

Causes of Absenteeism and Dropout Among Girls in Secondary Schools in Bureti Sub County, Kenya

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Abstract

Education is an important aspect for overall development of every person irrespective of gender. In Kenya, the girl child is faced with a number of challenges in the process of her secondary school education. Such challenges might include absenteeism and dropout rate which may lead to diminishing girl child participation in formal education. Determining factors affecting girl-child education is a worthy cause. This study sought to investigate the causes of absenteeism and dropout among the girls in secondary schools in Bureti Sub County. Survey research design was used in the study. The target population of the study was 5541 girl students and 62 secondary school teacher counselors. The accessible population was 360 girl students and 16 teacher counselors in the study area. Stratified sampling technique was used to sample the accessible population. Piloting of the instruments was carried out to find out the content validity of the items. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to estimate the reliability of the SQ and CTQ, and was found to be 0.75 suggesting that the items had relatively high internal consistency. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study may provide educational policy makers with in-depth information on the factors that undermine the girl child's education; and subsequently to the formulation of policies that could safeguard the girl child in the pursue of educational opportunities.

Keywords: Education, Girl Child, Absenteeism, Dropout

Introduction

Education is a basic human right without which human society will be adversely affected. According to a report compiled by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (IFPRI 2004), there are about 72 million primary school aged children and 226 million secondary school aged children still out of school worldwide. Of this, 60 percent are girls. The report further indicates that in Africa alone, there are 40 million children out of school while about half of all girls do not proceed beyond primary school. A report compiled by Center for Study of Adolescence (Moyoncho 2007) shows that in Kenya, the school completion rate for girls remains lower than that of boys in most parts of the country. This points out to the low participation of girls in educational opportunities in Kenya. Furthermore, a report by The Society for International Development (Bwire 2004), regional and gender disparities are evident especially in arid areas and pockets of poverty areas especially in urban slums in Kenya. Table 1 indicates the transition rate for girls from primary to secondary schools over time as a measure of the level of participation (in terms of numbers) by girls in schooling. It gives a clear indication of gender disparities in educational opportunities and which may have long-term effects on the girl child.

Traditional gender roles coupled with social-economic factors like poverty and child labor can have effect on a child's learning. They also may create an imbalance on the workload of boys and the girls, which may undermine their performance in school. Dakar World Education Forum (DWEF, 1991) proposed the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by the year 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015 with focus on ensuring girls full access at all levels of education. Furthermore, The Children Act (2001) provides that every child shall be entitled to education; the provision of which shall be the responsibilities of the government and the parents. This is because in Kenya, education is linked to economic development, social mobility, and national unity. Therefore, it plays a key role in transforming the society and providing individuals with the necessary skills for survival. However, in Republic of Kenya (2004), economic survey indicates that the enrolment in schools is in favor of males. Girl child's participation in secondary school education has therefore been affected by factors that may be related to their social economic background. By undermining the girl child's education, it will have a negative impact on their future lives in terms of employment opportunities, improved economic productivity and fundamentally the health of the family, nutrition and the schooling of the next generation.

In Bureti Sub County (DEO 2007), enrollment in secondary schools is in favour boys. Furthermore, cases of

school dropouts, absenteeism and low performance in classroom work are more common with girls than boys in secondary schools in the subcounty. Despite the effort by the Government of Kenya to provide access to education in the country, the girl child is still faced with constraints leading to low participation in secondary school education. Out of the many students who enroll each year in form one within the secondary schools in the country, a bigger number of girls as compared to boys do not complete secondary school education. Some girl students who forego schooling completely may end up engaging in hazardous and non-productive occupations while at the same time resulting in losses of millions of shillings in terms of money invested by the government on education. This situation is complicated by the fact that a society or a country cannot achieve its full development goals if a section of its members are not educated. The implication of disadvantaging the girl child in education is the disqualification from important economic activities like formal employment, poor health conditions leading to lower probability of survival and even lower participation in political and national domain. The problem of absenteeism and dropout among girls in secondary school is evidenced in Bureti Sub County among other parts of the country. In the sub county, cases of absenteeism, school dropouts are largely associated with secondary school girls than boys.

