



IDENTIFYING AND EXAMINING THE INTERVENTION EFFORTS CURRENTLY IN PLACE TO ADDRESS THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

Authors

Mutuku Magdalena Mueni⁽¹⁾ ; Enos Njeru⁽²⁾ ; Edward Mburugu⁽³⁾ 

Main author email: kyalomagda@gmail.com

(1.2.3) University of Nairobi, Kenya.

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the intervention efforts currently in place to address girls' education. Despite concerted international efforts to eliminate gender disparity in education, the gender gap is still widening, and discrimination continues to permeate the educational systems in some African countries. The tool for data collection was a set of questionnaires made particularly for the students in and out of school. A key approach used by the study was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) supplemented by in-depth interviews. The study also made use of direct observations guided by an observation guide or checklist. Furthermore, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. On efforts being made, 29 per cent of the respondents had gotten bursary allocation, while 32 per cent had not gotten any assistance at all. However, principals responded that they offered employment to the very needy parents at school and deducted part of the fees from their salaries in an effort to retain the girls in school. The following recommendations were made. There was a need to inculcate awareness among stakeholders, namely the community and the parents /guardians, teachers, and girls, as well as the importance of girls' education and ways of ensuring retention of girls at school until completion of school. This study identified that making sure that girls get an education involves tackling social issues such as child labour, unwanted pregnancies, forms of discrimination, early marriage and other problems that keep girls away from school.

Key terms: Education of girls, gender disparity, government, intervention efforts, secondary school.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The development of education has been a major objective of the Kenyan Government since 1963 (GoK, 2003). However, the majority of the 1.5 million children out of school in Kenya are girls, with the worst-hit areas being slums and ASAL regions (UNESCO, 2005). The education sector is still experiencing various challenges in spite of being allocated the largest share of social spending (GoK, 2005). The government has made several attempts to address the challenges facing the education sector. Various studies have noted that there are serious gender disparities in secondary schools despite the governments' and civil societies' efforts to even them out (GoK, 2005). Millennium Development Goal 3 aimed to promote gender equality and empower women. Specifically, it focuses on eliminating gender disparity and all other forms of discrimination in primary and secondary education. The government of Kenya also initiated in 1996 the Gender desk at the MOEST headquarters, which addresses gender-related issues and, in this year, waived secondary tuition fees as a step geared towards making secondary school education affordable.

Education is the responsibility of governments, and when governments fail to invest in education, the system fails, and quality education suffers (DFID, 2004). Numerous school levies make accessibility to education unaffordable to most parents. This has impacted negatively on the girls, leading to low participation in education and high illiteracy levels. This is particularly the case in Kitui District, where the dropout rate at the secondary level is 16.3 per cent for boys and 21.3 per cent for girls. There are 66 secondary schools with a total enrolment rate of 11.8 per cent, and the boys' average years of school attendance is 3.8 per cent, while that of girls is 3.5 per cent (Mueni et al., 2020). This implies that girls are not getting equitable access to education as compared to boys in Kitui district. Previous government policies on education have made considerable efforts to improve education sustainability. However, the girls' high school education has not been given much attention it deserves and thus why, it is important to keep on pushing the cause forward until gender parity is achieved at almost all levels of education.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Bank is devoted to fighting poverty and helping developing countries invest in their education systems. In light of this, it has embraced the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as its main priority, particularly eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Almost all low-income and middle-income countries have prioritised improving access to the quality of basic education, and some have gone further to particularly target girl child education. MDG 5 is devoted to gender parity and equality in education. Moreover, special attention has been paid to women and girls in the other goals. Goal 2 stipulates, "We must ensure that by 2015, all children, particularly girls and children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities acquire education".

In Guinea, enrolment increased by 17 per cent, and retention rates increased by 20 per cent from 1997 to 2002. This was due to environmental sanitation improvements through the installation of separate latrines for girls and boys (UNICEF, 2003). Various studies have shown that girls are particularly affected by sanitation, and building separate toilets can improve their participation in school. Kenya made a commitment to achieve gender parity by 2005 as articulated in national policies and plans (MOEST 2004:14). Nationally, Kenya has achieved almost near gender parity in participation in education at the primary school level with a GER of 105.8 per cent for boys and 103.7 per cent for girls (MOEST 2004). However, this hides regional disparities where the participation of girls is as low as 15.7 per cent, compared to 29.3 per cent for the boys in the region.

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Kenya has made concerted efforts to address gender concerns and achieve parity, especially at the primary and secondary levels, because of the perceived importance of women's and girls' education. Some of the efforts made concerning gender and achieving parity include the 2010 constitution, which enshrines gender equality, including a two-thirds gender rule that members of appointive or elective bodies must be of the same gender. Education initiatives that offer free primary education (FPE) and free day secondary (FDSE) significantly increase girls' access to education initiatives. The GoK, UNDP, religious organisations such as the Catholic Secretariat, NCK and NGOs have contributed rehabilitative services, food and educational finances to help children and women improve their quality of life and the provision of access to Basic Social Services, particularly education and primary health care. The challenge, therefore, for girls in Kenya is to increase access to girls' education and ascertain that once girls enrol, the school provides a good quality education within an environment where girls are able to compete and acquire basic intellectual empowerment and practical skills, perform well and complete the cycle with a level of achievement that allows them to rise to higher levels of education and training.

