

Girl Child Dropout: Experiential Teacher and Student Perceptions

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Abstract

This study, purposed to establish if there was a significant difference between the perceptions of teachers and students and the perceptions of male and female teachers on the causes of drop out of girls. Descriptive comparative research design was used. The participants included 125 grade 8 girls and 90 teachers. The results indicate that the teachers' perceptions of socio- economic status of the parent as a cause of drop out of girls from school are significantly different from the perceptions of pupils in relation to socio- economic status as a cause. Teachers have better perception on the socio- economic status of parents as a cause of drop out of girls from primary schools than students. However, there was similarity on socio- economic status, parental educational attainment, cultural belief, and lack of female teachers, opportunities for academic success, curriculum, health and pregnancy as viewed by male and female teachers.

Keywords: Girl Child, Girl's education, teacher, student, perceptions, girl's education

1. Introduction

By the twentieth century, women were winning greater access to educational programs at all levels. Feminists of various orientations have overtime made considerable contribution to politics of gender awareness and empowerment as well as issues of equal opportunity and access to resources such as property, wealth and education (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

Currently, girls' education has been viewed as a primary predictor for a number of development indicators including national fertility rates, infant mortality, family income and productivity. World Bank economists have recognized girls' education as single development intervention with the greatest individual and social returns (Brent, 2005).

Girl's education is not only important as a social indicator or an engine for economic development leading to a greater level of health, economy, security, liberty and participation in social and political activity, but can possibly yield higher rate of return than any other investment available in developing world (World Bank, 2002).

UNICEF (2004) report indicates that girls' education leads to more equitable development, stronger families, better services, better child health and effective participation in governance. Despite the obvious benefits of education to national development, research findings indicate that girls' dropout rate from school was higher than that of boys. Further, report indicates that girls' primary school completion rate was far behind that of boys, at 76% compared to 85% for boys. This gender gap meant that million more girls than boys are dropping out of school each year. UNICEF (2003) showed worrisome report from sub-Saharan Africa where the number of girls out of school rose from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. The report also indicated that 83% of all girls out of school in the world live in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific.

According to United Nation Millennium Project (2005), a closer look at the numbers shows that girls' enrolment rates were still low in most regions. Data from a sample of 8,000 primary schools, which participated in a survey carried out by the ministry of education in 2002, shows that the dropout rate in primary schools in Kenya was estimated at 5.4% and completion rate had for long remained below 50%. It was established that more girls than boys were dropping out in North Eastern and Nyanza provinces. The repetition rates decreased from 15.2% for girls and 15.6% for boys in 1993 to 12.9% for girls and 13.5% for boys in 2002 (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). It was unclear whether grade repetition increased the chances of completion, but what was apparent was that grade repetition extended the age range, and thus increased the possibility of drop out. Children who were over age due to high grade repetition had greater pressures to earn income for the household, thus were liable to dropping out. (EPDC, 2009 as cited in Sabates, Kwame, Westbrook and Hunt 2010).

According to the Economic Survey (2011), more than 400,000 pupils who enrolled in school under free primary education program did not complete standard eight. They were forced to drop out or repeat and only 59 percent of the completed. A greater percentage of the dropouts were girls. This caused concern on the high level of wastage in the education system attributed to repetition and dropout.

In a report released by CSA in Kenya, it is estimated that about 35 percent of girls between the ages of 16 and 20 were in school, compared to about 50 percent of boys. For every 10,000 girls leaving school every year, the government alone lost an estimated 750,000 dollars (Muganda & Omondi, 2010). The dropouts face many difficulties in these days of worldwide economic difficulties where jobs are scarce and types of jobs available to school dropouts are decreasing with the technological advancement. Countries striving to attain Universal Primary Education have to eliminate wastage and dropout in particular. The dropout problem for the girl child is very serious in Rachuonyo North District. Records indicate that some selected public primary schools have an average of 70% dropout rates. It is instructive at this time, to look at the dropout problem again in order to discover new avenues that need exploring in order to lessen or eliminate dropout and thereby improve the efficiency of the existing school systems.

The Session Paper No. 1 of 2005, whose aim was to achieve Education for All by 2015, was initiated following the meeting attended by 147 heads of states in New York where the MDGs were formulated. Kenyan government developed this paper as a guide to compensate for the emerging inequalities and disparities in all areas of nation building. However, the challenges remained, especially in the areas of sustainability, parity, access and equity as well as full implementation of the initiative (Boit, 2008).

