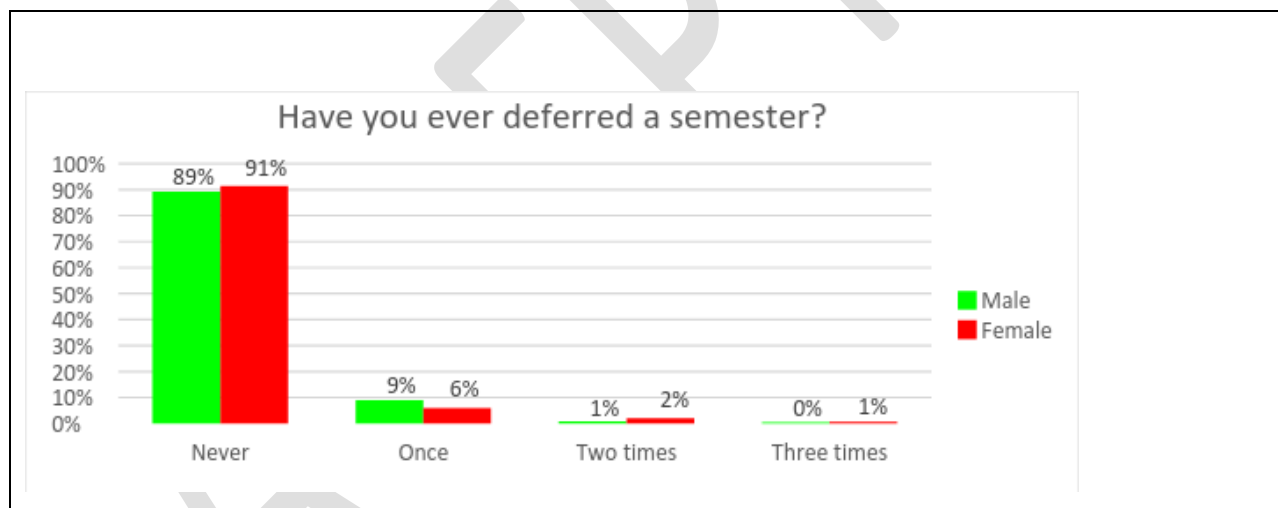


Figure 4: Deferment of Semester as Shown by Gender

The study findings on deferment of semesters revealed that majority of students had not deferred semesters 89% and 91% of the males respectively. Students who had deferred once were 9% of the males and 6% of the females and those who had deferred twice were 1% of the males and 2% of females while 1% of the females had deferred three times.

3.2.4 Knowledge of someone who had dropped out of the university

On the questionnaire item of whether the respondent students knew of someone in their year of study that had ever dropped out of university, 14% of female and 23% of male students sampled knew of someone who had dropped out. These gave contacts of such students. 60 respondents were successfully interviewed following this information.

