

Socio- Economic Factors Influencing Participation and Dropout of Students in Public Secondary Schools in Marakwet District, Kenya

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to assess the factors influencing participation and dropout of students in public secondary schools in Marakwet district. The target population comprised of twenty six secondary schools. A sample of fourteen schools was randomly selected based on streams, gender, and class. The research objectives were to establish the extent to which socio-cultural and economic factors contribute to students' participation and dropout in public secondary schools in Marakwet District. The questionnaire was used to collect data in this study with a sample population of 140 consisting of head teachers, teachers and students. Data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (version 13) whereas qualitative data was sorted out according to the research themes. Descriptive survey was employed and data presented in form of frequency distribution tables, graphs and pie charts. The study findings indicate that socio-economic factors had the highest effect in the participation of students in secondary school education. These factors include: poverty, low income level, inability of the parents to pay fees, cost sharing policies, provision of family labour and lack of basic needs. The results show that socio-cultural factors: early marriages, pregnancies and traditional culture were a major cause of low participation of secondary school students in education. The study concludes that the socio-economic and cultural factors that hinder student participation in secondary education should be addressed so as to improve the overall participation in Marakwet district. The study recommends the need to enhance the economic situation of parents to enable them cater for education needs of their children. This can be done by enabling parents' access low interest loans to develop income generating projects. Further we recommend free secondary education to be funded fully by the Kenya government.

Keywords: education access, secondary school dropout, arid lands education, school leavers.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally education in Kenya was tailored towards inculcating moral values and adapting to the environment for indigenous peoples' survival. The colonialists introduced formal education characterized by racial segregation with varied curricular for the whites, Asians and Africans. African education was inferior, elementary and based on: reading writing and arithmetic. At independence in 1963, the education structure comprised of primary, secondary and university levels. There were 6058 primary schools, one hundred and fifty one secondary schools and one institution of higher learning in Nairobi; a constituent college of University of East Africa (Eshiwani, 1993). After independence the segregated colonial policy in education was abolished. This resulted to an increase

in demand for secondary education in Kenya. The government of Kenya needed to develop skilled and educated people to replace the expatriates in the civil service and create space for the ever increasing number of primary school leavers requiring secondary education (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

According to Ministry of Education's Management Information System report 2011, the number of secondary school have increased from 151 to 7308. Enrolment in secondary education has grown from 30,000 students in 1963 to 1.7 million in 2010. This increase was accelerated by the introduction of Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) in 2008.

Studies conducted by Njeru and Orodho (2003) reveal that there has been considerable decline in

cross enrolment rates by gender. Severe disparities in access to participation are evident in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) Marakwet district inclusive (Awiti 2004). Government policies geared towards support of education at all levels considers that good attainment of education brings in the political, social, economic and cultural advancement. These factors have prompted governments especially in the developing countries to allocate higher percentage of their current budgets to education. It is a fact that in Kenya 30% of such allocation goes to education CBS (2006).

The main challenges facing the education sector today are issues of access, equity, quality, relevance and efficiency in the management of educational resources. In 2003 the Ministry of Education embarked on reforms geared towards attaining the education related Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA). The Sessional Paper that followed the recommendations of the 2003 National Conference on Education and Training recognized the need to develop a revised policy framework. This was produced in 2005, the Sessional Paper Number 1 of 2005 to guide the development of the education sector. The policy framework outlined short, medium and long term sector targets which included the Attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2005 and Education for All (EFA) by 2015.

Education being the key to social and economic growth, the government has endeavoured to promote the expansion of education in public secondary schools. A closer look at the enrolment ratios of students vis a vis retention, promotion and graduation rates depict an anomaly. The anomaly lies in the number of students who enrol in a given year (cohort) and those who graduate after completing the cycle. Some of them drop out of the system and fail to re-enter or re-enrol sometime later during the cohort cycle of education. This is as a result of many reasons including social economic, educational costs, cultural reasons, school climate, low attitude of learners and indiscipline among students. This study aims to establish the extent to which socio-cultural and economic factors contribute to students' participation and dropout in public secondary schools in Marakwet District. Ideally the number of students who enrol at the beginning of each year should be the number who complete form IV, four years later.