According to Economic Survey (2006), Enrolment rates were almost the same at primary school for both boys and girls. The gap started to widen in upper primary as more girls left school than boys in certain parts of the country. In Kenya, between 10,000 to 13,000 girls left school each year due to pregnancy alone. Girls made up less than half of secondary enrolment. Dropout rates among girls in schools between ages of 13-18 are currently estimated at 45% compared to 37% of boys. In Nyanza province, dropout rate of girls due to pregnancy alone stood at 29% (KHDS, 2004). Based on the estimate of 10,000 girls leaving school every year, the government lost an estimated Ksh. 60 million annually. Muganda and Omondi (2010) also show that though enrolment rates in primary schools were higher for girls; fewer girls completed primary school and enrolled at secondary schools compared to boys. This study therefore sought to find out the perceived household, school and pupil factors causing dropout of girls in public primary schools in Rachuonyo North District.

1.1 Household Factors

Some of the household factors that have an influence on school dropout, that was considered as variables were social economic status, parental education attainment and cultural beliefs.

1.1.1. Socio-economic Status

According to a report by UNESCO (2010) on Education For All (EFA) global monitoring shows that economic down turn between 2003 and 2008, as well as drought, results into high food prices forcing many poor households to cut on schools. With the scenario seeming to escalate, an increased number of children, particularly girls, are being made to leave school before completion. Hunter & May (2002) observe that the ability of a household to sustain the long-term investment in education might be hampered by short and intermediate economic difficulties and labor demands.

Other studies have also revealed that poverty, which characterized household of low economic status, was the most common reason for pupils, particularly girls, to be out of school. Children from better off households were more likely to remain in school while those who were poorer were more likely to dropout once they had enrolled. Household income was often correlated with when children started school and how often they attended, whether they temporary withdraw and when and if they dropped out. For children from poorer background, the pressure on them to withdraw from school increased as they got older. In many instances, it was the girls from poor household who were withdrawn earlier than boys.

According to Nkinyangi (1980), girls tended to be victims of drop out as opposed to boys in families with low socio-economic status. For instance, in a situation where parents cannot pay fees for both boys and girls, the latter is obvious a sacrifice. Boys are allowed to proceed while girls dropout. Badan (1997) showed that there was significant relationship between poverty, involvement of girls in house work or farming, religious education of girls, early marriages of girls, lack of children's interest, with drop out of girls at primary schools level.

Mutindi (2001) reveals that high cost of schooling was the major barrier to girls' education in Kilome division. She also identified gender assumptions that limited allocation of resources to girls and deny them access to meaningful educational opportunities. According to Hallman & Grant (2006), early school leaving and adolescent pregnancy are strongly associated with low economic status. Lloyd and Mensch (1995) reveal that rather than pregnancy causing girls to dropout, lack of social economic opportunities for girls and women and the demands placed on them, coupled with the gender inequalities of education system, may result in unsatisfactory school experiences, poor academic performance and endorsement of early motherhood.

A study done by Kenya National Examination Council exclusively on standard three pupils revealed that Nyanza province has the highest number of repeaters at 69% and that class repeating is associated with inefficiency and inequity in the provision of education. The report indicates that repeating usually leads to drop out. As many as 60% of children have repeated a class by the time they reach standard three. At this rate, many were likely to fall out by standard five or six (Standard, June 2010). This rampant class repeating in Nyanza was as a result of the poverty level of the area. Studies have shown that children who receive insufficient food are more likely to receive lower math scores, repeat a grade and even have difficulty in getting along with other children (Alaimo, Olson and Frangillo, 2001 as quoted in Carmen & Whitman, 2009).

1.1.2 Parental Education Attainment

The educational level of the family is one variable that has the most consistent relationship with the aspects of schooling considered here. The level of the highest educational attainment by any member of the family is found to influence enrolment rates and regularity in attendance positively and dropout population among children negatively. According to Ashraf and Popola, enrolment rates are the highest 92% in the rural and 97% in the urban area in the household with some member having a university degree. This relationship holds both in case of boys and girls in rural and urban.

According to Ashraf and Popola, dropout constitutes as low as 2 percent in the households with a graduate, 4 percent in those with a matriculate and 9 percent in those with primary school education as the highest education in the family. Those with lower educational levels or illiterate have 10 percent of their children as dropout from schools. There was a lower percentage of dropout of girls from homes where parents and other members have high level of education. This was because they are aware of their influence over their children's academic performance in schools. They were also actively involved in the education process of their children, for instance, supporting the pupil's basic learning and development at home. Illiterate parents are not able to do this effectively; therefore, their children are highly disadvantaged and as a result can withdraw from school early (Epstein & Conoley, 1987).