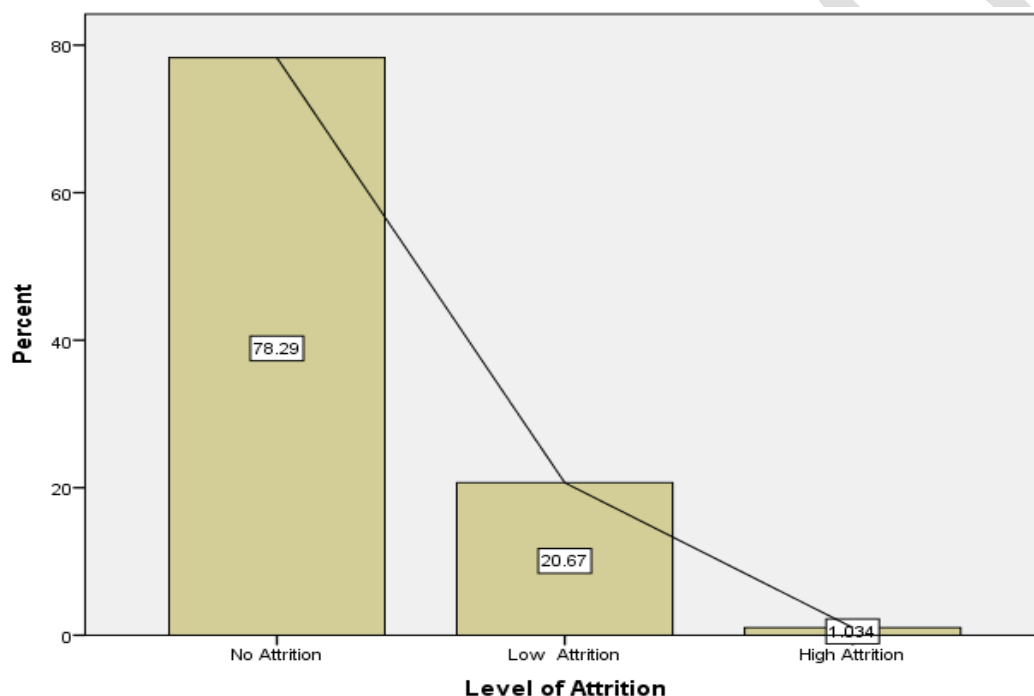


Figure 5: Distribution Showing Level of Students Attrition

In figure 5 above, the no attrition mark shows the highest rank followed by low attrition and high attrition levels. The implications of these findings are as depicted in table 1 showing attrition descriptive scores.

Table 1: Descriptive Scores of Attrition

N	Valid	387
	Missing	0
Mean		2.39
Mode		2.00
Std. Deviation		.96
Skewness		3.47
Range		6.00
Minimum		2.00
Maximum		8.00

Minimum and maximum scores were 2 and 6 respectively. The mean score was 2.39 with a standard deviation of 0.96. Coefficient of skewness was 3.47 meaning that majority of the respondents had low scores on attrition.

As expected, figure 4 shows that up to 79 % of students are shown as having never repeated an examination or deferred a semester and therefore the likelihood of finishing their university education was improved. However, up to 22 % had some level of attrition which means the students reported a measure of examination repeats and semester deferment. A further 60 comprising of 15% of the study population had dropped out of university. The interpretation of this finding is that the attrition rate in this study is a combination of 22% in continuing students and 15% of students who had already dropped out making attrition rate of 37% in private universities in Nairobi County. The current study is in agreement with Mwebi and Simatwa (2013) that attrition exists among private universities in Kenya. However the current study was more detailed to include students who had retaken examinations as well as those who had deferred semesters hence coming up with a higher attrition rates than the 3.2% which was constituted only those students who had dropped out of university and failed to complete the degree program.

Rates of attrition reported elsewhere in the world such as Britain, USA and Canada differ greatly with the rates established in this study. Barnes and Randall (2012) report attrition of as high as 50% in Britain and Canada. USA rates of attrition compare to the Canadian ones at 50% as

reported by Barefoot (2013). Studies from India and the Middle East however indicate that completion rates at university fall between 60% -79% and attrition rates are between 20% and 35% (Sakthival & Raju, 2006) which is more or less what this study has established. Such a dissonance between rates of attrition from the West and those from Middle East would perhaps be explained by the fact that the cultural factors in India and Middle East have more similarities with the Kenyan ones than those found in Britain, USA and Canada.

Although these results suggest that most students are managing the academic process successfully, the results also show that there is a substantial percentage of students (22 %) who are experiencing challenges coping with the demands of university education.

2.2.5 Qualitative analysis

This data on attrition is further accentuated by the telephone interviews of students who had dropped out of university all together. The researchers accessed and interviewed 60 students who had dropped out of university. When asked why they dropped out, the students cited a variety of reasons.

Among the verbatim interviews which were recorded was of one former student who cited lack of interest in the degree course she was pursuing as driving her to drop out of her degree program. She added that she did not find the degree necessary for the kind of livelihood that she was interested in. She put her views in the following way;

A degree is not always necessary to make money. I am a 'hustler' by nature and I am making money – I don't need a degree. I find books and exams very boring. The importance of these university degrees is exaggerated. (*Student dropout; telephone interview*)

It was the feeling of another student who had dropout of the university that the studies were demanding 'too much' from him especially during the second year of study. He stated his fears in the following way;

‘Nobody on campus showed interest in us. We were regarded as ‘old’ after the first year. Nobody seemed to care. Many of the assignments which we were asked to do were casually introduced to us in class without detail and woe unto anybody who dares ask for clarification...we were reminded that...‘you should know this by now’. It was very frustrating and some of us gave up.’

When respondents on campus were asked what their views were on the reasons why their former friends and/or classmates dropped out of the degree program, the responses were interesting and varied.