The purpose of this study was to establish the causes of girl child's dropout and absenteeism secondary education Bureti Sub county Overall, it aimed at uncovering the very factors and activities in the home environment that have taken up child's school time and the actual contributors of these activities. The concern of the study was also to explain the rationale behind the scenario; the benefits of keeping the girl child out of schooling hour. It was therefore the purpose of this study to generate more knowledge on the factors that cause girl child's dropout and absenteeism in secondary school education particularly with the view of improving educational opportunities for the girl child in the district.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. This design was economical and has a rapid turnaround in data collection (Crewell, 2003). It is also advantageous in the identification of attributes of a large population from a small group of individuals (Babbie, 1990). Therefore, the results obtained from the sampled population would be generalizable to the entire population of the study, and even to areas outside the study area.

The target population was 5441 girl students and 406 teachers in Bureti Sub-county. The accessible population was 360 girls and 62 counselor teachers arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for estimating the sample size needed. Proportionate Stratified-sampling technique was also used since it is effective in producing sampling results (Kathuri, 1993). Schools were stratified into three main categories: purely girls' boarding schools (15 in number), mixed and boarding schools (17), and day secondary schools (13), and the selection was done in the ratio of 1:2:1 respectively with full consideration of the geographical locations of the schools. Stratified sampling was also used to cater for the class (forms) difference among the students sampled. This means that at least a girl student was sampled from all the forms (Form 1-4) and in every stream in the sampled schools. Random sampling was used at the classroom level to select the respondents (the first students to raise their hands).

The study utilized Students' Questionnaire (SQ) and The Counselor Teachers' Questionnaire (CTQ) for data collection. Questionnaires are documents that ask the same questions to individuals in the same predetermined order (DeVaus 1991). Validation of the instruments was done using expert judgment. Piloting of the instruments was conducted in two schools in the study area. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to estimate the reliability of the SQ and CTQ, and was found to be 0.75 suggesting that the items had relatively high internal consistency.

Data Analysis

The objective of the study sought to investigate the causes of absenteeism and dropout rate among the girls in secondary schools in Bureti sub- county. Data collected using the questionnaires were coded, tallied, tabulated and data analysis was done using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics involved the use of the percentages, means and frequencies. The percentages and frequencies were used to display the outcome of the study especially in quantifying the responses from the respondents (girl students, and the teachers). Descriptive statistics were particularly useful in quantifying, giving ratio and frequency counts on parents' level of income, number of students missing exams/CATs and causes of absenteeism among secondary school girls. Once the Percentages and frequencies were tabulated, the research data was translated into pie charts and graphs. The presentation of data in pie charts and graphs provided for effective qualitative analysis and discussion on the research finding based on the objective of the study.

Results and Discussion

Causes of Absenteeism by Girl child in Secondary Schools in BuretiSub County

School fees

The study established that the main cause of absenteeism among the secondary school girls in Bureti Sub County was school fees problem (58.6%). Most teachers believed that most girls missed classes because of school fees. It means that many students found themselves out of school for a day or more as they were sent home to bring school fees - an obligation which should have been handled by their parents. This put into question the parents' ability and commitment to paying school fees for their daughters in secondary schools. In most secondary schools in Kenya, there is a practice of sending student home to bring school fees just before exams begin. In some instances, the students may not get the required amount in good time to go back to school before examinations start. Consequently, some students end up missing examination and eventually getting affected in their overall performance and participation in secondary school education.

Medical Cases

Medical cases were the **second** leading cause of absenteeism among the girl students in secondary schools in the study area. On grounds of health, which may or may not be genuine, the girls absented themselves from school. It was noted 25.3% of students sometimes used the excuse of sickness/illness when they wanted to absent themselves from school. However, the issue of menses among the girls in secondary schools could not be overlooked as it could be a reason for absenteeism, especially for girls in that age bracket (Watson and Brazier, 2000), therefore, the issue of medical reasons for absence from school by the girl child was open to further scrutiny. This indeed was an area of concern as it was a key factor in girl child absenteeism in secondary schools in the study area.

