Parental Support Factors as Determinants of Student Attrition in Private Universities in Nairobi County

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parent support and student attrition among students attending private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. To achieve this, the study sought to establish the attrition rates among students under investigation, parental support and family incomes and their relationship with student attrition in Kenya. The study was informed by Tinto’s (1975) student integration theory and Bean’s (1980) student attrition model. The study sample consisted of 387 current and 60 dropout students of 13 private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Data were collected through a paper based questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The results revealed that majority of students (over 80% of the males and females) were satisfied with the relationship they had with parents while over 60% of males and females were satisfied with the way parents provided support materials and books. Fewer than 50% of males and females reported that their parents visited them at the university. Qualitative findings yielded mixed results with some students reporting positive parental support while others reported insufficient support. Majority of parents’ income was between 50,000 Kenya Shillings (500 US Dollars) and 100,000 Kenya Shillings (1000 US Dollars). Statistical analysis in relation to the purpose of the study revealed no significant relationship between parental support and attrition. The study makes various multifaceted recommendations on how to control student attrition. The findings of this study are significant to university administrators, counselors and mentors in higher education institutions. Policy makers will also find these results valuable in the search for appropriate remedial action for the problem of student attrition.

Keywords: attrition, private universities, home factors, parental support, family income, examination retakes, deferment of studies, drop out

INTRODUCTION
The phenomenon of student attrition has been defined by Tinto (1975) as a process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the university which determine whether students are retained or drop out. Student attrition has been identified as an issue of major concern globally and nationally due to the negative consequences it has on individual students’ lives, their families and a country’s economies. The result of attrition is a large number of unfinished degrees which have a cost for the country, the students and the universities concerned (Schneider, 2010). The causes of student attrition are multifaceted and include factors intrinsic to individual students and those factors in the various environments that impact the students including family and institutions. Various studies have specifically identified students’ academic background, integration of social and academic school experiences, funding and university entry behavior (Church, 2009; Jiranek, 2010; Herman, 2011). At times students take longer than the subscribed time to finish their degree due to a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons identified in studies include but are not limited to loneliness, financial constraints as well as the incompatibility between the students and the degree programs enrolled in (Christie, Munro & Fisher, 2004). No one factor has however been established to account for student attrition but rather it is an interplay of a range of factors.

Studies from Western countries indicate that student attrition is caused by the complex interaction of home factors such as; parental or guardian level of education, a family’s economic status measured by monthly income, students perception of parental support and parental or guardian expectations of a university student upon completion of a degree program (Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011). Several studies (for example Breckner, (2012) and Johnson (2001) seemed to link student attrition to individual
factors of past academic performance, the individual and program fit, as well as the social economic status of the student’s family. Other factors that have been identified as leading to student attrition include students’ family background, peer relatedness and study skills (Schneider & Yin 2011). Whereas student attrition maybe a continuing concern, adequate interventions to reduce attrition rates need to be recommended so as to reduce attrition costs through additional fees for the student, opportunity cost of missing out on employment, emotional costs as well as the addition cost incurred by the institution by way of lost school fees, recruitment costs and tuition fee. Despite the puzzle of academic attrition being an object of inquiry for decades in the Western world, there are reported few studies in Africa. Among the studies done in universities in Africa is one by Herman (2011) for a university among graduate students in South Africa. The South African study established that students believed that they were unable to complete their degree programs due to; personal reasons, lack of financial support and inflexible university policies. Attrition rates of as high as 50% were established and collaborated by studies of graduation rates in South African which were found to be at times as low as 15% (Letsela & Maile, 2008) thus falling among the lowest in the world.

Among the few studies done on students’ attrition rates in universities in Kenya is one by Mwebi and Simatwa (2013) who established that the dropout rate in the 2007/2008 cohort in private universities in Kenya was 1.7%. Further studies in Kenya’s higher education that suggested that students drop out of university due to reasons rooted in personal and family background (Mutula, 2002). At a personal level a student joins university leaving behind support systems such as family, secondary school and friends. Some students experience challenges balancing the personal freedoms existing at the university and academic life and thus engage in behavior patterns that are detrimental to timely completion of degree programs.