The study is significant in that students who drop out of school engage in unfruitful activities like drug abuse, prostitution, and criminal activities posing a great threat to the society. The study findings will assist policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, school managers and entire stakeholders to effectively deal with the problem of dropout in order to enhance student performance and completion rates

in the district.

The research study operated on the following assumptions: secondary schools have well defined curriculum, facilities and administration that are strong and responsive. That students pay fees and their parents are able and concerned with their education performance and socio-cultural factors enhance education and there is no gender disparity. That the head teachers, teachers and students are knowledgeable and they will respond to all questions accurately and positively. The study was carried out in Marakwet District which is regarded as Arid and Semi-Arid areas and may not be representative of most regions of the country. Long distance between the schools sampled was a challenge, thus the research was expensive and took more time than expected.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research employed a descriptive survey method design to findings out the factors influencing school dropout in secondary schools students in Marakwet district. This design helps explain social phenomenon with confidence and authenticity since the investigation was face to face with the respondent. Abagi (1995) argued that the descriptive survey method is useful to describe what is in a social system through data collection by use of interviews and questionnaires.

The target population comprised of twenty six public secondary schools in Marakwet district. The researcher noted there was no private secondary school in the entire district, thus most of these public schools register high student turnover every year. According to the district statistical officer the student population in the 26 secondary schools is 10,065. The study sampled 14 schools out of the 26 creating as 54% representation. According to Neuman (2000) a sample size 10% of the target population is large enough so long as it allows for reliable data analysis by cross tabulation, provides desired level of accuracy in estimates of the large population.

The respondents were derived from the following categories; 14 principals, 28 teachers (selected based on gender and work experience of at least four years in the school) and 140 students (selected 10 students from each school) determine through a purposive sampling. A pilot study was conducted prior to the research in two schools. To obtain district representation in the study the researcher used random sampling to select two schools from the existing seven divisions (14 schools).

To cater for varied structures and ecological zones, selection was based on type / status of the school if mixed, boys or girls schools. To gather for gender distribution, one male and one female teacher were

identified in each of the 14 schools (28 teachers). The student sample was selected based on stream, gender, and class determined by random sampling. The students were selected ten per school in form two's and three's because they had information regarding factors that influencing drop outs. Where the school had more than two classes, random sampling was used to identify the ten respondents.

Questionnaires were used as the main research instruments; head teachers used structured questionnaires, teachers questionnaires were open ended while students used a close-ended questionnaire. To ensure validity of research, the researcher performed a pilot test in two schools outside the sample population. Appropriate changes were made on the research instruments depending on the responses. Secondly, the researcher discussed the items in the instrument with the supervisors, lecturers from the department and colleagues.

Data from the field was first sorted out to check if all items in the questionnaires were answered. Questionnaires which were not well answered, incomplete were termed as spoilt. To analyze data responses were coded and processed by computer using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13. This derived frequencies (f) and percentages (%) were used to analyze the data. Data was analyzed qualitatively. Descriptive methods were employed and data presented in the form of frequency distribution tables, graphs and pie charts that facilitated description and explanation of the study findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

The main purpose of this study was to find out the socio-economic factors influencing participation and dropout of students in public secondary schools in Marakwet district. As such, the study found it paramount to find out the demographic information of the students, teachers and head teachers since they form the basis under which the interpretations of the data collected would be justified. The findings of the study indicate that majority 43.3% of the teacher respondents were aged between 30-40 years; whereas 30% are above 40 years old. With regard to gender of the respondents, findings indicate 73.3% female, whereas 26.7% are male teachers. This indicates a gender imbalance which can be explained by the fact that Marakwet area is a Arid and semi-arid zone as indicated by (Njeru and Orodho 2003). The female teachers' transfer from rural to urban areas causing gender imbalance; teacher shortages; and contributing to school dropouts. The study findings on level of education of the respondents' shows majority (73.3%) of the teacher respondents possess a bachelors' degree as their highest level of qualification. Most studies

indicate that the level of experience in the workplace may be correlated with the efficiency of the teachers. The research findings on work experience of teacher respondents shows 46.7% have more than ten years. This implies the teachers have experience to make them efficient in curriculum delivery as shown in table 1.0.

