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Relationship Between Selected 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 examine the relationship between selected socio-cultural factors and the enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. The Kenyan government strives to promote girl child education as is depicted in the Kenyan Constitution, 2010 and Basic Education Act, 2013. The researcher used a descriptive correlation survey design. The study was guided by Social Conflict Theory by Oberschall. The target population of the research was 136 female teachers and 135 headteachers who happened to be male teachers from rural public primary schools in Samburu County. The sample size for the study was 136 female teachers and 27 headteachers. Out of these, 14 female teachers and 3 headteachers were used for piloting. The researcher used the census method for female teachers who responded to the questionnaires, and a purposive sampling technique was applied for head teachers whose data was obtained using interview schedules. From the hypothesis, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient revealed a statistically significant negative correlation of -0.503 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.045 less than the .05 p-value. The significance level, at 5 per cent, indicates that with higher socio-cultural factors, there will be a corresponding decrease in girls' enrolment, thus making the null hypothesis to be rejected. The study recommends a holistic approach to enhance girls' education in Samburu County. This behooves educational planners include raising public awareness about the importance of girls' education challenging traditional beliefs and increasing the presence of female teachers.

Key terms: Cultural practices, girls enrolment, nomadic mobility, rural schools, 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 is 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 of more girls than boys worldwide, especially in Africa's 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 (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 the boy is given priority if parents were 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 more 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 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. Rural public primary schools have fewer (36.5%) girls in school compared to boys (63.5%). There are even disparities within the County where Samburu Central sub-county has a girl's 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. If the problem of low enrolment of girls in rural primary schools is not addressed, then they will continue facing socioeconomic problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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 because 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. (2019) 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 data collection 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. 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.

FINDINGS 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). The study focused on selected socio-cultural variables of cultural practices, perception about the girl child, nomadic mobility, parents' education, and parents' occupation. In regard to cultural practices, 92.2 per cent of the respondents agreed that FGM is still being practised by the community, while beading is practised by 66.0 per cent, Early marriages by 78.7 per cent, and teenage pregnancies happen by 72 per cent, and age-set graduation by 98.2 per cent. In general, 73.5 per cent of the respondents agreed that the cultural practices related to the enrolment of girls in schools, while 73.5 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).

Around 74.2 per cent and 96.2 per cent agreed that beading and early marriage, respectively, affect girls' school enrollment. This agrees with Mughal et al. (2020). Similarly, 87.2 per cent mentioned that teenage pregnancies are also a factor. Age-set

graduation is also mentioned as impacting girls at 82.4 per cent and polygyn at 56.4 per cent. 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. About 65.2 per cent blamed the perception that girls cannot perform in school, and 68.1 per cent on fear that girls will get pregnant in school. Approximately 80.4 per cent believed that schooling spoils girls. This agrees with Mungai (2021).

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. 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 the importance of educating girls, and engage in many cultural practices that affect girls' schooling. In general, as shown in Table 1, 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.

Table 1: Socio-cultural Factors and their Relationship with Girls School Enrolment

Socio-cultural Factors	% Disagreed	% Agreed
Nomadic mobility	21.4	78.6
Cultural practices	26.5	73.5
Perception about girl child	27.0	73.0
Parent education	32.8	67.2
Parent occupation	33.5	66.5
AVERAGE	**28.2**	**71.8**

The hypothesis test, as reflected in Table 2, revealed a statistically significant relationship between Socio-cultural factors in the Enrolment of Girls in Samburu County, where the Pearson correlation coefficient was -.503, with the P-value being less than the .05 alpha level. The coefficient (r) was a moderate negative correlation, which means that an increase in socio-cultural practices in Samburu Country leads to a decrease in the enrolment of girls in the rural public primary schools.

Table 2: The Test of Hypothesis (H_0)

Area of Residence	Selected Factor	Enrolment of Girls	
		Pearson Correlation Coefficient Values	Sig. (2-tailed)
Samburu County	SCF	-.503*	.004

*** - Means Significant at 5 Per Cent Level**

The ANOVA test suggests the existence of a statistically significant negative relationship between socio-cultural factors with a beta coefficient of -.608, which means that when the practice of SCF increases by an additional unit, enrolment of girls in the public primary schools in Samburu County decreases by .608. 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 bead girls and then beat them if girls go 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 not to go to school.

The respondents mentioned a negative perception of the girl child, especially among rural parents who reside in more remote parts of the County where modern influence is minimal. The more families lived in extreme remote areas, the more they moved about often in search of pasture and water for the livestock, thus taking children away from where schools were. The government administration is also less effective in remote rural areas as the chiefs could not realistically be able to follow families in order to convince parents to take girls to school. In any case, even if parents would wish to, schools may not be near them as they keep migrating.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations: 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 in the diversification of livelihood sources, such as crop farming and entrepreneurship. Further research can be done on specific factors such as fatigue, traditional parents, rural habitation, loss of livestock, loss of grazing lands, and age-set graduation.

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