

The Relationship Between the Gender of Children and Their Access to Primary Schools in Samburu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This investigation aimed to look at the connection between the gender of children and their access to primary school in Samburu County, Kenya. The study got its data from secondary and primary avenues. The secondary sources were literature materials from local libraries and records/reports in education offices and schools in the Samburu District. Primary sources were based on interviews and direct observations. An interview schedule with 9 main areas was used. Proportional Stratified sampling was used to divide the area into three clusters, namely;- Highland-Rural, Lowland-Rural and Urban. The study adopted the Survey Research method. Direct observations were used to assess the nature of the regions studied and capture relevant 'off-the-cuff' remarks of the respondents. In this study, the analysis of the data was done using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to aid data analysis, organisation, interpretation and presentation. The specific tools used were frequencies, cross-tabulations, contingency tables, chi-square, multiple regression, correlation, and qualitative presentation in the form of quotations. The study revealed that respondents' background factor, like gender, influence access to basic formal education among the Samburu people of Kenya. The study also found out that households prefer sending boys to school than girls. Accordingly, the study recommends that gender awareness creation be enhanced. More so, households should be educated on the rights of children, especially in relation to education.

Key terms: Gender awareness, gender of children, households, primary school, secondary sources.

INTRODUCTION

Because of the arguments advanced earlier, the acquisition of formal education is a must in today's world. It is important and necessary in its own right and is also a basic human right. There could be no sustainable development of the nomadic pastoral people without increased and sustained education of their children (Njeri, 2022). The government's policy is to make basic education universal, and some efforts have been made to provide it to the disadvantaged (those living in ASAL and in slum areas) (Government of Kenya, 2020).

However, despite Kenya's policies, plans, and efforts to make education universal, its access to nomadic pastoralists and slum dwellers is still limited. Kenya, therefore, faces a problem in the elimination of illiteracy and realisation of education for all. One of the intractable aspects of the problem, inter-alia, is the "low enrolment and extremely high dropout rates among the pastoral peoples" (Njeri, 2022). This, by implication, means that these people will continue lagging behind in all aspects of development because they will lack the capacity to march forward with the rest of the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Gronhaug & Aashamar (2018) identified successful cases of closing the gender gap in education across countries and analysed the factors contributing to their progress. In their study, they found that closing the educational gender gap necessitates a multifaceted strategy. While strong legislative frameworks, specific programs such as scholarships, and community awareness campaigns help to set the scene, success is dependent on adapting these measures to local difficulties, restructuring schools to combat gender prejudice, and providing girl-friendly conditions. Even in nations that have achieved great progress, cultural opposition, limited resources, and persistent economic gaps persist, necessitating long-term efforts to achieve real educational equality. The study demonstrates that closing the gender gap in education is achievable through targeted interventions and multi-pronged approaches.

Further, Mbilinyi (1969) undertook research that attempted to clarify attitudinal and socio-economic factors acting as barriers to girls' education in Tanzania. The study showed that 47 per cent of rural and 77 per cent of urban respondents saw the cost of education as being one of the reasons for not sending girls to school. Rural respondents (25% of them) also asserted that the domestic chores (responsibility) of girls were the other reason.

From the aforementioned literature materials, it is clear that there is no consensus as to the significant factors that influence accessibility to basic formal education. This, therefore, calls for a well-focused empirical study aiming at examining the major factors that influence accessibility to basic formal education, especially among the nomadic pastoral Samburu.

METHODOLOGY

Data were gathered and examined using Excel and SPSS computer packages and further presented using descriptive and inferential statistics. According to Yellapu (2018), descriptive statistics involves methods concerned with arranging, summarising and conveying the characteristics of a range of numbers. Descriptive statistics used in these items include percentages, proportions and frequency distributions. On the other hand, inferential statistics involves making generalisations, predictions and conclusions about the characteristics of parameters based on the characteristics of the samples (Guetterman, 2019). The specific tools used were frequencies, cross-tabulations, contingency tables, chi-square, multiple regression, correlation, and qualitative presentation in the form of quotations. The study adopted the Survey Research method. This method of data collection was used because it is the most appropriate for generating data and describing a population too large to observe directly (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents by gender.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by Gender

	Highland Rural		Lowland Rural		Urban		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Males	24	48	21	22.8	25	43.1	70	35
Females	26	52	71	77.2	33	56.9	130	65
Total	50	100	92	100	58	100	200	100

Female respondents were more in all three areas – 52 per cent in highland Rural, 77.2 per cent in Lowland Rural and 56.9 per cent in urban. In general, the female respondents were 65 per cent while the male respondents were 35 per cent. This was because most of the men were out ‘herding’, and the majority of them had more than one wife. More so, women were

the heads of some households, as most of the men had more than one wife.

