Academic performance in KCSE in Garissa District has been below national average for the last 12 years. In order to improve educational standards and particularly KCSE performance, in depth research, analysis and documentation of factors affecting KCSE performance is required that will enable educational stakeholders strategize towards better performance. The study aimed at identifying the most influential school based, socio-cultural and family’s economic and educational background factors affecting KCSE performance in Garissa District. A descriptive survey study design was used and questionnaires were used as the main instruments, this instrument was structured to have both open ended and closed ended questions. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the study sample which were seven public secondary schools. The researcher collected data from the DEO, head teachers, deputy head teachers, HODs, class teachers and students. After collecting data the researcher checked the questionnaires for completeness, accuracy and uniformity of the information obtained. Data was then coded and analyzed using SPSS to get the frequencies and percentages, and presented in tables. The findings of this research included the great extent to which school based factors affected KCSE performance such as lack of physical facilities in the school as reported by 70% of the students, 83% of the class teachers noted lack of students discipline, 96% of the HODs expressed lack of teachers’ motivation while 67% of the deputy head teachers reported teacher’s availability and motivation, 83% of the head teachers said lack of physical facilities in the school. The DEO mentioned teachers unavailability and lack of preparedness. The socio-cultural factors affected KCSE performance greatly such as religious beliefs as noted by 80% of the students, 83% of the class teachers said that preference for boys to girls especially in education matters, 98% of the HODs expressed nomadism, 60% of the deputy head teachers reported female genital mutilation while 67% of the head teachers mentioned early marriages. The DEO noted female genital mutilation. Family economic and educational background factors greatly affected KCSE performance such as lack of parents’ support and encouragement as mentioned by 69% of the students, 65% of the class teachers said family size, 88% of the HODs expressed parents’ level of
education, 83% of the deputy head teachers reported parents’ poverty levels while 67% of the head teachers noted source of income of parents. The DEO reported parents’ poverty and educational levels. The study recommended that in order to improve KCSE performance, the government through TSC should employ more teachers and improve on their hardship allowances to attract and retain qualified teachers, as an incentive the government through the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) should lower university entry marks and review upwards the loans and bursaries allocated to university students from arid and semi-arid regions in order to motivate the students and to increase their access to higher education. The government through the law enforcements agents such as the police and the provincial administration should also eradicate drug and substance abuse and ensure that legal drugs such as Khat (Miraa) are only sold to adults of over 18 years. The parents should be educated on the modern methods of farming such as irrigation and zero grazing for those situated on river banks or drill boreholes to discourage staying away from homes for 3-4 months while looking for pasture and water for animals. The presence of parents at home will improve their support and encouragement to the students. The students should be sensitized on the value of Guidance and counseling services by their teachers and encouraged to be counselors of their fellow students in order to curb drug and substance abuse and ensure that students grow up all round and responsible persons.