As students transit to university, important psychological and socio psychological factors have been associated with student attrition (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Young adult transition is one of the challenges that students joining university may encounter (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). The social requirement for the young adult transition is that the individual navigates university life successfully, developing career paths that lead to attainment of financial independence (Cahill, Hamilton & Lynch, 2006). This transition period is associated with various stressors, including social isolation, academic pressure, financial difficulties and homesickness (Cahill, Hamilton & Lynch, 2006). It is often assumed that perceived parental support will act as a buffer against such stressors. Thus investigation of socio economic status, parents’ educational background, family encouragement and financial support and student attrition becomes relevant (Muckert, 2002). This is especially true for Kenya where studies on attrition have largely been done in high school and leaving university studies mostly under studied (Nyarko & Vorgelegt, 2007; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). In the Kenyan situation possession of a degree certificate continues to be critical towards social and career mobility which in turn would help the country achieve the goals of higher education would and consequently support the country’s economic growth (Mwiria et al., 2003). As such attrition poses concern at a time when the tertiary education is accessible to only 3% of university aged population (Otieno, Kiamba, & Some, 2008).

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In Kenya private universities have become institutions of choice for a growing number of students due to varying reasons. Some of them complement the public universities by offering unique programs that meet job market needs and they are also characterized by stability and absence of student unrest and thus delivering degrees on time (Kiboiyi, 2013). However, like other universities worldwide, private universities in Kenya are still faced with the problem of attrition (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan 2009). Student attrition has been associated with detrimental effects as it has been related to reduced opportunities to obtain gainful employment, prosperity and social mobility among the students who drop out of universities and those who take longer than the stipulated time to complete degree programs. To the university, attrition translates into loss of revenue in addition to perceived failure in increasing the graduate population in the country. Studies in Kenya and elsewhere reveal many causes of student attrition such as individual, home, peer and university factors. Searches in universities in Kenya reveal that published studies exploring the relationship between parental support factors and student attrition are scarce. This study sought to investigate the relationship between parental support factors and the parameters of student attrition (dropping out, examination retakes and deferment of studies) among students attending private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Such additional knowledge is envisioned to aid in improving the general understanding of the factors associated with attrition and may help in developing appropriate intervention programs to help students who repeat academic years, call off semesters of drop out altogether. The study may also expand the knowledge base of student attrition in private universities in Kenya leading to better management and planning to ensure student retention.
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
The study was guided by the following research objectives
i. To establish the attrition rates among the students under investigation.
ii. To investigate the relationship between parental support and attrition
iii. To investigate the relationship between parental income and attrition

HYPOTHESIS

H₀: There is no significant relationship between parental support and student attrition.
H₁: There is no significant relationship between parental income and student attrition.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE
The study was grounded on two theoretical perspectives the first one being Tinto’s (1975) student integration theory (SIM) while the second one was Bean’s (1980) student attrition model (SAM).

Tinto’s Integrated Theory of Student Attrition
Tinto’s model posits that persistence in higher learning is primarily a function of the quality of a student’s interactions with the academic and social systems of the university. According to the theory social integration and academic integration are critical to retention. Student attrition is present when retention fails to happen. The theory further informs that when there is a match between the student’s motivation and academic ability and social characteristics retention is enhanced. The social integration refers to the extent of congruence between individual students and the university social system, which includes both formal and informal (non-classroom) interpersonal relationships and attachments between the student and faculty, as well as interactions among the university students in the university social life (Tinto 1975). Among the most acclaimed of Tinto’s views is that, he sees student attrition as a process rather than a single isolated incident. Tinto was of the opinion that there is need for an individual to successfully transition to the role of a higher education student and become socially and academically integrated into a university.

Academic integration is seen as consisting of rules such as getting a pass mark at the end of a university semester and the academic values of an institution. Social integration represents the extent to which a student finds university environment to be in line with student’s preferences. The preferences are informed by a student’s background, values and aspirations. The integration process takes place both in day-to-day interactions and through the intellectual sharing of values. As Tinto’s theory evolved but retaining the original position, other aspects of students’ lives such as student backgrounds, cultures, economy and social factors were found to have a bearing on retention (Tinto, 2007). This theory was found to be relevant in this study as it sheds light to the way interactions between individual students and the social support systems as well as the characteristics of the university processes may promote or hinder retention.

