



Challenges faced by boy-child in relation to school participation in Embu west Sub County, of Embu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper is premised on the findings of a study that sought to establish the challenges faced by boy-child in relation to school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County, Kenya. Specifically, the study aimed at establishing and identifying the challenges faced by boy-child in relation to school participation. The study was anchored on functionalism theory and adopted a pragmatic mixed method approach with a sample size of 205 comprising of class eight, form four boys' students, teachers, schools heads and community members in five main town centers in Embu West Sub County. The researcher adopted purposive and simple random sampling strategies for setting up samples. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used for data collection and data analyzed using SPSS (version 20). The study established that there are socio-economic and school-related factors affecting school participation of boys. In particular, poverty, family size, child labour, circumcision and desire for earnings affected school participation. Perceived importance of education among boys was low in comparison to girlchild, Majority of boys of age and youths were found in town centers as boda boda riders, selling and consuming khat, touts and other form of occupations. Peers pressure and lack of mentors; class repetition, victimization, and poor academic performance affected school participation. Drug and substance abuse was very high in the area. Majority of boys out of school were engaged in unproductive social activities such as video, pool, discos, monitory gaming which has Captured the boychild mind instead of concentrating with schooling. The study recommends that the national and county government should avoid over-focus on girls' programmes and initiate programmes to empower the boy child. Use of existing structures including "nyumba kumi" initiatives should be applied to monitor the boychild activities and ensure they are going to school. The government should also put mechanisms to stop all forms of child labour by ensuring compliance with the law including withdrawal of licenses for businesses employing school-age children. Cultural rites like circumcision should be conducted in a way that does not instill values and freedoms likely to interfere with boys' enjoyment of the right to be children and to enjoy a good education as a solid foundation for future prosperity. Embu West Sub county schools and religious societies should implement guidance and counseling sessions and find ways and means of admitting students back to school after dropout to curb wastage of resources. Embu West Sub county schools should embrace and encourage motivation talks to counter poor school participation. Role models should be used to make visitations to schools to encourage learners' school's participation. Policies of readmission of dropouts should be formulated especially those touching on boychild to reduce wastage. The study also recommends more research to identify factors contributing to marginalization of the boy child and to prioritize solutions in programmes and other interventions.

Keywords: boychild, participation, socio-economic and institution factors

Introduction

Background of the Study

The mantra of each family and society at large is to have a health, educated and socially accepted productive citizens (Annmary, 2013; Rumberger, 2014 and Cameron 2015) ^[3, 29, 6]. When a country is able to provide and guarantees education for all, there is all wise long term improvement in productivity and reduced replication of inter-generation poverty cycle and inequality among its citizens (Livingstone, 2009 ^[12]; Myers, 2011 ^[20]; Maitr and Ray, 2012 ^[15]; Psacharopoulos, 2014 ^[28]; Oettinger (2019) ^[27]. Maitr and Ray (2012) ^[15]; Ananga (2010) ^[2]; Rumberger (2014) ^[29] and Mwihi (2019), insisted that education is the prime mover on socio-economic development, self-development and improves productivity. Thus, education reduces poverty by imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior traits, often known as socio-cultural capital by (James, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Neumann, John and Oskar 2014) ^[10, 12, 21].

Globally however, regardless of the importance of education

has a human endeavor, the boy-child of the 21st Century seems to be left behind in many parts of the globe (Maitr and Ray, 2012, Annmary, 2013; Cameron 2015) ^[15, 3, 6]. The negligence of challenges facing the boy-child is evident and noticeable in every part of the globe as indicated by (Juma, 2011; Ayoo, 2012; Rumberger, 2014; Psacharopoulos, 2014; Oettinger, 2019) ^[11, 5, 29, 28, 27] among other scholars. According to Juma, (2011) ^[11]; Ayoo (2012) ^[5]; Atikson, Maynard, & Trinder (2013) ^[1], today's boy child is facing numerous challenges due to parental and societal negligence as well as the evolving world economy and technological changes where the boy child seems to be at the center of the evolution. In many parts of the globe, over the years the girl child education has received more attention than that of the boy child in terms of participation, enrollment, retention and access (Annmary, 2013; Psacharopoulos, 2014; Rumberger, 2014; Cameron, 2015 and Oettinger, 2019) ^[3, 28, 29, 6, 27]. Over the years, gender equality and parity in education participation has focused primarily on girl child and stemming from these narratives, education for the boy-child

who is the father of tomorrow has been neglected. Thus, in discus of boychild education Myers (2011)^[20]; Ayoo (2012)^[5]; Atikson *et al.*, (2013)^[1]; Psacharopoulos (2014)^[28] and Oketch & Rolleston (2017)^[26] advices that, if the boy child challenges will not be well addressed in the society and in the institutions of educational, the society will be losing the boy child in social development. However, few studies have discussed the challenges facing boy-child in relation to school participation in Embu West Sub County.