According to Jeynes (2007), if there is little parental involvement in a child's education, there is more of a likelihood that the student will not succeed. When a parent is not involved or interested in his or her child's education there is a greater chance that the child will not be interested in his or her own education.

1.2 Cultural Beliefs

Some of these include the continued importance culture places on institutions such as bride price, polygamy, adultery fines, especially in rural areas.

The highest status accorded to marriage and motherhood in many communities impact negatively on female participation in education (Commish and Brak as cited in Chege and Sifuna, (2006).

Save the children (2005) indicates that cultural norms also inhibit girls access to education in many parts of developing world. Social traditions and deep rooted religions and cultural beliefs may make it unacceptable for a girl to express her opinions, make decisions for herself or participating in activities with boys of her age. Other studies suggest that social traditional environment, which is rooted in culture, creates the barriers that rob females of their human identity and social rights. A negative attitude toward women dowry system, control of women's lives, male privilege and time constraints as well as the multiple roles women perform are some of the cultural barriers impeding women access to education (Begum, Khan & Iqbal, 2007). According to Tanye (2003), marriage puts girls in bondage thereby suppressing their efforts towards higher education. Dowry places women under the rigid control of husbands. Wives become property of and slaves to their husbands and their families.

Chege and Sifuna (2006) observe that parents tend to discourage their daughters to acquire too much education for fear that they would have difficulties in finding educated husbands or being good wives. In such cases, the cultural beliefs of the households influence their attitudes and practices in relation to girl child education. The parental attitudes determine the child's chance of education as the parents control initial decision of a child to attend school often influence the nature of a child participation in education. Chege and Sifuna have shown that culture favors education for the boys as opposed to that of the girls; therefore boys received more parental support than girls did.

In another study by Kapakasa (1992) on determinants of girls participation and persistence in school, found that initiation ceremonies contributed significantly to school dropout as parents demonstrated willingness to pay more for initiation of their daughters than for regular schooling. This implied that those parents valued initiation ceremonies more than their daughters' education.

According to Peasgood (1999), as cited in Colough (2003), some cultural practices have a serious impact on the girls' self-esteem since they reinforce the feeling of unworthiness in them. Some parents argue that girls are less interested in school and that will make less effort to stay on. As a result, such parents send their boys to school and leave girls at home to be taught chores like, cooking, laundry and baby care by their mothers.

Nadia (2010) identified cultural and social barrier for girls to access education in Pakistan as given below;

1. High illiteracy among parents who do not realize the importance of education for girls.
2. Poverty leads parents to prefer boys for schooling than girls.
3. Women have low status in some tribal societies. They are regarded as less intelligent; responsible for house work and serving the men –folk of the family.
4. Early marriage is very common, therefore, girls are prepared for housekeeping rather than for school education. These barriers are deeply rooted in centuries- old- customs. In order to eliminate these barriers such customs must change.

In Maasai community, for example, family and peer pressure for early marriages is one most cited reason that girls dropout of school. In the Maasai culture the girls are taught that circumcision is a rite of passage into womanhood and that once circumcised they should not continue with their education but to be married off since school is for children. Maasai women are traditionally valued on the basis of how many children they can produce for their husbands but not by how educated or economically success they might become. Again, in the Maasai culture, girls sleep in separate houses without supervision and when a girl becomes pregnant before marriage, she brings disgrace and reduces bride price to the family. This is why parents insist that their daughters leave school and marry early (Afrol, 2007).

2. Methods

This study used descriptive research design. The descriptive research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which questionnaires are administered to a small group of people (sample) to identify trends in attitude, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a large group of people called population (Creswell,2008). The study was conducted in purposively selected public primary schools. Only those schools with a dropout rate of 25% and above were considered for the study. Cluster sampling was employed for the pupils and teachers.

All standard eight girls and teachers participated in the study. The girls of standard eight were involved in the study because they were older and had been in school long enough to know why some of their schoolmates dropped out of school.

There were two questionnaires, one for the pupils and the other for the teachers. The questionnaires had closed ended questions to minimize misinterpretation and to allow easy analysis and clarity (Role, 2008). A few open ended questions were also used in areas where the participants were required to give their opinions on how to curb dropout problem.