Distribution of Respondents by Age

The sample drawn shows a marked variation in the age brackets of the respondents by gender. Indeed, Table 2 aptly captures this variation below:

Table 2: Age Distribution by Gender

Years	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	F	%	F	%
18 to 25	4	5.7	28	21.5	32	16
26 to 35	13	18.6	46	35.4	59	29.5
36 to 45	27	38.6	34	26.2	61	30.5
46 to 55	18	25.7	10	7.7	28	14
56 to 68	8	11.4	12	9.2	20	10
Total	70	100	130	100	200	100

The age of respondents ranged between 18 to 68 years. With a mean of 37.9 years. The mode and mean were 35 and 36 years, respectively. According to Table 2, the majority (76%) of the respondents ranged between 18 and 45 years. These findings reflect the statistical fact that Kenya is composed of a youthful population (Republic of Kenya 1989). The majority (35.4%) of the female respondents fell between the age range of 26 – 35 years, while that of males was in the 36 – 45 years bracket. The concentration,

however, was between 36-45 years – 30.5 per cent, with only 10 per cent between ages 56-58.

Gender and Access to School

The study sought to establish whether gender bias against the girl child ‘exists’, ascertain its level and find out how it affects access to basic formal education. The following table shows the total number of children in school by gender.

Table 3: Total Number of Children in School by Gender

	Highland Rural		Lowland Rural		Urban		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
Boys	64	61.0	20	69.0	77	57.5	161	60.1
Girls	41	39.0	9	31.0	57	42.5	107	39.9
Total	105	100	29	100	134	100	268	100

Table 3 shows that 268 children were enrolled in school. Of this, 60.1 per cent were boys, while girls were only 39.9 per cent. Indeed, all the study areas

had fewer girls in school than boys, although Urban had a higher percentage of 42.5 per cent than

Highland-Rural 39 per cent and Lowland-Rural 31 per cent.

In comparison with the total number of school-going age children (6-14 years) in each region, 59.6 per cent of the boys were in school while girls were 40.4 per cent, as shown in the table below.

Table 4: Children Enrolled in School Versus Non-enrolled (within their Respective Gender Groups)

	Highland Rural				Urban				Lowland Rural				Total			
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Enrolled	64	58.7	41	59.4	77	64.2	57	60.6	20	19.2	9	8.8	161	48.3	107	40.4
Non-enrolled	45	41.3	28	40.6	43	35.8	37	39.4	84	80.8	93	91.2	172	51.7	158	59.6
Total	109	100	69	100	120	100	94	100	104	100	102	100	333	100	265	100

In both gender groups, those in school were fewer than those at home. However, boys (in comparison to total boys) are slightly more than girls. In Highland-Rural and Urban, the children in school (both genders) are more than those who are not in school. There is a notable variation in Lowland-Rural: 91.2 per cent of all the girls are not in school while boys are at home, 80.8 per cent. It seems, therefore, that the main problem is in the Lowland-Rural, and this could probably be explained by the harsh environment of the area.

The respondents were further asked whether it was good to send girls to school. The results were that 88 per cent in the Highland Rural, 100 per cent in Urban and 46.7 per cent in the Lowland Rural said 'Yes'. This tells why more girls were in school in Urban and Highland Rural than those girls not in school. In general, 71 per cent said it was good, and 29 per cent said it was not good to send girls to school.

When it came to choosing between either a boy or a girl to enrol in school, boys were preferred in all regions, as depicted in the table below.

Table 5: Choice Between Boy or Girl

	Highland Rural		Lowland Rural		Urban		Total	
	f	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
Send boys	27	46.6	39	78	73	79.3	139	69.5
Send girls	15	25.9	4	8	4	4.3	23	11.5
Undecided	16	27.9	7	14	10	10.9	33	16.5
Send both	-	-	-	-	5	5.4	5	2.5
Total	58	100	50	100	92	100	200	100

The majority (69.5%) of the respondents preferred boys, 11.5 per cent preferred girls, 16.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent were undecided and said send both, respectively. Regionally, 78 per cent, Lowland-Rural, 79.3 per cent Urban and 46.6 per cent Highland-Rural preferred boys. This most likely is the explanation of why there are more boys in school than girls. Urban had the highest preference for girls, 25.9 per cent, while it was only 8 per cent for Highland Rural and 4.3 per cent for Lowland Rural. This shows that Urban respondents were relatively more exposed to and

aware of the rights of both gender groups. The results show that there is still a big gender bias in favour of boys with respect to schooling.