Table 1.0: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Age of the respondents		
Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 30 years	8	26.7%
30 - 40 years	13	43.3%
Above 40 years	9	30.0%
Total	30	100.0%
Gender of the respondents		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	8	26.7%
Female	22	73.3%
Total	30	100.0%
Level of education of the respondents		
Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma Level	4	13.3%
Bachelors Degree	22	73.3%
Masters	4	13.3%
Total	30	100%
Working experience of the respondents		
Working Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 5 years	7	23.3%
5-10 years	9	30.0%
Above 10 years	14	46.7%
Total	30	100%

Socio-Cultural Factors that Contribute to Students Participation and School Drop-Out

This study aimed at establishing the socio- cultural and economic factors that contribute to students' school dropout. The study findings indicate that 40% of the student respondents disagreed that initiation was one of the reasons that was keeping students out of school as shown in table 1.1

Table 1.1: Reasons that keep students out of school

Reasons that keep students at home	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	No response	Total
Not allowed to move to next class	9 7.6%	17 14.4%	13 11.0%	39 33.1%	38 32.2%	2 1.7%	120 100%
Lack of school fees	11 9.4%	23 19.7%	8 6.8%	44 37.6%	31 26.5%	3 2.5%	120 100%
Fear of repeating classes	47 39.2%	8 6.7%	11 9.2%	21 17.5%	32 26.7%	1 0.8	120 100%
Initiation	42 35%	48 40%	7 5.7%	18 15%	5 4.2%	0 0	120 100%
Parents do not want them in school	79 65.8%	27 22.5%	5 4.2%	65%	2 1.7%	1 0.8	120 100%

These findings imply that socio-cultural factors do not play a big role in students drop out and retention rates in Marakwet district. Further, the findings indicate that 26.5% of the students respondents strongly agreed that fear of repeating classes was a major factor that caused students school dropout.

The findings also reveal that 65.8% of the parents want their children to go to school and a negligible 1.7% prefers the children to remain at home. Therefore economic constraints contribute to student school dropouts. This concurs with Awiti (2004) who noted that increased levels of poverty in Kenya and reduced returns on education have made parents unable to pay school fees.

To further probe the issue, the researcher conducted a one sample statistics test with a test value of 3 in the Likert scale which indicates indecisiveness of items which all the respondents significantly agree with $P < 0.05$ if the mean is higher than 3 or disagree if the mean is less than 3 in order to assess the factors influencing participation of students in public secondary schools in Marakwet district as shown in table 1.2.

Table 1.2: One sample statistics on reasons that keep students at home

Benefits	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Not allowed by administration to move to next grade	119	4.645	0.987
Lack of school fees	118	4.234	0.567
Initiation	120	3.9167	0.2631
Fear of repeating classes	118	2.9765	1.1441
Parents do not want them in school	117	2.5595	1.2968

Data analysis indicates that students who are retained are more likely to dropout of school than those students who have progressed through classes. By some estimates, 15% of

students between ages 6-17 years are retained. These are children who are then at elevated risk of dropping out as indicated by Eshiwani (1993) who states that adolescent stage in the absence of guidance and counseling contribute to dropout.

Economic Activities and their Effects on School Participation and Drop-Out

The study assessed economic factors that influence participation of students in public secondary schools and school dropout. The findings indicate that majority (58.5%) of mothers and (45.9%) of fathers respondents were peasant farmers as shown in table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Occupation of Parents

Occupation	Father		Mother	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Salaried	13	11.7	2	1.7
Business	10	9.0	4	3.4
Farmer	21	18.9	38	32.2
Pastoralist	9	8.1	5	4.2
Pensioner	7	6.3	0	0.0
Peasant	51	45.9	69	58.5
Total	111	100	118	100

This indicates that the parents are from a low socio economic status and hence may not be able to afford decent education for their children. The low socio-economic status also manifests itself in the sense that the parents may not be able to afford the reading materials for the children; clothing; as well as food to sustain their children in school. In addition, when parents are poor, there is a high likelihood that the students will miss school due to lack of school fees. These findings lead the researcher to find out the reasons why students were not performing well in school. These findings are presented in table 1.4.