The reasons given were inability to continue studies due lack of finances to meet school fees and personal maintenance needs. Other reasons given were that some students lived too far away from the university and were unable to commute every day. There were those students who were reported to have dropped out due to sickness of a family member while others suffered misfortunes such as parent’s death.

Thus the reasons the students who had dropped out cited were: challenges with finances, entering business, distances from the university, sickness, social background challenges and death of parents.

The reasons students gave for dropping out of university show that attrition is as result of a combination of several factors rather than as a result of one single factor. A previous study among Egerton University students, by Kyalo and Chumba (2011) found that in order to determine whether a student is able to complete a degree program, a student’s interpersonal skills, the university environment and the social economic status of the family needs to be addressed.

3.2.6 Relationship between Parental Education levels and Students Attrition in Private Universities in Nairobi County

The second objective of the study sought to establish the relationship between parental education and attrition among undergraduate students in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. In order to meet this objective, students responded to items on questionnaire indicating their

parents' level of education as; no schooling, primary school, secondary school, certificate/diploma, university and post graduate. The findings are presented in figure 6.

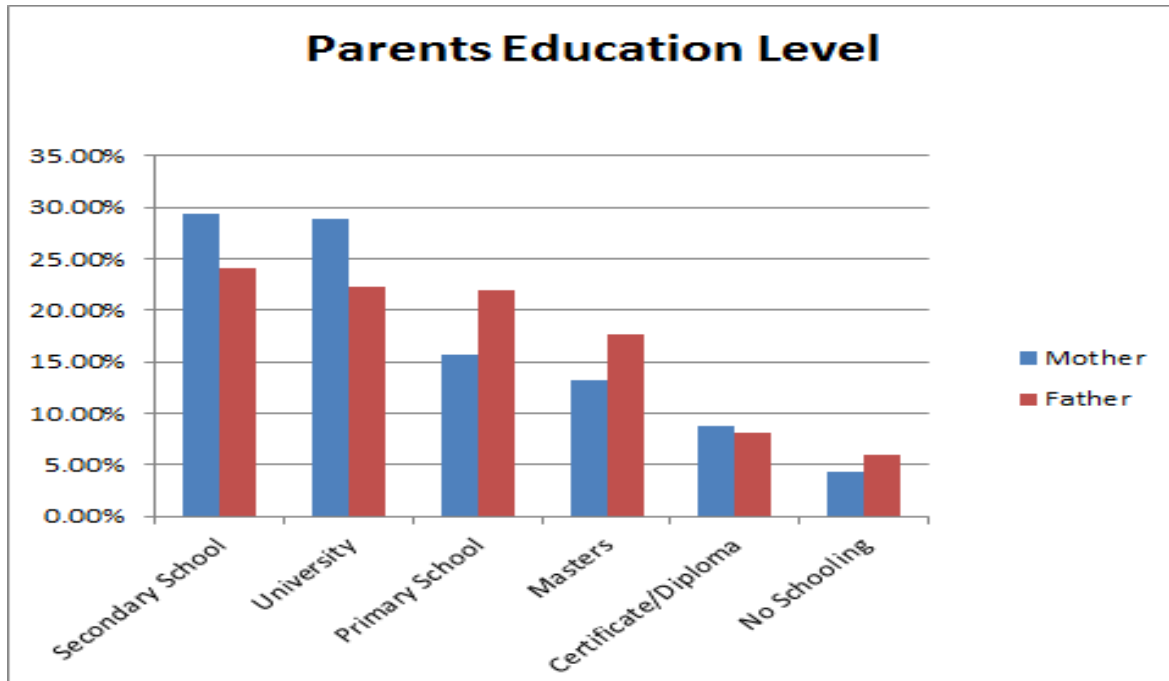


Figure 6: Comparative levels of parental education

The findings revealed that the parents (both mothers and fathers) had secondary education and above. Approximately 21%, 35% and 32% of respondents' mothers had secondary, certificate/diploma and university education respectively. On the other hand, approximately 13%, 35% and 43% of respondents' fathers attained secondary, certificate/diploma and university education respectively. Comparison across parents' gender shows that respondents' fathers are likely to be more educated than the respondents' mothers. The results of the study showed that 35% of mothers and 43% of fathers had a university degree. This finding is in line with the presence of gender disparities in the education arena in Kenya. A UNICEF report (2014) showed that of students registered in secondary schools in Kenya, 51.6% were boys compared to 48.4% of girls. It is from secondary schools that students enter university most probably carrying on the same discrepancy.