In African context boy-child is needed to work and carry the mantel of the family for future generations (Awuor, 2012; Mukudi, 2014a; Nyamute, 2016; Wanja, 2019)^[4, 25, 17, 31]. However, in the African milieu, the achievement of 100 percent child retention index in the primary and secondary schools has been a hard task for countries like Chad with 72% child attrition rate, Angola and Uganda both with 68%, Ethiopia with 71% child repetition rate and Kenya with 76.8% child survival rate to last grade (Atikson, *et al.*, 2013)^[1]; Grimsrud, 2013; Mukudi, 2014a; Mukudi^[17], 2014b; Rumberger, 2014^[29]; Oketch & Rolleston, 2017; Oettinger, 2019)^[1, 9, 26, 27]. Boy-child school participation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is lower than any other region of the world in terms of access, retention, completion and performance (Atikson *et al.*, (2013)^[1] and Psacharopoulos (2014)^[28]. Ananga (2010)^[2]; Grimsrud (2013)^[9]; Annmary (2013)^[3]; Mwihi (2019) and Wanja (2019)^[31], attributed poor boy-child education access, retention, completion and attainment on social, cultural and economic factors. Similarly, Juma (2011)^[11]; Awuor (2012)^[4]; Rumberger (2014)^[29]; Mukudi (2014a)^[17]; Nyamute (2016)^[25] and Wanja (2019)^[31] on other hand attributed the vices on household setting, institution and learners treants. Maitr and Ray (2012)^[15]; Annmary (2013)^[3] and Psacharopoulos (2014)^[28] observed that, in Nigeria, Chad, Camerun, Niger and Algeria, though seemingly decreasing number of parents are sticking on fundamental issues such as religion and considered government schools to be either too westernized and un-Islamic for their boys affecting boychild school participation. In addition, studies carried out in Malawi on education access have revealed that children from poor households cannot enroll and complete education and the most affected was boys (Atikson *et al.*, 2013)^[1]. As such the current study aimed at establishing whether socio-cultural, fundamentalism and households' issues are some of the challenges influencing boychild on school participation in Embu West Sub County.

In Kenya, according to Juma (2011)^[11]; Awuor (2012)^[4]; Rumberger (2014)^[29]; Mukudi (2014a)^[17]; Nyamute (2016)^[25]; Wanja (2019)^[31], regardless of the convections and articles on children right, an estimated 3-4 million boys between the ages of 6 and 18 are not in school. KNBS (2018) data on education indicated that, out of the 633,200 boys who enrolled for primary school in 2006, only 67 per cent (426,400 boys) sat for the KCPE exams in 2018 compared to 69 per cent of the girls in the same cohort, who completed their primary education. Education Management Information System (EMIS) (2019) also indicated that, the dropout rate in 2018 was 2% for girls while that of boys was 2.2% and 2019 drop out for girls was still at 2% while that of boys increased to 2.7%. Regardless of these demographic evidence of poor boychild education participation, many boys continue to drop out of school in Embu West Sub County which puts these boys' future in periphery.

According to the studies done by Wanja (2010); Juma (2011)^[11]; Lucy (2013); Mwihi (2019); Wanja (2019)^[31] and Njuguna (2019)^[24], reveals that boys dominated in disciplinary referrals, suspensions and expulsions. According to Wanja (2019)^[31] and Mwihi (2019), some of these boys had never enrolled in school while many others had dropped out after only a few years. Many of those who have dropped out of both primary and secondary schools usually end up working in a wide range of sectors which include commercial agriculture, *miraa* growing areas and public transport sector (Njagi, 2017 and Wanja, 2019)^[23, 31]. In Embu West Sub County secondary school enrollment rate in 2019 was girl's 55.3 percent and boy's 44.7 percent. The enrolment for girls in secondary school in Embu County was 3.81 percent higher than that of boys in both public and private secondary schools as shown in Table1.