Bean’s Psychological Theory of Retention
Bean and Eaton (1980) developed the Psychological Model of Student Retention which sought to take into account factors outside an institution. The theory demonstrates that attrition is influenced by academic outcomes and psychological outcomes (Whannel, 2012). This model is a mixture of four psychological models; the attitude-behavior theory, coping behavior theory, self-efficacy theory and attribution theory. According to the model a student with a positive attitude towards university, is able to handle difficult situations, believes in success and has belief in self, she/he will then be likely to stay in university until completion of a degree (Bean & Eaton, 1980). Bean and Eaton in developing this model argued that Tinto had used sociological basis to explain attrition whereas student departure from university could also be studied from a psychological focus (Bean, 1990). Tinto’s model looked at an individual’s integration into groups whereas Bean looked at the individual. According to Bean and Eaton, the process of attrition is derived from students’ behavior and behavior is motivated by psychological processes (Bean & Eaton, 2000). In their view student satisfaction is influenced by a variety of factors that include academic performance and the students’ belief regarding the influence of a university degree on future job prospects. On admission to university, the student is likely to develop networks that include the university’s administration and is at the same time subject to environmental factors such as missing family and high school friends, running short of money and longing to engage in previous familiar activities.

A student’s interaction with the university leads to development of both personal and institutional attitudes. The attitudes are reflected in academic performance as shown in examination scores, the feeling of fitting in the institution and loyalty to the university, all of which are important in determining a student’s intention to remain in the university (Bean & Metzner, 2002). Thus Bean’s psychological theory of student retention offers cohesive multi-level causes of dropping out of university. It combines individual features of student dropout such as student background and family support. This theory was used in this study as it provided a different but relevant perspective to Tinto’s bringing in the role played by psychological factors to either promote retention or hinder it.
The conceptual framework of the study was based on the thesis that family factors such as parental support and income levels were important determinants of student attrition. This was based on the premise that students who receive adequate support from their parents were more likely to navigate university education more successfully than their counterparts without such support. Such students would engage in debates about the degree programs chosen and would also feel secure and motivated to pursue the degree programs and complete them within the stipulated time. In addition, parents with adequate financial base would be in a position to meet the financial needs of the students in a timely manner preventing unnecessary wastage of study time unlike their counterparts without similar financial advantages. Students whose parents lack secure economic bases may therefore lead to increased attrition rates through retaking examinations, deferring studies or dropping out of university altogether.

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 that included the following: Students Self-report Questionnaire, the Dean/Head of Academic Department IDI Schedule, the dean of students IDI Schedule, and the faculty structured interview schedule.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY
Attrition Rates
The first study objective was to establish attrition rates from the students under investigation with regard to examination retakes and study deferment. The data were collected through self-reports by the students. The results were presented in figure 2 and 3.

Retaking Examinations
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.

Deferment of Semesters
Deferment of semesters arises when a student is unqualified to continue to a progressive year due to requirements 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 for example by low attendance of 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 3.
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.

The findings show that up to 22% of students under the study showed some level of attrition (repeated examinations and deferred semesters) while 60 students comprising of 15% of the study population had dropped out of university. The interpretation is that the attrition rates in this study is a combination of 22% in continuing students and 15% of students who had already dropped out making attrition rates of 37% among private universities in Nairobi Kenya.

### Relationship between Parental Support and Attrition

The objective of this study was to establish the relationship between the perceived level of parental support and attrition among undergraduate students in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Parental support was measured through five-level Likert scale containing 11 items. The students were to requested to score the items by indicating: Strongly Agree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Disagree to issues such as: my parents visit me in school, my parents follow my students' academic progress and my parents provid books and other educational materials. Other items on the questionnaire sought to find out if the parents or guardians helped the students search for attachment and job-related experiences, if parents and guardians expressed the need to be supported during their old age and if the students’ siblings looked up to the students in education matters. Additional items sought to establish if parents and guardians expected students to get good jobs, satisfying careers, keep close relationship with guardians or parents and if parents or guardians were able to guide the students through the academic program adequately. The findings were reported in figure 4.
Parents, guardians and relatives were seen as an important support factor for continued stay at university. 87% of male students and 84% of female students believed that they had a close relationship with their parents/guardian. This finding was closely followed by 85% of male students and 86% of female students citing that their parents/guardian believed that they would get a good job and become successful in the future because they have a degree. A relatively lower 65% and 63% of the female and male students respectively reported that their parents supported them with materials such as books. Only 46% of female students and 41% of male students admitted that their parents visit them at school. With regard to looking for jobs and internships 55% of the students felt that their parents supported them in the search. Majority of the respondents, 82% females and 83% males were of the view that their parents and relatives felt that they would get into good and satisfying careers once they graduated with a university degree.