To ensure reliability of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted before the actual study. The pilot study was conducted in two schools from the neighboring district, that is, Rachuonyo South District, which had participants of similar characteristics as the one in the targeted population. The questionnaire for pupils had a reliability coefficient of 0.697 and the questionnaire for teachers had a reliability coefficient of 0.777, thus suitable for the collection of the data.

Upon the validity of the instruments and after the result of the pilot study, permission to carry out the study was sought from the National Council for Science and Technology. The researchers delivered the questionnaires to schools. Before conducting the study, permission from principals of specific schools was granted.

3. Results and Discussion

In this study, two null hypotheses were tested: (1) *Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of teachers and pupils on the causes of drop out of girls?* (2) *Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers on the causes of drop out of girls?*

In testing the above null hypothesis, a t- test for independent groups was applied in order to compare the means of the teachers and pupils regarding the causes of dropout of girls.

Table 1: Mean comparison of perceptions of teachers and pupils

| Statements. | Pupil | | Teachers | | t-value | p-value |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------------|----------|----------------|---------|---------|
| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Mean | Std. Deviation | | |
| Socioeconomic status | 2.6053 | .84283 | 2.9815 | .83219 | -3.245 | 0.001 |
| Parental educational level | 2.4720 | 0.86155 | 3.1259 | 0.69523 | -6.149 | 0.000 |
| Cultural beliefs | 2.0100 | 0.72499 | 2.2148 | 0.75005 | -2.014 | 0.045 |
| Teaching methods | 1.9000 | 0.95462 | 2.0222 | 0.94188 | -0.931 | 0.353 |
| Lack of female teachers | 1.9467 | 0.91326 | 2.3111 | 0.94914 | -2.839 | 0.005 |
| Opportunities for academic success | 2.2400 | 1.10461 | 2.0222 | 0.87381 | 1.612 | 0.108 |
| Curriculum | 2.1211 | 0.63398 | 2.3825 | 0.52580 | -3.297 | 0.001 |
| Health and pregnancy | 2.8933 | 0.87437 | 3.3444 | 0.71273 | -4.160 | 0.000 |

Table 1 indicates the perception of teachers and students on socio-economic status. The t- test for independent groups yielded a p- value of 0.001, which is smaller than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that “there is no significant difference in perception of teachers and pupils regarding socio economic status as a cause of drop out of girls” was rejected.

Thus, the teachers' perceptions of socio-economic status of the parent as a cause of drop out of girls from school are significantly different from the perceptions of students in relation to socio-economic status as a cause. Teachers ($\mu = 2.9815$) hold better perception on the socio-economic status of parents as a cause of drop out of girls from primary schools than students, whose mean score was ($\mu = 2.6053$).

The results also suggest that there were significant differences in the perceptions on parental educational attainment, cultural beliefs, lack of female teachers, curriculum, health and pregnancy, which yielded p-values of 0.000, 0.045, 0.005, 0.0000 respectively, which are less than the set level of significance of $\alpha = 0.05$. In these areas, the perceptions of teachers revealed these causes to be more of factors contributing to drop out than those of the students.

The above findings may be due to the fact that teachers are more knowledgeable on how these causes interact with one another in such a way that they result in girls leaving school than the pupils. Also teachers are more mature and experienced on this problem than the girls, most of whom have not even left school.

However, there were no significant differences in the perceptions of teachers and students on teaching methods and lack of opportunities for academic success as causes of dropout of girls from primary schools. This finding may be due to the introduction of in service training of teacher on the appropriate teaching methods that are learner centered and not gender biased. This implied that new approaches of teaching have been implemented in these schools.

This finding differs from that of Lloyd and Clark (2002) on a study of effect of primary school quality on school dropout among Kenyan girls and boys, which revealed that school factors like passive instructional strategies, disregarding the pupils learning style influenced the girls decisions to withdraw from school.

The second hypothesis tested if there was a significant difference between perceptions of male and female teachers on the causes of dropout of girls.