It is noted however that parental education levels in this study are somewhat higher than the national averages. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2013) reported that about 85% of

children in Kenya enroll in primary school. Out of these, only 75% go on to secondary school and only 60% of these children in secondary school go on to enroll in institutes of higher learning including universities. This trend simply translates to the fact that only 38.4% of school-going people in Kenya make it to the university as compared to the study figures which show figures of 35% females and 43% males have a university education. The choice of the study site, that is Nairobi County, may have had a bearing on this finding. The population in Nairobi is generally better educated than the population in rural areas where access to education is more difficult.

Though parental education levels have been seen to be present in attrition, it was important to statistically verify whether there was a relationship between parental education levels and attrition. This was done using Chi square test. The scores of the respondent's parental level of education were analyzed. Table 4.7 shows the Chi-Square results.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test for Parental Education and Students Attrition

Education Level	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Father	Pearson Chi-Square	12.65	0.24
	Likelihood Ratio	12.69	0.24
	Linear-by-Linear Association	.53	0.47
	N of Valid Cases	387	
Mother	Pearson Chi-Square	10.87	0.37
	Likelihood Ratio	12.69	0.24
	Linear-by-Linear Association	3.16	0.08
	N of Valid Cases	387	

Table 2 shows that the chi-square statistics testing the relationship between the father's level of education and students attrition is $\chi^2 = 12.65$ with p-value of $\alpha = 0.24$. The chi-square statistics testing the relationship between the mother's level of education and students attrition is $\chi^2 =$

10.87 with p-value of $\alpha=0.37$. In both cases, the probability value was greater than the critical probability value of 0.05 (that is $\alpha > 0.05$). This means that the null hypothesis was not rejected at 5 % significant level. Hence, there is no relationship between parental education and student attrition.

These findings seem to contradict previous findings on the relationship between parental education levels and attrition. Atkins (2004) in a study among university students in USA reported that parents' education levels matter in determining whether a student is likely to persist at university or not. He noted that academic persistence was significantly increased if both parents had college degrees. Interestingly, a study among students in a university in Ghana found that the relationship between parents' educational levels and students' persistence was one where parents who did not have a university degree were found to be more likely to encourage and support their children so that they can attain a university degree and thus uplift the family household (Chowa et al, 2006). Moreover, a study by Sewasew (2014) found out that parental education levels do not count towards persistence in university education as much as the parents' attitudes towards the importance of education and the subtle support that parents give to the students. Parental education levels were thus found not to be important in view of cultural norms which often allow and expect parents, regardless of educational levels, to give guidance and support to the university going students, encouraging them to complete their studies (Nyarko, 2011).

3.2.7 Qualitative analysis on parental education

The findings from the qualitative section of the study support the study findings to a very large extent. In this section students were asked in interviews to state their views on the extent to which parents' educational levels impacted on the academic achievement and whether educational levels had any bearing on a student staying or leaving before getting a degree from a university. The results of the interviews were recorded in themes and coded to determine the frequency of the themes and are as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Role of Parent Education Levels

	Male	Femal e
Parents education level doesn't determine academic achievement and has no relation	16%	15%
Paying school fees in time and visiting students boosts their morale towards academic achievement	15%	14%
Educated parents will want their children as role models	13%	14%
University students make independent choices that depends on attitude, peers, hard work	12%	9%
Highest contribution performances is relayed on parents academic advice as a motivation	8%	16%
How one is raised determines how he or she will behave and perform at school	6%	3%
Some students would want to go further than their parents	5%	3%
Enlightens and motivates the student to work hard	5%	4%
To an extent literate parents have influence on their children's academic performance	5%	1%
Parents should be able to provide counselling on academic matters	4%	6%
Parents who have gone to university know the kind of challenges their children face	3%	1%

From the themes, 16% of male students and 15% of female students stated that parents' education levels were not related to whether students stayed or left university or how they performed academically. The students stated that educational levels did not matter to them but what did was whether a parent paid school fees in time or not. The opinion that parents' payment of school fees on time mattered in fact was cited by 15% of male students and 14% of female students. In addition, a significant number of students (12%) felt that parents' educational level was not important, as the parents looked upon the students to become role models for others in

the family and the community at large. About (12%) of students reported that university age students usually made independent choices and it did not matter what level of education the parents were. It is significant to note that in this category the male students, 12%, were more than the women students, 9%. Perhaps the differences in gender come to play here where boys are apt to show more independence than girls of the same age.