Looking at responses from the survey in their entirety, there were several items that required further discussions. For example, item nine on the scale asked the students to rate the extent to which they agree with the statement ‘I believe I have a close relationship with my parents/guardian’. To this statement, 84 % of male students and 87 % of female students rated this scale high, indicating that the students believed they had a good relationship with their family more specifically the parents. This finding is in line with the findings shown in figure 4 showing the high level of parental support and low level of attrition. It would thus be true to say that if the reverse was found, it would mean that perception of a poor relationship between parents and students may result in high attrition levels. Maleck and Demaney (2012) in a study among university students in Eastern USA found that students who were able to get feedback and guidance on academic performance from parents were likely to stay on at university. Getting feedback is a factor of support. Students who received high levels of verbal support from parents stayed on at university until graduation as affirmed by Jacobs (2012).

Furthermore, Kenyan parents are seen as being among key stakeholders in university student education. Parents’ attitude towards university education is one of the factors most closely associated with attrition, (Chiuri and Kiumi, 2005) thus making perceived parental support an important variable in a study. It is more likely that in Kenya, parents would encourage and support students at university with the goal that the student will get a well-paying job and be able to support the aging parents (Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005) and thus get upward mobility in society.

**Income levels**

In looking at the parental levels of income, this study found out that majority of the students’ parents had monthly income levels of KES 50,000 and KES 100,000 as shown in figure 5.

![Figure 5: Income levels](image-url)

Generally, the income distribution was positively skewed towards the left indicating that the majority of households had lower levels of income. For instance, the distribution shows that approximately 21% of the household’s monthly income lies between KES 15,000 and KES 50,000 while approximately 21% of the household’s monthly incomes lie between KES 50,001 and KES 100,000. 17% of the household’s monthly incomes lie between KES 100,001 and KES 150,000 while approximately 12% of the household’s monthly income lies between KES 150,001 and KES 200,000. These findings echo earlier findings on educational levels where the average education levels of parents was found to be a high school certificate. With these levels of income it can be deduced that taking a student through university is an enormous task that takes a lot of sacrifice on the part of the parents. It may be these...
levels of income that parents will wish their children to improve on by acquiring a university degree.

Another item of interest is item number one which “my parents pay visits to university to see how I am doing’. 46% of female and 41% of male students agreed with the statement. This finding may have a relationship with the culture within which Kenyan students come from. This culture is a collectivist one, where the needs of the individual are subject to the needs of the community. Parents would therefore feel an obligation to know where and under what circumstances a student spends time. Thus it is not a surprise that in the same scale the response to the statement number five ‘my parents expect me to take care of them in old age’ had 82% female and 80% males agreeing with it.

The interpretation of this finding is that there may be no direct relationship in perceived parental support among university students but there is a linear relationship between levels of parental support and students’ desires and efforts to attain an academic degree. Interview data from university administration and faculty gives a further view to this finding. A member of the administration staff from one of the universities had the following to say on the question ‘in your opinion does parental support impact on student attrition’ The staff member had worked with students in the Dean of students’ office for four years and had this to say,

The value of parents’ involvement in a student’s academic life cannot be understated. It is easy to notice from far, students whose parents care about what happens to them at university as opposed to those students who are going the journey alone. Yes…parents’ involvement is absolutely necessary.

Another staff member who had worked as Dean of DStudents for more than five years said that most problematic students cite their parents as not being interested in what they were doing. He said,

Students complain that parents do not understand them. They say that parents are unwilling to give guidance on career choice and look upon the students as grown-ups who should make own decisions. An attitude like that from parents is bound to make the students feel lost… Such are the kind of students who we are likely to drop out. In another interview the university staff observed that there were some students who fully acknowledged that the support they were getting from parents was limited to financial contributions but that the parents did very little else to help them to get a university degree.

