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Relationship between ecological, economic, conflict, socio-cultural factors and enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to address the persistent low enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. The study targeted all 136 female teachers in rural public primary schools who were interviewed using questionnaires and purposively selected 27 head teachers whose responses were obtained using interview schedules. In the first test (Ho1), the researcher investigated the connection between ecological factors and the enrolment of girls in Samburu County. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient revealed a statistically significant negative correlation of -0.429 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.025. The second test (Ho2) examined the relationship between economic factors and girls' enrolment in Samburu County. With respect to the Ho3 test, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient revealed a significant negative correlation of -0.537, with a low p-value (Sig.) of 0.005, indicating significance at the 5 per cent level. This similarly indicates that higher levels of inter-group conflict factors are linked to a reduction in girls' enrolment in the region. Pearson Correlation for Ho4 of Socio-cultural factors yielded a value of -.503. The significance level is 0.004, less than the .05 p-value. In a nutshell, all the null hypotheses have been rejected. The study recommends a holistic approach to enhance girls' education in Samburu County. This behoves educational planners, including raising public awareness about the importance of girls' education and challenging traditional beliefs, increasing the presence of female teachers, and addressing economic barriers. Infrastructure improvements, transportation, and safety measures are essential, along with resolving water scarcity issues and expanding access to education in rural areas.

Key terms: Girls' school enrolment, nomadic pastoralists' education, ecological factors, economic factors, inter-group conflict factors, socio-cultural factors.

INTRODUCTION

Girls' education is a critical determinant for overall societal development and is a basic human right; school enrolment levels for girls are still low in Africa, especially in its rural areas. It impacts women's health positively, economic empowerment, and social development (United Nations Statistics Division - UNSD, 2019). There is a 10 per cent increase in women's earnings for every additional year of their schooling, and a child of an educated mother is 50 per cent more likely to survive beyond age five (UNESCO, 2019).

Kenya, like other nations, has tried to promote girls' education, but to date, girls are still disadvantaged with low enrolment, especially in rural areas. This study seeks to ascertain the linkage that some picked realities have with the enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya.

Despite significant progress in school enrolment, millions more girls than boys worldwide, especially in Africa south of the Sahara desert, are not in school (UNSD, 2019). Only seven nations in sub-Saharan Africa attained the goal of at least an 80 per cent gross enrolment ratio (United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization- UNESCO, 2019). According to UNESCO (2019) and World Bank (2019), there are still one hundred and thirty million primary girls who are not in school, most of whom live in West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Evans & Yuan, 2020).

Socio-cultural dynamics have been advanced to be influencing the enrolment of girls in school. Many of the traditions in African culture confine girls to homestead activities, while boys are given priority if parents are to choose who among them is to be enrolled in school (Sakwa, 2020). In Asia, there is more pressure on girls to participate and contribute to household income earning or care for their young siblings; rural parents also marry their daughters off to get the bride price (Raj et al. 2019). It is the pursuit of this inquiry to ascertain the association between the notion of girl child education and the enrolment of girls in primary school.

The government of Kenya has been endeavouring to promote girls' access to primary education, but data from 42 counties in Kenya prove that urban girls are doubly likely to be in school than rural girls (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Sakwa (2020) further noted that a girl in central Kenya is over seven times more likely to attain a standard two level of literacy and numeracy than a girl in northern Kenya. In Samburu County, the gap between girls and boys in primary school enrolment is wider in schools in rural than in schools in urban areas.

The level of enrolment of girls in primary school in Samburu County has remained persistently low. The percentages have remained around 40 per cent with marginal increases. The national primary school enrolment depicts very minimal disparities of decimal points. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for 2022 in Samburu County was 0.7. According to UNESCO (2020), if the GPI ranges from 0.97 to 1.03, then it means that gender parity has been attained. GPI below 0.97 indicates an imbalance in favour of boys, but 1.03 and above favours girls. Primary school enrolment data for 2022 shows that Kenya achieved gender parity at 0.98 (Ministry of Education, 2022). Samburu County is, therefore, way below the acceptable bracket of between 0.97 and 1.03.

To date, enrolment figures for the girl child still remain low in remote areas like Samburu County. Rural primary schools in Samburu County have a relatively lower enrolment of girls in relation to the overall county enrolment. Girls' enrolment in public primary schools was 36.5 per cent, while 63.5 per cent of boys were in school in 2022. Similarly, there were variations between sub-counties. For instance, Central Sub-county had a relatively higher enrolment at 40.2 per cent, while Samburu East had a meagre 34 per cent.

In spite of the government of Kenya's efforts to promote education for all children through its educational planning and economic policies and plans, girls' enrolment in primary school remains low in rural areas of the country, especially in Samburu County, where girls school enrolment in rural public primary schools in 2022 is 36.5 per cent (UNICEF, 2019; MOE, 2022).