To address gender concerns in education, the government is promoting gender-friendly learning environments in schools with a special focus on the provision of water and sanitation. The gender policy is being finalised and, once completed, will create a framework through which partners can work together to promote the education of girls, as this requires a multifaceted approach (MOEST, 2004). Instructional materials, especially textbooks, have taken gender concerns on board.

The government specifically promotes the education of the youth through the provision of bursaries to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs), students from low-income families, bright but needy students and students in marginalised or arid and semi-arid lands (ASALS) at the secondary school level to enhance access and retention. However, out of the total bursary allocation of 770 million for the 2004/05 financial year, 5 per cent of the total bursary allocation targets girls as a part of affirmative action. Science equipment is also provided to selected girls' secondary schools to improve their learning of mathematics and sciences. To improve the participation of girls at the University, the government has lowered the entry points for girls by one point (MOEST, 2004).

The government has made efforts to improve retention: school feeding programmes have been introduced in ASAL areas, urban slums and pockets of poverty areas where the majority of the vulnerable children live. The Arid and Semi-Arid lands (ASAL), which are inhabited by nomadic communities, are historically characterised by low enrolments. Measures have also been put in place to continuously improve gender parity in access, retention and performance, and the following strategies have been adopted to achieve gender parity: Mainstreaming gender in education sector policies and plans; servicing teachers on gender-friendly methodologies; gender sensitisation of education policymakers, practitioners and communities, establishing gender friendly learning environments in schools and creating a framework for partnerships with communities, the civil society and the other stakeholders in support of education of girls.

A gender-responsive curriculum has been put in place, and instructional materials have been engendered. The Children's Act of 2001, which provides for education as a right to all children, has given further impetus to girls' education. In addition, the reforms currently ongoing in education, especially free primary education and the expansion of secondary education, have created more educational opportunities that indirectly promote girls' education. The government has also put in place a policy framework and relevant

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legislation that guarantees that education is provided to all children despite their circumstances. Key among them is the 2001 Children's Act, which guarantees all children the right to an education. The government is also a signatory to international declarations and conventions, which is a commitment to providing education to all its citizens and a framework for enhancing socio-inclusion. For example, the Education for All Goals (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) call for the universalisation of education.

While the government of Kenya made education free in primary schools and waived tuition fees in secondary schools, there is still a need for girls to go beyond the primary level. This study hopes to contribute to the knowledge capacity of girls' secondary education and help in forming policies which favour girls' retention in school in line with MDG3.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research design of the study was exploratory in nature, attempting to give an insight into the gender factor and how it influences girls' dropout rates through the discovery of new ideas and ways of sustaining girls in school from selected public secondary schools in Chuluni division of Kitui District in Eastern Province. The total population of the students in school and those who dropped out were the main respondents. The three schools in the Chuluni division that were purposively selected were Mbitini Girls' Secondary School, Mbitini Mixed Day Secondary School, and Kaluva Mixed Day and Boarding Secondary School. Snowball sampling was employed to reach girls out of school. It used qualitative methods to capture the gender factor in girls' participation in high school education. Quantitative methods were used to give insight into the magnitude of girls' participation in high school education. Discussions and interviews of a cross-section of the teaching staff were also employed to supplement and validate the findings. Data was coded and input into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

School-Based Intervention Efforts to Address Girls' Education

When the respondents were asked whether any intervention efforts were made to address girls' education, they all concurred that there were indeed some intervention efforts. Some of the intervention efforts included the following articulated by respondents: girls are allowed to go to other schools and encouraged to enrol to avoid stigmatisation. Bursary allocations, CDP, and LATF are awarded but not adequately; therefore, the government should increase the allocations. Parents are also employed in schools, and part of their salary is deducted as fee payment. One principal said, "Girls are allowed to go for transfers and encouraged to enrol themselves to other schools, especially after resuming school following pregnancy and delivery in order to avoid stigma. Parents are also encouraged to source for donors while schools attempt to give bursary allocations to needy cases. We also offer avenues for parents to get jobs at schools, and part of the payment is remitted to fees payment."

Other efforts by the principals are that they are engaged in approaching donors such as individuals and NGOs, though they are not so reliable. There are campaigns on the importance of girls' education and the role models are invited to address and motivate the girls on educational matters as well their parents. Guidance and counselling sessions are being offered to the girls frequently.

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Classmates who Dropped out of School and Reasons why they Dropped out

Within the school, almost all the girls reported that they had witnessed classmates dropping out of school. Over half of the respondents attributed the dropout to premarital pregnancies. The rest attributed dropout to lack of fees, early marriages, poverty and continuous poor performance in school.