Table 1: Secondary School Enrolment per Sub County 2019

Sub-county	Secondary Schools Enrolment		Totals
	Girls	Boys	
Embu West (Manyatta)	7727	6239	13966
Embu East (Runyenjes)	4610	5059	9669
Mbeere South	4679	4731	9410
Mbeere North	4222	3650	7872
Total	21238	19679	40917

Source: Embu County Education Office, 2020

Some scholars such as Wanja (2010); Lucy (2013)^[13]; Aloka (2018); Mwihi (2019); Wanja (2019)^[31] and Njuguna (2019)^[24] looked at varied cause of boy-child dropout and associated it with Khat (*Miraa*) production and consumption, but none looked deeply at challenges facing boy-child in relation to schooling, neither pull and push factors influencing boys to leave schooling and end up loitering in market centers which is evident in most town centers, hence creating need for a in-depth study on challenges facing boy-child in Embu West in relation school participation.

Statement of the Problem

The enrollment rate in Embu West in 2020 painted un-corresponding picture where enrollment rate for girls was quite higher at 21,238, while that of boys stood at 19,679. Evidently observed in Embu West Sub County, there are some many boys loitering in towns and market centers which shows that the plights of boy-child out of school seemed to be escalating and quite unsettling. Recent studies by Njagi (2017)^[23]; Ndegwa (2019) and Wanja (2019)^[31] indicated rise on dropout among boychild in both primary and secondary school. However, since school participation is not only influenced by social, cultural and economic factors, other micro factors require extremely focused investigations since decision to drop out of school is a gradual process. Thus, the current study attempted to assess, identify and examine schools learning environment, learners related factors, home environment and community settings influencing schooling and non-schooling. The study deepened understanding on challenges influencing these boys and youths to be out of school, and what maintains them in and out of school is of paramount importance to policy makers and other stakeholders in education sector. The study fills the existing gap by looking at the challenges faced by boy-child in relation to school participation in

Embu West Sub County of Embu County.

Specific Objective

The research was guided by the following objectives

1. To identify the socio-economic challenges influencing boy-child school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County.
2. To examine the institutional based challenges influencing boy-child school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County.
3. To investigate the student-related challenges influencing challenges on boy-child school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County.

Research Questions

1. What are the socio-economic challenges affecting boy-child school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County.
2. To what extent does institutional setting influencing boy-child school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County.
3. What are the student-related factors affecting boy-child school participation in Embu West Sub County of Embu County.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on functionalism theory by Durheim (1938). The sociologist Durheim, compared societies to organisms with structures that consist of interrelated parts that work together to achieve a goal. If one part is affected it affects all the other parts of education. Education is vital in maintenance of society as a whole. It happens in acquisition of skills, knowledge, values and attitude hence an important agent of socialisation. The functionalists approach views specific component parts of the school systems as performing specific and complementary roles those are necessary if the school has to achieve its desired goals. One goal of education is to promote individual development and self-fulfillment.

Education should assist children to develop their potential interests and abilities towards schooling. In this approach therefore, the component of the social system can be referred to as those that play their respective roles effectively to ensure the students participate in schooling and complete their education successfully. These components include; parents, who play a crucial role in the early socialisation of the students by helping them to learn and adapt to the values and norms of the society. The students, according to functionalists must view themselves as instruments which the future of society depend upon (Atikson *et al.*, 2013 and Rumberger, 2014) [1, 29]. The students must be ready to be shaped by the teachers into responsible citizens by being guided to observe rules and regulations and core values at all cost. They are expected to make use of their abilities to fully harness their potential and get best out of education provided by the school. The school must have adequate facilities, enough teaching staff, and conducive teaching and learning environment (Atikson *et al.*, 2013) [1]. The roles played by the three components are complementary to each other and if one of them is faulty, the whole system will most likely not achieve the intended goals. The performance of these components of a school as

social system will determine whether there is smooth school participation.

Materials and Methods

The study applied the paradigms of mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative research approaches). The researcher used both approaches due to their suitability in social research. Through qualitative method, the researcher collected first-hand information through interviews directly from participants. The target population was purposefully drawn from five main town centers in Embu West Sub County namely Manyatta, Kithimu, Nembure, Mutunduri and Kibugu. In every town center. Stratified random sampling was used to select two 2 public primary schools and 1-day secondary school since each town center had a mixed day secondary school. From each category of schools, simple random sampling was used to get 10 class eight learners and 10 form four students per secondary school. Thus, the sample size for students was 150 respondents. Purposeful sampling was used to get 15 teachers and 10 head teachers and 5 principals. The study applied snowballing method to get 5 members of the community in each of the town centers to get a sample of 25 respondents. Thus, the total sample size was 205 respondents. Questionnaires were used to gather information from class 8 learners and form four students, and an interview schedule was used for teachers, schools' heads and members of the community. Qualitative data was evaluated, classified into thematic objectives and coded. The data from interviews were read carefully paying attention to comments, ideas, concern from the participant and conclusions were drawn based on theme of the study. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS. Data was presented using frequencies distribution tables, percentages and graphs.