Interestingly, when the respondents who had fallen out of university were asked on phone how they viewed the role of parental support in attrition, their responses did not appear to differ very much from those of the continuing students views. They agreed that parents now expected university going students to act in such a way that they could be emulated by the community at large. One student who had dropped out of university had this to say,

My parents would tell me over and over again that I must set an example for everybody in the family (these included my cousins). They believe that I have been favored (I don’t know by who) by getting a chance to go to university. This kind of pushing did not help me in my studies…instead I felt too much pressure that I decided to take a break…

Another student was able to excuse her parents and observed that they would not know how to advise her about university because they have no idea what happens in a university. She had this to say;

My father is more interested in how much milk the cows produce than in what subjects I am taking at university. He says that university education is my business. He says that he was not able to go very far in school as it was not the ‘done’ thing at the time he was growing up. As far as I can see, I am in this alone...

The above qualitative findings on the relationship between parental support and attrition would point out to a clear relationship in spite of the statistical analysis to the contrary.

**Perceived Levels of Parental Support**

In the quantitative part of the study, participants were asked about the availability of parental support when at university through an 11 item survey scale. Perceived levels of parental support were measured by summing up scores on the scale which were given weights ranging from 10 to 50. Low scores represented low level of parental support scores while high scores represented high level of parental support. Figure 6 presents a line graph showing the distribution of parental support.
Figure 6: Distribution of Parental Support Scores

Figure 6 shows that parental support scores were somewhat normally distributed. This means that majority of respondents held the view that parental support was satisfactory while few students held the view that parental support was relatively very low or very high.

Hypothesis Testing
To address this objective, the null hypothesis stated that there was no significant relationship between parental support and student attrition. Chi square test was used to test the relationship. Table 4.10 shows the Chi-Square results.

Table 4.10: Chi-Square Test for Parental Support and Students Attrition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>53.674</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>58.726</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>1.989</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 4.10 shows that the chi-square statistics testing the relationship between parental support and students attrition is $\chi^2 = 53.674$ with p-value of $\alpha = 0.637$. Given that $\alpha > 0.05$, the null hypothesis was not rejected at 5 % significant level. This means that there is no relationship between parental support and student attrition.

This finding was puzzling taking into account that extensive research on university student attrition is of the opposite view (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2008). A recent study among university students found that while focusing on the interactions between a person and the environment, face to face interactions and support from a student’s family members played an important role in a student’s academic outcome. In addition, parental support may fail to be seen from a financial point of view due to the availability of tuition loans for such programs from institutions such as Higher Education Loans Board (HELB).

The findings of the study thus concluded that even if there is little statistical significance in the relationship between parental support and attrition, the implied relationship carries weight. For example, the students report that parents expect them (students) to become role models, meaning by implication that the parents support the children in university experience which they view as being important in making role models. Research would appear to support this view. A study by Douglas –Hall and Chau (2007) found out that there is clear evidence that higher education is associated with higher earnings and thus parents have been urging their children to pursue higher education with a view of raising the family’s income.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS
The overall purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived parental support and attrition among students in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Perceived Levels of Parental Support
The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant relationship between perceived levels of parental support and attrition among undergraduate students in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Parental support in this study was characterized by the perception of students on the degree of closeness with parents, the interest parents showed in students' academic journey and availability of facilities such as books to the students at home. In this study, majority of the students said that they had a close relationship with their parents. This finding of 87% of male students and 84% of female students believing that they had a close relationship with their parent/guardian may be attributed to the cultural backgrounds of the students. The cultural tenets of Kenya are largely collective; one where the community and especially the family are concerned about an individual’s wellbeing, and in
turn, an individual is looked upon to behave in a way that takes the family into consideration. A collective culture is where the needs of an individual are subject to the needs of a community. Taking into consideration that the objective on parental support was a self-report investigating the perception of the respondents, cultural undertones are more likely to manifest. This observation corroborates findings from other studies that in Africa, where parental support to university-going students was found to extend to such a level, graduation of a child was a family celebration, and dropping out of studies was found to be an embarrassment for the whole family (Lewin, 2011; Sewasew, 2014).