In 2022, girls accounted for 41.4 per cent of primary school enrolment in Samburu County compared to

58.6 per cent for boys. As shown in Table 1, enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools has been consistently low, with minimal increases over the years. In 2022, girls in school were fewer (36.5%) girls compared to boys (63.5%). There are even disparities within the county, where the Samburu Central sub-county has a girls' primary school enrolment of 40.2 per cent, while Samburu East has 33.5 per cent. The 0.7 Gender Parity Index also shows that girls' school enrolment is low. This scenario depicts a disadvantaged position for girls in rural areas in reference to primary school enrolment in Samburu County.

Table 1: Enrolment in Rural Public Primary Schools in Samburu County

SAMBURU COUNTY					
Year	**Male**	**%**	**Female**	**%**	**Total**
2018	16233	66.4	8214	33.6	24447
2019	19375	65.7	10026	34.1	29401
2020	19326	64.8	10498	35.2	29824
2021	19804	64.1	11092	35.9	30896
2022	19833	63.5	11400	36.5	31233

Source: Ministry of Education Office, Maralal (2022)

If the problem of low enrolment of girls in rural primary schools is not addressed, then they will continue facing socioeconomic problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was viewed from the context of social conflict theory articulated by Oberschall (2015), where societies are incessantly in conflict because of contending for limited resources, power, status, and values. Men and women are in a perpetual state of conflict due to unfair treatment of the latter. Girls are in a state of conflict with cultural practices, taboos, beliefs, environment, economic activities, as well as parents, families and parenting practices.

Das and Das (2023) relate distance to school and drought and girls' school enrolment in Punjab, Pakistan. Ahmad et al. (2021) saw the role of sanitation facilities in primary schooling in Pakistan, while Wangila (2019) mentioned the geographical location.

European Commission (2021) raises the point that child labour, such as domestic work, disproportionately affects girls' schooling when compared with the case for boys. Börzel and Risse (2021) noted that in Jega Township in the Kebbi state of Nigeria, socioeconomic background interfered with girls' schooling. Karuku (2021) posits that the home environment affects girls schooling in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Farah et al. (2021) allude that in Mandera County, inter-clan conflicts affect girls' access to school, and Benhura and Naidu (2021) mention dispersion of families created by conflicts in Zimbabwe as linked to the inability of girls to enrol in school.

Mungai (2021) identified socio-cultural factors such as child marriage and female genital cutting (FGM) as violating the rights of girls and that communities need sensitisation to discard the practices.

An inquiry by Mughal et al. (2019) in Muzaffargarh, India, noted that 92 per cent of parents said that they engage their daughters in early marriages due to poverty. Toroitich and Mureithi (2019) assert that early marriages relegate them to housework, thus preventing them from going to school. Moreover, Andiema (2021) verified how many of the traditions in West Pokot, such as premature marriages, female genital cutting, and widow bequests, upset girl-child education.

Female Genital Mutilation has been blamed for the trauma and complications it brings to girls, plus the attitude it brings that they are now ripe for marriage

(Toroitich & Mureithi, 2019). FGM has also been cited in Kuria as a factor affecting girls' school enrolment (Magige, 2020)

Early pregnancy has also been mentioned in Eastern Cape, South Africa, as an issue relating to girls' school enrolment (Jochima et al., 2021). The study noted that girls from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to being pushed out of school cause of pregnancy, as they often do not have the resources and support systems necessary to continue with their education.

An inquiry by Ozowuba (2021) in Nigeria appraised the role of culture in relation to the meagre entry of girls into school. Adanna (2020) corroborated this in that misconceptions about female education, polygamy, and preference for male children affected girls' school attendance.

Psaki et al. (2022) discussed issues preventing the increase of girls in schools in low-income countries and found that a lack of information on the importance of girls' education negatively influenced girls' school enrolment.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a descriptive correlational design, and the survey method was applied for the collection of data by use of questionnaires and interview schedules. The study was based in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. The respondents were 136 female teachers and 135 head teachers in rural public primary schools. The census method was used to select all 136 female teachers, and purposive sampling was used to select 27 head teachers. Piloting was done on 14 female teachers and 3 headteachers. The questionnaires used four-degree Likert-type items in order to avoid neutral responses.

Quantitative data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 29.0. Descriptively, percentages were computed. Correlation analysis was done to test the existence, direction, and degree of the relationship between selected factors and the enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was extracted through regression analysis to test for significance. A regression analysis was carried out to show the predictive capacity of socio-cultural variables on girls' enrolment in rural public primary schools in Samburu County. In conducting and reporting the research findings, the utmost level of respect for the rights of the respondents was adhered to, including adherence to integrity and truthfulness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There was a 100 per cent turnout of the respondents, with 30.3 per cent being above 35 years of age, while the rest ranged between 21-34 years. All had primary teacher education training certificates (P1).

On ecological factors, drought ranks highest, with 85.3 per cent of the respondents agreeing that it has a relationship with girls' enrolment in rural public primary schools in Samburu County. This is followed by distance with 83.4 per cent and high temperatures coming last with 25.4 per cent. Pearson Correlation Coefficient value was -0.429, signifying a moderate negative correlation. ANOVA coefficient (Beta) of -0.429 also indicated that ecological factors have a moderate negative effect on girls' enrolment.