Suggestions on what should be done to Keep Girls in School until Completion

Girls in school suggested that to ensure that girls remain in school, parents should be advised on the importance of letting their girls finish school instead of forcing them into entering early marriages. This should be in addition to discouraging female discrimination in terms of preference when choosing between taking the girl or the boy to school. Secondly, appropriate measures should be put in place to ensure that girls' education is funded in such a way that all girls are in a position to finish their secondary education without interruptions in the form of a lack of fees. Thirdly, there should be enough guidance and counselling sessions geared towards both the parents and the students on the importance of education to the girl child as a whole. Parents should be enlightened on the benefits of educating their girls. Girls should be enlightened on the dangers of engaging in premarital sex and the impact of this on their education and future lives. This could be achieved by counselling officers at the school and organising behaviour change talks.

Community Support

Girls out of school recommended that laws should be enacted to ensure that parents are restrained from forcing their girls into entering early marriages, subjecting their girls to too much domestic work and child labour at the expense of their education and that those parents who discriminate against the girl child be punished. Moreover, there should be enough guidance and counselling for both parents and students, emphasising the value of education and the need for parents to pay school fees for their girls. While commending the presence or absence of female role models who had inspired the girls in school, almost 9 in every 10 girls identified an icon that they could emulate. An equal percentage (90%) wished to continue with their education up to the university level, while 11 per cent went to the tertiary level (college). All the girls out of school recommended that every girl should be given the opportunity and encouragement to attain a university education. They strongly felt that this would enable them to be in a position to help themselves and other people, in addition to leading a better life.

Services Schools Provide towards the Girl-child Education

Concerning what the school provides, the respondents agreed that various services were being provided by the school. However, they are concerned that the school provide adequate water (25%), adequate security (20%) while in school, separate toilets for girls, especially those in mixed schools (20%), and sanitary towels (16%), although these are provided occasionally. Guidance and counselling were paramount at school, and the respondents said it helped them focus on their studies positively despite the challenges they received at home. This was ascertained by 20 per cent of the respondents.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study revealed that some of the intervention efforts included allowing girls to transfer to other schools and encouraging their enrolment to prevent stigmatisation. Bursary allocations are awarded but not adequately, and therefore, the government should increase the allocations. Parents are also employed in schools, and part of their salary is deducted as fee payment. Guidance and counselling services and programs promote the educational, personal/social, and career development of all students.

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The study shed light on the critical role that counsellors should play in schools. These roles primarily relate to academic preparation and planning, but they also extend to interpersonal relations, mental health, social adjustment, career planning, and work adjustment. Such efforts are ultimately directed at promoting the fullest development of each individual, more so girls. The study found that girls face various pressures both within the school and society. Therefore, assisting such students needs the cooperative efforts of government officials, school administrators, teachers, community representatives, parents, and the students themselves, as well as trained school counsellors and staff who are able to facilitate student achievement and development. Of particular importance to students' success is access to motivational guidance and counselling that begins early in the student's school life, and parents have to play a role in it. Even for the girls in school, guidance and counselling is important. Summary of responses from key informants: Guidance and counselling should be done more frequently so as to encourage girls to make informed choices concerning education and their future life; girls out of school expressed their wish to register for high school education and suggested the government to organise for their adult literacy classes near their homes, and provision of financial support would help them attain the highest education possible. Summary of responses from focus group discussions: The FGDs felt that girls' education was vital to enhancing the development of the community; however, more interventions were needed to motivate girls to remain in school. Principals were engaged in sourcing financial support to educate the girls from the churches, NGOs, CDFs, bursaries and Local Authority Transfer Fund (LAFT), but it was not much to sustain the girl child in school, and the FGDs suggested the need for united efforts from all stakeholders to address girls' education in Chuluni in Kitui.

Recommendations: The government should begin to ensure that policies do not discriminate against girls and women in education, employment or gaining access to leadership positions. Measures should be implemented to create a balance in favour of girls by offering scholarships or school feeding programmes, making schools girl-friendly with proper and separate sanitation, and employing more female teachers for the girls' security and as role models. The government should increase early childhood education, particularly for girls, to ensure that more will enrol and benefit from secondary schooling. Additionally, it is crucial to encourage girl-friendly schooling by making sure that schools are good places for girls to be secure and healthy. Affirming and encouraging. There should be gender sensitisation programs in schools, workplaces and communities and, in addition, incorporate gender studies in educational curricula to get rid of stereotypes that depict female gender as the weaker sex. For example, when designing textbooks and other materials, girls and women should not be shown limited roles, for instance, merely as mothers or food providers. The government can start a parallel adolescent education program for girls who dropped out of school or who never went to school. Dropping out of school makes it very difficult to obtain and attain basic education. There is a need for targeted initiatives to give these girls, most often in their adolescent years, the chance they missed. To strengthen this study, there is a need to carry out a study on the socio-economic and cultural impacts on education of girls' participation in high school education.

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