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of respondents

The study adopted a three-pronged approach, collecting data from learners, members of the community, schools head teachers and teachers. A total of 205 respondents were targeted as the sample size in the study, data was collected from 10 primary and 5 secondary schools. Notable is that the study involved 10 learners in class (8) in primary schools, and 5 Form four students in secondary schools. This section presents an overview of the characteristics of participants who participated in this study.

Table 2: Response Rate

Town centers	Class 8	Form 4	Teachers	Schoolheads	Community
Manyatta	17	8	2	2	4
Kithimu,	18	7	3	2	5
Nembure	19	9	3	2	5
Mutunduri	18	10	2	2	4
Kibugu	20	10	3	2	5
Sample size	100	50	15	10	25
Response	92	44	13	10	23
Percentage %	92%	88%	87%	100%	92%

The response rate was adequate since all participants' representations was above 80% and according to Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) observed that when the response rate of a study is over 50% it is considered adequate for analysis

and reporting.

The socio-economic challenges influencing boychild school participation

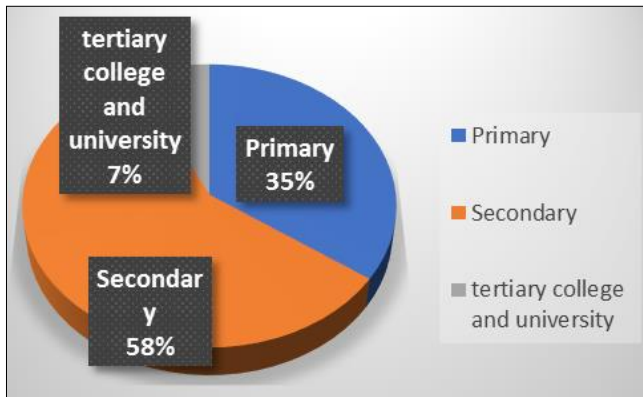


Fig 1: Rate of dropout as per siblings

The findings clearly indicate that most students (35%) stated that their brothers dropped out at primary school level. A good number stated that their brothers dropped out while in secondary school (58%). Very few indicated that their brothers dropped from tertiary college and university (7%). A concerned parent at Kibugu town center said that, *“majority of parents in the area concentrate more on challenges facing girl-child to the extent that the boychild is neglected and turned into rotten avocado of no use and even our young ladies are getting married in other areas since there are no men to marry them”*

A teacher in the same area Kibugu observed that, *“Some parents and young boys perceive circumcision with high regards than education”* After circumcision, boys are perceived as adults and therefore expected to take responsibilities of themselves as men which impacts to them negatively since they end up lacking proper guidance education wise.

On educational levels of parent’s analysis indicated that, 17% of mothers had never been to school, while only 56% had attained primary level schooling and 27% had post-secondary education. On other hand only 7% of the fathers had never been to school, while only 67% had attained primary level schooling and 26% had secondary education and above. The study findings was supported by Ersado (2005) who observed that, parental education is the most consistent determinant of school participation and drop out in many parts of Africa.

On marital status of parents, analysis indicated that only 54.8% of the children reported to be living with their biological fathers, while 76.1% were living with their biological mothers and 34% were not with biological parents but lived with their grandparents and relatives. In some cases, the boychild living with one un-biological parent is considered as a threat to property inheritance, while girls is regarded as an asset. Many boys in such scenarios mostly live with parents and to some extent they lack parental guidance compounded with self-denial and ultimately shun schooling. A teacher in a day secondary school concurred and indicated that, *“the anxiety of not having one or both parents triggers emotional problems to student and leads to long-term distress which can result to student not liking schooling”*.

Employment and financial status of parents also to high extent influenced school participation in the scope area. The study established that, most students dropped out of school because their parents does not have adequate finance to educate and support their families. Such parents might not be able to provide their families, thus impacting on schooling as observed by (Njagi, 2017; Wanja, 2019 and Njuguna, 2019) [23, 31, 24].