The results suggest that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers on the causes of dropout of girls as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Mean comparisons of perceptions of male and female teachers

| | Sex | Mean | Std. Deviation | t-value | p-value |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Socioeconomic status | Female | 2.8889 | 0.86923 | -0.816 | 0.392 |
| | Male | 3.0432 | 0.80888 | | |
| Parental educational achievement | Female | 3.1944 | 0.69636 | 0.762 | 0.448 |
| | Male | 3.0802 | 0.69721 | | |
| Cultural beliefs | Female | 2.2685 | 0.76768 | 0.549 | 0.585 |
| | Male | 2.1790 | 0.74314 | | |
| Teaching methods | Female | 1.5694 | 0.71866 | -4.264 | 0.000 |
| | Male | 2.3241 | 0.95738 | | |
| Lack of female teachers | Female | 2.2315 | 1.00101 | -0.648 | 0.526 |
| | Male | 2.3642 | 0.91864 | | |
| Opportunities for academic success | Female | 2.0417 | 0.92099 | 0.171 | 0.867 |
| | Male | 2.0093 | 0.84948 | | |
| Curriculum | Female | 2.3135 | 0.57835 | -1.017 | 0.312 |
| | Male | 2.4286 | 0.48782 | | |
| Health and pregnancy | Female | 3.3241 | 0.79477 | -0.220 | 0.826 |
| | Male | 3.3580 | 0.65988 | | |

Table 2 indicates that for the socio economic status as a cause of dropout, the t- test for the independent groups yielded a p-value of 0.392, which is higher than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. This implied that generally male teachers' perceptions of these causes were not significantly different from those of female teachers.

Male teachers ($\mu = 3.0432$) hold similar perceptions with ($\mu = 2.8889$) female as regards the socio- economic status as a cause of drop out of girls from schools under study.

The similarity of perceptions of male and female teachers holds true for all the other possible causes of dropout (parental educational achievement, cultural beliefs, lack of female teachers, lack of opportunities for academic success, curriculum, and health and pregnancy) except for teaching methods which had a p- value of 0.0000, which is less than the set level of significant difference in the perception of females and male teachers concerning teaching methods as a cause of dropout of girls. The difference in the perceptions of female and male teachers concerning teaching methods implied that male teachers could be using methods that discriminated against the girls as opposed to the females. This is evident from those teachers who were brought up by the society to believe that girls are of less value than the boys.

Several studies have confirmed that teacher education practice and curriculum offer shallow, superficial and even inaccurate treatment of the role of gender in teaching and learning (Klein Etc, 2007). Further studies have suggested that active engagement is not distributed to all students equitably, instead, behavioral and demographic factors often guide where the teacher invests her or his resources (Jones & Geng, 1994; Montage & Rinaldi, 2001; Sadker, 1995).

From this study, it is evident that these teachers could be using different teaching methods depending on the needs of the students. This made them have different perceptions about the causes of dropout of girls. This concurs with the findings of Jyotsha (2006) which revealed that teachers at primary stage of education actively engaged each child depending on her or his situation.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

There was a significant difference between the perceptions of teachers and students on the following factors: Socio-economic status, Parental educational attainment, Cultural belief, Lack of female teachers, Curriculum, Health and Pregnancy as regards the causes of dropout of girls. Teachers perceived these variables more of the causes of drop out of girls than the students. However, there was no significant difference in the perception of teachers and pupils regarding teaching methods and lack of opportunities for academic success in those selected schools in Rachuonyo North District. They tended to disagree that these variables caused dropout.

There was a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers on teaching methods as a cause of dropout of girls. Thus, the male teachers perceived teaching as the cause of dropout of girls from schools, while the female teachers did not. However, there was no significant difference on socio- economic status, parental educational attainment, cultural belief, and lack of female teachers, opportunities for academic success, curriculum, health and pregnancy as viewed by male and female teachers.

The administrators, teachers, parents and students should be sensitized on the factors perceived to be the causes of dropout of girls from primary schools and how they can help curb this problem.

Parents and guardians should be educated in order to gain knowledge and guidance on how to teach their daughters on reproductive issues and the importance of girls' education. This will lower the problem of adolescent pregnancies. There should be increased effort to address social problems such as poverty, as a matter of urgency by the community and the government.

The government's effort for improving school access, retention and achievement should be accompanied by early and continuous health interventions to tackle health related illness and conditions that impact on children's school absenteeism and overall cognitive development.

There should be formation of active guidance and counseling committees in schools to help girls overcome their life related issues that could lead to their dropout. The government should continue supplying sanitary towels to girls from poor communities. There should be establishment of feeding programs in schools where majority of pupils are from poor homes. This could be done by the government, NGOs and well-wishers. There should be adequate training to the teachers in the colleges and universities on gender related issues, including how to handle orphaned children, particularly girls.

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