In addition to findings on the relationship between parental support and attrition, other studies show that perceived lack of support and resources is more powerful and indicative of attrition than the actual presence of support (Braxton et al., 2008). In other words, the level of complaint and blame of failure on parents by students who are not supported emotionally or otherwise is higher than the appreciation of parental support by those who perceive support (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Braxton et al. 2008). Interaction and support by and with family members has been found to be instrumental in the academic outcomes of young adults (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). However, it has also been found that students from cultures where there is a great deal of family interdependence may be disadvantaged in that they may be forced to take time out of their studies to fulfill family obligations (Tseng, 2004). This observation corroborates findings that indicate that 4.2% of the students in the 2007/2008 cohort, who dropped out of private universities in Kenya, did so because of family commitments (Mwebi & Simatwa, 2013).

The relationship between attrition and perceived parental support did not hold for all variables under study. The explanation of the findings under this objective was that students come to the university from backgrounds where cultures of origin are strong. An example is the collectivist culture which has been manifested in this study. Responses from respondents when asked how they would feel if they were to stop university education, showed that feelings of letting people down and a feeling of shame was cited by 24% of male students and 20% of female. A further 13% of male students and 15% of female students said that they would be filled with feelings of shame and shattered dreams.

The feelings of the respondents are in line with a previous study in private universities in Kenya which established that students who drop out of university often have low self-esteem and are filled with feelings of guilt and shame (Mwebi & Simatwa 2013). Further research has shown that students who drop out of university experience long periods of unemployment and even when they finally find employment, they earn much less than those who went on and graduated (Freeman and Bresciani, 2007). Tinto (1975) in his Student Attrition Model saw that students brought with them home factors into universities and colleges, and interacted with the university environment with those factors. Thus homes socialize children through inputs such as opportunities, demands and rewards, and that is what they take with them to university to interact with other factors (Hong and Ho, 2005; Hicks and Heastie, 2008).

**CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study established student attrition of 37% established by looking at examination retakes, deferred semesters and those who had dropped out of university. Examination retakes and deferred semesters counted for 22% while students who had dropped out counted for 15%. The investigation of the parent support systems revealed that majority of students believed that their parents or guardians gave the expected support. Majority of students believed that their parents and guardians had positive attitudes towards the student future careers after completion of university studies. In addition over 60% of students were satisfied with the way parents supported them by providing materials and books and over 80% of the students were satisfied with the relationships they had with parents and guardians. One area that parents did not seem very involved in was visiting the students at the university. This may be explained by the fact parents may find university difficult to penetrate or they may believe that the student is grown up and may not need as close monitoring as when they were in high school. These findings seem to suggest that the parents and guardians are committed to supporting the students’ university education. The results from qualitative data revealed that some students were not satisfied with the support they got from their parents. Surprisingly the findings from statistical analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between perceived parental support and attrition. Students involved in attrition gave reasons such as lack of school fees and money for personal maintenance, students living too far from the university, and either finding the distance too long and time consuming or being unable to commute everyday due to high cost of transportation, and sickness in the family. This finding may lead to the conclusion that parental support is linked to financial support as perceived by students which is in turn related to attrition.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In order to gain a deeper, more inclusive understanding of the relationships between parental educational levels as determinants of student attrition in private universities in Kenya the study population
was taken from university students in session at the time of study and as such only examined cross-sectional differences among private universities. Gaining clearer focus would require a longitudinal approach.

The study only covered private universities. To enable academicians and researchers develop interest in studying the relationship of parental support and student attrition in universities in Kenya, both public and private universities need to be studied. The study did not address gender diversity a factor which may give more insight into the problem of attrition. Thus factors specific to women may be investigated as individual factors may need to be investigated further.

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Based on the study findings as well as the conclusion of the study the following recommendations were made: First, since students bring with them all past experiences from home and other education institutions which they attended, multifaceted methods may be employed in order to control attrition in universities. Secondly, families’ involvement in university student education path can also be encouraged. The value of parental advice was highly rated in this study, which would suggest that parental advice would be more valuable were the parents to know what happens at university. This study recommends that programs be rolled out, which would see parents made more aware of the activities students are involved in at university. In addition students need to be equipped with life skills that instill values and attitudes that support pursuit of university education to completion. Universities should have mentoring programs that support students’ social and academic life to enable timely completion of degree programs. The national government should support the education of students in private universities by giving them loans and bursaries the same way they give to students attending public universities.

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