It is only a small percentage of 5% male and 4% female who felt that parents who have a university degree are likely to understand the challenges students go through in university. Female students were of the opinion that parents are happy when one graduated with a degree and that parents ignored anything to do with education when students join university assuming that they were mature. However, the participants were also of the opinion that parental advice reduced students' frustrations in colleges. This corroborates findings from another study done in Africa, which found that parental characteristics such as educational levels did not count as much towards attrition as do parents' attitudes towards academic excellence in addition to the support that such parents gave to the studying children (Sewasew, 2014).

In the qualitative summaries, the perception of students that the parents' level of education had no bearing as to whether they stayed on at university or not came through in the interviews. One student whose mother had a primary school certificate had this to say;

‘Whether parents have gone to school or not does not matter. I know of some of my friends whose parents are big ‘shots’ and have degrees but who keep on failing exams at the end of the term (semester). I have another friend whose mother sells vegetables in a kiosk and did not go to school....my friend passes all exams. She studies very hard and is determined to get a degree. So you see...it is the student who can decide whether to study or not to study’. (*Personal interview, students*)

Another student who was in second year, had differing views and felt that parents who had university education had more to share with their university going children. He had this to say;

‘I am close to my father but I do not discuss my school work with him because he would not understand. I have tried to teach him how to get information from the internet but he loses his temper when he cannot do it. I sometimes feel very discouraged. I wish my father had gone to school and to university’. (*Personal interview, students*)

A complete picture of student views shows that parental education levels are not associated with students' performance at university nor are they linked to attrition levels. There is however a part of the population who were of the view that educated parents were able to support their university students in academic matters by offering advice and acting as 'sounding boards.'

3.2.8 Hypothesis testing

The hypothesis in the research was to find the relationship between parental education levels and attrition. On one hand, the present findings indicate that there was no relationship between parental education levels and student attrition. On the other hand, more examination was required to find out whether parental education levels may have been a factor in student attrition.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to test the null hypothesis.

Table 4: Parental Education Level and Attrition Correlations

		ATTRITION	PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL
ATTRITION	Pearson Correlation	1	.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.622
	N	361	358
PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL	Pearson Correlation	.026	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.622	
	N	358	384

** Correlation was not significant at the .026 level (2-tailed).

Based on the confirmation of directionality shown after application of the Pearson Correlation there was sufficient evidence to accept the null hypothesis which stated that there was no relationship between parental education levels and attrition. Table 4 shows that parental

education levels are not positively associated with attrition. Whereas this test confirms the findings in the study, it is contrary to earlier findings which associated parental education levels to students' persistence in university (Atkins, 2004; Bemak et al., 2005). Such studies have found that students whose parents have low educational levels may be susceptible to personal doubt regarding their academic ability quoting lack of support and education preparedness (Lee et al., 2004).

3.2.9 Discussion of Results

The results of the study have established attrition rates of up to 37% in private universities in Nairobi County. The students in session accounted for 22% of attrition in retakes and deferment while the 60 students who had dropped out accounted for 15% of attrition, making a cumulative 37% attrition. The implication of this attrition rate is that 37% of students in private universities are taking longer than the prescribed time to complete their degree program while some of them dropped out altogether. Whereas this rate is lower than attrition rates among other populations such the USA, Britain and Canada, attrition rates appear to be on the increase in private universities in Kenya. Mwebi and Simatwa (2013) in their study on expansion of private universities in Kenya established that 1.7% of students dropped out before completion of their degree program in the 2007/2008 cohort. This figure does not include students who had repeated examinations or deferred semesters. These levels of attrition have negative implications for the students, parents, and the government. For the students, delay in getting a degree could result in feelings of disappointment, anger and frustration, and a view of oneself as a failure. For the university any situation that results in a student interrupting studies could be viewed as a failure in that institution because the educational goals which were set have been achieved. The parents are likely to view attrition as a waste of resources and unmet expectations on their children, while for the government the implication is the inability to meet education growth targets.