To find the reasons for the preference of boys over girls, another question was asked about why girls should not be taken to school. All Urban respondents mentioned that girls' education is important. Therefore, only the two other regions answered the question, as captured in the following table.

Table 6: Why Girls Should Not be Taken to School

Reason	Highland Rural		Lowland Rural		Urban		Total	
	f	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
Get pregnant	2	33.3	32	65.3	0	0	34	61.8
Expensive	2	33.3	5	10.2	0	0	7	12.7
Get married	1	16.7	10	20.4	0	0	11	20.0
Useless	1	16.7	2	4.1	0	0	3	5.5
Total	6	100	49	100	0	0	55	100

Of the total number of respondents, 65.3 per cent of the Lowland-Rural and 33.3 per cent of the Highland-Rural respondents cited pregnancy as the main reason why girls should not be enrolled in school. Generally, 61.8 per cent also gave the same reason. Other reasons were expensive (12.7%), girls getting married and, therefore, not benefiting their parents (20.0%), and Useless (5.5%). The latter viewed the education of

girls as a waste of resources. Those who were for the education of girls mentioned that girls also require employment (46.3%) and also need to acquire knowledge (22.7%). The other reasons were that girls have the same values and rights as boys (19%), and they also need to be self-reliant (11.8%). See the following.

Table 7: Why Girls Should be Enrolled in School

	Highland Rural		Lowland Rural		Urban		Total	
	f	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
Acquire knowledge	10	22.7	10	23.3	5	8.6	25	22.7
Employment	21	47.7	25	58.1	40	69.0	51	46.3
Same as boys	8	18.2	5	11.6	8	13.8	21	19.0
Self-reliance	5	11.4	3	7.0	5	8.6	13	11.8
Total	44	100	43	100	58	100	110	100

The results of the study clearly show that gender affects access to basic formal education, as girls are fewer in school than boys. However, the main reason deduced in this study is the belief that girls get pregnant in school. Moreover, it is a taboo among the Samburu for a girl to get pregnant before she is circumcised.

Association between Gender and Access to basic Formal Education

Table 8 sheds some light on the association between gender and access to basic formal education. In this study, gender is the predictor variable, and access to basic formal education forms our criterion variable. Details of the association are also reflected in the following:

Table 8: Association Between Gender and Access to Basic Formal Education

ACCESS	GENDER		
	Gender bias	No Gender bias	Row Total
Accessible	45(69.2)	31(67.4)	76(68.5)
Not Accessible	20(30.8)	15(32.6)	35(31.5)
Column Total	65(100.0)	46(100.0)	111(100.0)

- Missing observation 89
- Contingency coefficient 0.02
- $X^2 = 0.04222$
- Significance = 0.8372

Table 8 shows that over half (58.6%) of the respondents acknowledged that they would prefer to send boys to school rather than girls, while only 41.4 per cent revealed that they had no preference when it came to sending children to school. The former finding

of 58.6 per cent of the total sample preferring boys over girls to be taken to school concurs with African culture, where boys are seen to be more superior than girls. Indeed, our field observation reveals that Samburu people fear taking girls to school because getting pregnant outside wedlock might spoil them. More precisely, one of the respondents asserted that:

Ladies should not be taken to school as they will get impregnated and spoil our culture... and do you young men know that being pregnant outside marriage is a taboo in our culture... the problem with you people is that you do not know your culture at all.

Interestingly, however, only 30.8 per cent of those who claimed to have gender bias reported that basic formal education is not accessible. This leaves well over half, 69.2 per cent, of those who have asserted gender bias, revealing that basic formal education is accessible. The latter finding is probably explained by the fact that there were more boys than girls who had been captured in this study.

The relationship between gender and access to basic formal education was found to be significant at only a 16.3 per cent confidence level – very far below the study's confidence interval of 95 per cent. The strength of the relationship was also found to be very weak, as indicated by the value of the contingency

coefficient (0.02). Thus, the study concludes that the association between the two variables is not only insignificant but also weak. The latter observation suggests that there are other factors that can explain access to basic formal education in Samburu.

Discussion

Gender appeared to be the third-best predictor of access to basic formal education. The implication here was that access to basic formal education is low in households with a gender bias. That is in households that prefer to take boys to school than girls. This finding can probably be explained by the fact that the study found out that there were more boys than girls enrolled in primary school than girls. According to our discussion with these households, the study established that the Samburu do not take girls to school for fear of them getting pregnant outside marriage – which is a taboo in the Samburu culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There is an urgent need for intensive education and gender campaigns and lobbying for households to support the 'cause' of education. This is because the study found out that households prefer sending boys to school than girls. In the process, the education of the girl child is compromised. More so, households should be educated on the rights of children, especially in relation to education.

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