Headteachers similarly blamed drought and distance to schools as factors affecting girls' child access to basic education in the county, as indicated in the statement below:

> *The drought in Samburu is worsening every day, making desperate families trek long distances in search of food, water and pasture for their livestock. Men go looking for food, while women, including school-going children, stay at home to take care of other family members as they look for more food to sustain themselves.*

In relation to economic factors, household wealth comes out as key, with 73.2 per cent of the respondents agreeing that it relates to girls' school enrolment, followed by family residence at 70.0 per cent, rural infrastructure-62.7 per cent, school facilities and child labour at 61.6 per cent each. The more families reside in rural areas, the more they practice traditions that impair girls' access to school (Ishaku, 2020). The hypothesis test Ho1 realised a Pearson

Correlation Coefficient value of -0.348 with a significance level of 0.005, indicating a significant negative correlation between economic factors and girls' enrolment in these schools. This aligned with Kagigi's (2020) assertion that girls' school enrolment is consistently related to economic challenges.

Headteachers mention that "livestock is the source of wealth, so parents hardly sell livestock to educate their girls".

Notably, 82.1 per cent of the respondents brought out fear of attack as a key factor caused by inter-group conflict in affecting girls' access to school. This was followed by loss of livelihood source-80.1 per cent, loss of human life-78.5 per cent, learning disruption- 77.6 per cent, and displacement-72.2 per cent.

Pearson correlation coefficient was -.537, with the P-value being less than .05 alpha level, showing a moderate negative correlation, which means that an increase in inter-group conflict practice in Samburu Country leads to a decrease in enrolment of girls in the County. The headteachers mentioned that:

> *Some schools were completely destroyed during inter-group conflicts; thus, girls could not access schools. Teachers were threatened and thus decided to run away and refused to go back. With inadequate teachers in schools, there was no effective learning.*

The analysis of socio-cultural variables indicated that 92.2 per cent of the respondents said that FGM is still being practised by the community, while beading is practiced-66.0 per cent, prevalence of early marriages-78.7 per cent, and teenage pregnancies-72 per cent. And age-set graduation 98.2 per cent. The data indicates that 92.2 per cent of respondents agree that FGM has an association with the enrolment of girls in primary school, agreeing with Magige (2020) and Toroitich and Mureithi (2019).

Perception about girl child is also cited as an issue affecting girls' education, with 76.1 per cent of respondents citing myths and 85.2 per cent saying that rural parents harbour more attitude towards girls' education. This agrees with Mughal et al. (2019). Nomadic mobility was alluded to as a factor affecting girls' schooling by 78.6 per cent of the respondents, while 77.1 per cent said that mobility makes girls outgrow school, agreeing with Mungai (2021). Further, 65.3 per cent of respondents agree that low parents' levels of education affect girls' school enrolment as this leads to them not valuing girls' education and makes them unable to advise girls.

The majority (66.5%) of the respondents also agreed that the occupation of parents affects girls' access to school since traditional parents make their daughters herd livestock, have little exposure and awareness of importance of educating girls, and engage in many cultural practices that affect girls schooling.

In general, nomadic mobility rates are higher at 78.6 per cent, followed by cultural practices at 73.5, then perception about girl child at 73 per cent as affecting girls schooling.

Qualitative interviews also corroborated the above findings by the respondents mentioning that cultural practices affect girls' enrolment in public primary schools. It was reported FGM causes trauma, takes time to heal, and makes girls feel ready for marriage. Warriors also beat girls and then beat them if girls go to school. Girls who went to school. One respondent reported as follows:

> *There was an incident where warriors stormed the school and forcefully took away all girls for enrolling in school without their permission. This scared girls do not go to school.*

The hypothesis test, as reflected in Table 2, revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the study and the Enrolment of Girls in Samburu County, where the Pearson correlation coefficient was -.489, with the P-value being less than .05 alpha level. The coefficient (r) was a moderate negative correlation, which means that an increase in the selected factors of ecological, economic, inter-group conflict, and socio-cultural factors in Samburu Country leads to a decrease in enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools.

Table 2: Correlation of Selected Factors with Enrolment of Girls Samburu County

Area of Residence	Selected Factors	Enrolment of Girls	Pearson Correlation Coefficient Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Samburu County			-.489*	.006

** - Means significant at 5% level*

The ANOVA test suggesting an existence of a statistically significant negative relationship between socio-cultural factors with a beta coefficient of -.4898 means that when the practice of the selected factors increases by an additional unit, enrolment of girls in the public primary schools in Samburu County decreases by .489.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions: Community members need to be sensitised to changing traditional beliefs and attitudes towards girls' education. Secondly, the government should deploy more female teachers in the area as girls will always resonate well with teachers of the same gender. Further, opening up remote rural areas by constructing road networks, increasing mobile phone networks, and constructing more primary schools, including boarding schools, is critical. Similarly, nomadic pastoralists need to be trained on diversification of livelihood sources, such as crop farming and entrepreneurship.

Recommendation: Further research can be done on specific factors such as fatigue, traditional parents, rural habitation, loss of livestock, loss of grazing lands, age-set graduation, physical environment, displacements, and loss of bread-winners.

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