Consequently there is need to establish the actual causes of the high attrition rates among the individual, parent and institutional factors. The individual factors that may be implicated are the students' effectiveness to adequately plan personal lives in a manner that allows enough time for academic pursuits. This may include lecture attendance and study methods that lead to passing of examinations. It is likely that a student who passes examinations and excels in other academic requirements will have confidence and will be motivated to persist in university studies until

completion. On the other hand, a student who fails in an examination may get demoralized but more so maybe forced to repeat a semester in order to meet university requirements. A number of researchers have shown that the amount of effort that students put into their education, affects their academic outcomes (Johnson et al., 2001; Marks, 2000; Natriello & McDill, 1986). This finding is also in line with Cizek and Burg (2006) findings among Nigerian students where performance in examination was linked to a variety of emotions including tension and anxiety. Parental factors may include level of education and psychological support and material support while the university factors may include conducive environments and strengthening of student support structures and include early identification of students encountering challenges and remediation. If the composite mechanisms work well student attrition will be minimized if not eradicated completely.

Relationship between Attrition and Parental Education Levels

The findings in this study under this objective were that there was no statistical significant relationship between parental levels of education and attrition in private universities in Nairobi County. The average level of education was established as being secondary school certificate. The finding in this study appears to contradict other findings in studies of attrition. For example Lee, Sax, Kim and Hagedorn (2004), in a study among university students in Los Angeles, found that parental education levels were important in determining whether a student is likely to persist at university or not. The study established that persistence at university towards completion of a degree was more increased if both parents had a university degree. The Kenyan education scene has been found to be similar as parents with higher levels of education are likely to have well-paying jobs, thus higher family incomes. Higher incomes are likely to translate to sufficient money to afford school fees. Parents with higher education levels may also have higher education expectation for their children (Muolo, 2010). In this study, parental levels of income were established at being between Kenya shillings 50,000 and Kenya Shillings 100,000. It is thus surprising that statistical significance is lacking in the relationship between parental education levels and attrition.

In spite of these findings, when financial support was measured alone, it was found to have a positive correlation to attrition. The finding is supported by a study of private universities in Kenya which found that 21.39% of the students in the 2007/2008 cohort who dropped out of

their study program, did so due to lack of tuition fees (Mwebi & Simatwa, 2013). Other aspects of parental attributes other than education levels, in this study, were found to have more bearing towards attrition. For instance, the respondents in the qualitative part of the research saw parents as providers of counseling in academic and other matters no matter the level of education. Chowa et al. (2006), in a study among Ghanaian university students, agreed with the view of parents as counseling providers. The study in Ghana provided another perspective to the relationship of parental education levels and attrition, and it found that parents who did not have a university degree were likely to encourage and support their children so that they can attain a university degree (Chowa et al., 2006). To buttress this point, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), observed that students from low economic status and who may have been the first in their family to go to university, did very well and were motivated inter alia by a need to have better lives than their parents. This support can however be a contra indicator. Muolo (2012) found that the nature of parental encouragement matters in attrition levels as some students are likely to feel more pressurized than encouraged to acquire a university degree. On the other hand, parents who do not have a university degree do not have firsthand knowledge of the intricacies of university life. As such, they may be ill equipped to advise their children on what to expect in university Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998).

4.0 Conclusions of the study

The findings of the study revealed that attrition among students attending private universities in Kenya were high with about 22% of continuing students having either retaken units or deferring semesters while 15% of the students had dropped out of university. The qualitative findings established mixed findings with some students reporting that parental education was an important determinant of student attrition while other students reported to the contrary that whether a parent was educated or not, was not a determinant of completion of university education. There is evidence of students who have parents who are educated, dropping out, and students of parents who had no education, completing their studies and attaining a university degree, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998).

5.0 Recommendations on Research Findings

Based on the findings and the conclusions of the study the following recommendations were made: that it was important for universities to hold frequent seminars to educate and sensitize parents of their invaluable role in supporting students to enable them to complete their degree programs. These seminars could be organized by the mentoring units in conjunction with the Dean of Student's office. Suggestions for the subject matter of these parent seminars would be how to navigate life at the university, challenges and coping skills, developing and maintaining self-esteem in young adults, the role of the parent of a university student, reasons for attrition in university, and addiction. The study also recommended that researchers should investigate other social dynamics related to attrition among university students in Kenya, both public and private in line with recommendations suggested elsewhere by (Pace, 1980; Astin, 1984, 1993) and Kuh, 2003). This would especially be of benefit to universities in Africa, especially Kenya, where studies addressing attrition rates in higher education are still in their infancy. Academic mentoring should be done before students join university to ensure that the students embark on degree programs that they are best suited for as this will boost the motivation to pursue university education to completion.

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