On child labor and poverty, analysis indicates that among the boys of age and youths found in town centers, 34% were boda boda riders, 29% had no work, 21% were selling and consuming khat. Another 9% were touts and 7% were on some form of occupations. The analysis indicted that majority of boys left schooling to operate boda boda in Embu West sub county instead of schooling

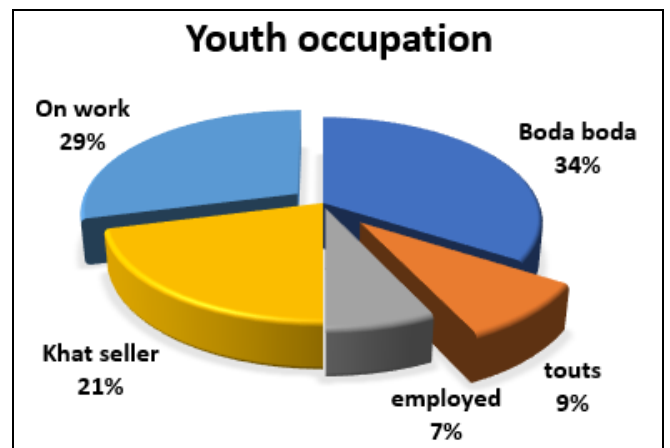


Fig 2: Youths occupation in town centers

The parenting style, democratic or authoritarian also seemed to influence learner’s school participation. Parenting and the home/community environment were raised as potential contributing factors on boys’ education. A teacher in Manyatta explained that; *high parental expectations and unwillingness to accommodate alternatives influenced school perception and participation.*

The institutional challenges influencing boy-child school participation

The study established that, learners who more often got low grades, fail subjects were retained in same class and were more likely to leave school. Lack of mentors; class repetition, victimization, and poor academic performance affected school participation. The teachers felt that insensitive school environment affects boy’s school participation. One Principal of day secondary school explained that, *the punishment levelled at learners mostly affect their motivation and attitude towards learning participation.* The study further revealed that majority of the teachers agreed that lack of effective guidance and counseling affects boys’ school participation rates.

Failure to find positive relationships both at home and in school, such as lack of caring and supportfull environment influenced school participation. Positive relationships between teachers and students and among students and a climate of shared purpose and concern have been cited as key elements in schools that hold students in school. The relevance of schooling and school completion as perceived by students also had an impact on school participation.

The student-related factors on boy-child school participation

The analysis on student-related factors that influenced boy-child school participation was peer pressure 25%, single parenting 11%, drug and substance abuse 29%, orphaned boys 7% and parents negligence or don't care attitude 28%. The data indicated that peer pressure, drug and substance abuse and negligence were the major factors that influenced boy-child school participation.

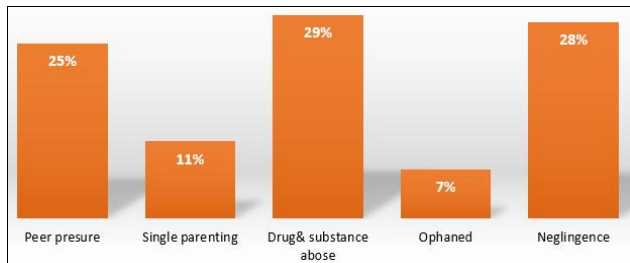


Fig 3: Student-related factors affecting boy-child school participation

In most schools, drugs and substance mostly abused included bhang, Khat, cheap liquor and tobacco. Boys abuse these drugs mostly lacked concentration, lacked interest in schooling, absenteeism and in most cases dropped out of school. On other hand most boys in school also engage in economic activities that keep the out of school because their peers were making money. Majority of boys out of school were engaged in social activities such as video, pool, discos, monetary gaming which has captured the boychild mind instead of concentrating with schooling.