Domestic reasons

Domestic reasons accounted for 7.2% of absenteeism in secondary schools in the study area. These reasons could also be related to the social and economic status of the parents. Some parents may have persuaded or coerced their daughters to stay out of school for reasons that were limited to the family level. These reasons might have been according to the parents justifiable enough but had negative effects on their child participation in secondary school education.

Discipline cases

Discipline cases and other reasons accounted for 3.9% and 5% respectively. In a secondary school setting, sometimes students are sent home for a day or more when they have been involved in a disciplinary case. Some are sent home to be accompanied back by their parents for the same matter. Hence, time otherwise meant for learning is lost. The other reasons for absenteeism from school (5 %) could be varied and many and therefore could be investigated in another research.

Causes of Girl child Dropout in Secondary Schools in Bureti Sub-County

From the findings, there were about 280 girls who dropped out of school every year from the sampled secondary schools in the district. This added up to an average of 4 girls dropping out in every school each year in the study area. Although some might have ended up joining other schools later, statistics indicated that there were those who never went back to school after dropping out. This was represented by almost 190 students each year in the Sub-county who fell into early marriages.

School fees

From the findings, lack of school fees led to girl child absenteeism and eventually dropping out of school. The idea that an educated girl transfers the benefits elsewhere made some of the parents reluctant in payment of school fees, consequently leading to some of the school girls dropping out of school. This problem of dropout due to school fees had some linkage with economic factors affecting the girl child's participation in secondary school education. The problem of low income and poverty may have negated the parents' effort to meet the educational costs of their daughters (IFPRI, 2004).

Early marriage

Early marriage was another key factor that led to school dropout among the girls in secondary schools in the

study area. From the study, it emerged that annually, about 190 girl students in secondary schools in the Sub - county got married before completing their education. Since it is presumed that once a girl gets married, it becomes difficult for her to go back to school, this number automatically fits in the drop out category (Bruns and Mingat 2003).

Sexual harassment

Another factor that might have led to drop out among the secondary school students in Bureti Sub-county according to the study included sexual harassment. From the data, annually, there were an estimated 130 female students in secondary schools in the study area who were sexually harassed or intimidated. This was associated with a report (Bwire, 2004) that sexual harassment and abuse by teachers and boys was a major factor hindering girl's education across the country.

Early pregnancy

Early pregnancy was also a negative factor affecting girl child education in the district. The numbers of girls in schools who already had babies were estimated at 130 per year .These cases posed a great challenge to the girl child participation in secondary school education. Once a school girl becomes a mother, she finds it difficult to cope with school work and if she does not get adequate support from the teachers and parents, she may end up dropping out of school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn after the empirical inquiry on the causes of absenteeism and dropout among girls in secondary schools in the study area. Social factors played a major role in determining the participation of the girl child in secondary school education. These social factors included the level of education of parents which directly affected the quality of educational decisions they made which in turn affected the participation of the girl child in secondary school education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained from the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The government should provide bursaries and any other form of assistance to needy girl children in secondary schools in the study area so as to ensure that they complete their full cycle of secondary school education.
- ii. Concerted effort should be made by the government and the local leaders to provide well equipped and affordable girls' boarding secondary schools to cater for the needs and the preferences of the girl children in the study area.
- iii. The government and local leaders should spearhead the fight against early marriages, early pregnancies and sexual harassment and intimidation of the girl child in the study area. This is to eliminate girl child absenteeism and drop out from secondary schools.
- iv. Parents and schools administrations should devise means and methods of school fees payment that are effective and friendly to the students. These may include work study programs and negotiated payments by installments. This would serve to minimize the number of times these students are sent home for school fees hence improve their level of participation in secondary school education
- v. School managers should endeavor to provide guidance and counseling programmes designed to educate the girls on social issues and challenges, and in particular equip them with the skills necessary for their age bracket.
- vi. Managers of girls' secondary schools should put up and equip health facilities within their schools premises so as to take care of cases of sickness among the girl students. This will reduce the frequency of students seeking medication outside the school consequently reducing absenteeism among the girl students in secondary schools.

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