Table 1.4: Reasons why students do not perform well

Reasons	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Teacher frequent absenteeism	5 4.2%	2 1.7%	10 8.3%	48 40%	52 43.3%	117 97.5%
Time specified for exams is limited	0 0.0%	1 8%	5 4.2%	41 34.2%	66 55%	113 94.2%
Questions are so difficult and tricky	8 6.7%	24 22%	11 9.2%	54 45%	21 17.5%	119 99.2%
Students frequent absenteeism	0 0.0%	75.8%	4 3.3%	40 33.3%	60 50%	111 92.5%
Teacher did not cover subjects well	21 17.5%	38 31.7%	17 14.2%	35 29.2%	8 6.7%	119 99.2%

The study findings indicate that majority (50%) of the students respondents strongly agreed that students' frequent absenteeism was to blame as one of the major reasons why students did not perform as per the set standards. The researcher pegged this to the fact that most of the students' parents were from a poor background and thus had problem raising the required school fees as well as maintaining the students in school in form of clothing and food which are the basic necessities.

To further probe the issue, the researcher conducted a one sample statistics test with a test value of 3 in the Likert scale which indicates indecisiveness of items which all the respondents significantly agree with $P < 0.05$ if the mean is higher than 3 or disagree if the mean is less than 3 in order to assess the factors influencing participation of students in public secondary schools in Marakwet district as shown in table 1.5.

Table 1.5: One sample statistics on why students do not perform well

One sample statistics on performance	n	Mean	SD
Teacher frequent absenteeism	118	3.0195	.9594
Time specified for exams is limited	117	3.1444	.6124
Questions are so difficult and tricky	118	2.5949	.7929
Students frequent absenteeism	119	2.6296	.8283
Teacher did not cover subjects well	118	2.7284	.8805

The researcher established the factors that influence early and late dropouts diverge such that various student risk factors differ between early and late dropouts and that family issues including: both family structure and parental level of income;

become more important in predicting late dropout. The researcher undertook to find out whether the teachers receive remuneration support to facilitate learning. The study findings to this effect are as tabulated in figure 1.0.

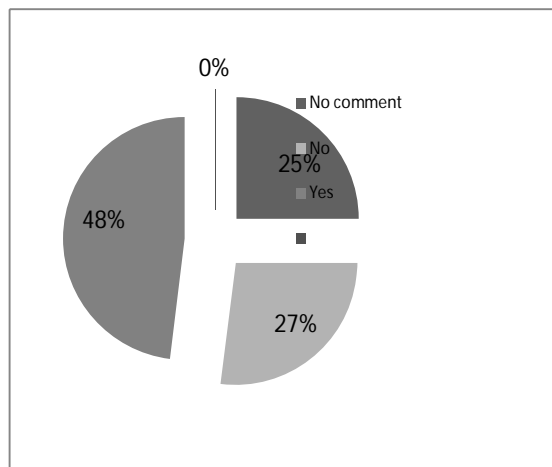


Figure 1.0: Teachers receive administrative support to facilitate teaching

The findings indicate that 48% of the teacher respondents indicated they received administrative support in order to facilitate their teaching; but 27% of the respondents argued that they did not receive support from the administration (see figure 1.0). This implies that there is a discrepancy between what the school administration provides and what the teaching staff expects in terms of support that will go a long way in enhancing efficiency of the teaching-learning process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the study concludes that socio-economic factors such as poverty had influenced the participation of students in secondary schools. The study also concludes that socio-cultural factors such as initiation have little influence on student participation and dropout in Marakwet district. Arising from these conclusions, the study recommends the following in order to improve education achievements in arid and semi arid areas and serve to reduce poverty in the areas. There is need to enhance economic situation of the parents so that they are able to cater for educational needs of their children. The government should enhance assistance to those students from poor families such as free tuition. This will ensure that they advance in secondary school and reduce dropout along with associated wastage of human resources.

The study recommends intervention and implementation of an effective framework for participatory rural development that will ensure access, retention and completion rates of secondary

school students. They include provision of bursaries to students from the Constituency Development Fund, commercial banks and civil society. The government should effective monitoring student participation to ensure that school administration policies do not contribute to wastages through; forced repetitions and expulsion of students. Finally, the study findings recommend the Teachers Service Commission to employ more teachers to curb gender differences and staff shortages particularly in arid and semi-arid areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper was generated from a master of Education thesis undertaken at University of Nairobi by the first author.

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