A female teacher at Manyatta observed that; *early adolescence is an extremely difficult time because the cultural differences become more evident during that stage of development, resulting in personality disturbances among youths which can in turn influence ones education participation.*

Discussion

Most parents concentrated more on the girl child to the extent that the boy child has been neglected in the scope area. Gender stereotypes was evident since parents assumed that boys can take care of themselves. After class eight, boys undergo circumcision rate of passage and are perceived as adult which impact to them negatively. Perceived importance of education among boys was low in comparison to girlchild. Marital status of parents strongly influenced boychild participation in Embu West Sub county at 54.8%. Majority of boychildren who had challenges in school participation had no biological fathers and living with grandparents and relatives representing 76%, while those living with both parents was 34%. The boychild is left with anxiety of not having one or both parents which triggers emotional problems and leads to long-term distress which affect school participation. Another social challenge was child labor and poverty, since majority of boys of age and youths were found in town centers as boda boda riders, selling and consuming khat, touts and other form of occupations. The parenting style either democratic or authoritarian also influenced learner's school participation. Parenting and the home/community environment were raised as potential contributing factors on boychild school

participation. Another notable factor was that the high parental expectations and unwillingness to accommodate alternatives result in school work influenced school perception and participation. The study established that, learners who more often got low grades, fail subjects were retained in same class and were more likely to leave school. Lack of mentors; class repetition, victimization, and poor academic performance affected school participation. The punishment levelled at learners mostly affect their motivation and attitude towards learning participation.

On student-related challenges influencing boychild school participation, was peer pressure 25%, single parenting, drug and substance abuse, orphaned boys and parental negligence or don't care attitude. Drug abuse was identified as a major issue of concern and those affected were in classes seven and eight and those in secondary schools. Boys were initiated to drugs and consumption of alcohol at an early age by their peers in Embu West Sub county. Many boys dropout of school in Embu West Sub county because their friends have done the same. Majority of boys out of school in Embu West Sub county were engaged in unproductive social activities such as video, pool, discos, monetary gaming which has captured the boychild mind instead of concentrating with schooling. Failure by students to find positive social relationships in schools and the lack of a climate of caring and support also appear to be related to increased rates of poor school participation Embu West Sub county.

Conclusion

Gender stereotypes was evident since parents concentrated more on the girl child to the extent that the boy child has been neglected in the scope area. Perceived importance of education among boys was low in comparison to girlchild. Circumcision rate of passage and unfavorable home and school environment highly influenced poor school participation in the area. Marital status of parents strongly influenced boychild participation in Embu West Sub county, since majority were in single mother households, grandparents or relatives and often impacted on school participation. Another social challenge was child labor and poverty, since majority of boys of age and youths were found in town centers as boda boda riders, selling and consuming khat, touts and other form of occupations. Parenting and the home/community environment were some of potential challenges influencing school participation. Another notable factor was that the high parental expectations and unwillingness to accommodate alternatives result in in school work influenced school perception and participation. Lack of mentors; class repetition, victimization, and poor academic performance affected school participation. The punishment levelled at learners mostly influenced their learning participation. On student-related challenges influencing boychild school participation, was peer pressure, single parenting, drug and substance abuse, orphaned boys and parental negligence. Drug and substance abuse was identified as main challenge, and the drugs often abused was bhang, heroin, illicit brews, khat and tobacco. Peer influence was live in Embu West Sub county because majority of dropouts followed friends. Majority of boys out of school were engaged in unproductive social activities such as video, pool, discos, monetary gaming which has captured the boychild mind instead of

concentrating with schooling.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following: The national and county government should avoid over-focus on girls' programmes and initiate programmes to empower the boy child. There should be regular reviews to find out whether boychild needs an intervention based on varying social, cultural, economic and regional consideration. Poverty reduction strategies should be encouraged and focus on the needs especially on income earning for the parents to ensure boychild is in school. Use of existing structures including "nyumba kumi" initiatives to monitor the boychild activities and ensure they are going to school. Enforce implementation of relevant laws and policies that protect the rights of the child and monitor to identify specific challenges likely to impact negatively on boys schooling and address them. Put mechanisms to stop all forms of child labour by ensuring compliance with the law including withdrawal of licenses for businesses employing school-age children. Ensure that cultural rites like circumcision are conducted in a way that does not instill values and freedoms likely to interfere with boys' enjoyment of the right to be children and to enjoy a good education as a solid foundation for future prosperity. Embu West Sub county schools should implement guidance and counseling sessions and find ways and means of admitting students back to school after dropout to curb wastage of resources. Embu West Sub county schools should embrace and encourage motivation talks in schools to counter poor school participation. Policies of readmission of dropouts should be formulated especially those touching on boy child to reduce wastage in education and make education beneficial to the country and the society. Education of stakeholders should embrace guidance and counseling of the boy-child either in schools or homes. Role models should be used to make visitations to schools to encourage learners' school's participation. More research is needed to identify factors in the county contributing to marginalization of the boy child and to prioritise solutions in programs and other interventions.

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