Influence of Perceived Role of Girls on the Academic Performance among Mijikenda Community Learners in Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract: Despite all effort that has been shown in addressing the education issues that affect the female students, there is still a gap. Thus, the need to study socio-cultural dynamics influencing management of gender participation in schooling among Mijikenda community. The study was conducted to answer a research question; what is the influence of perceived gender roles on the management of gender participation in schooling among Mijikenda community learners in public secondary schools in Kwale County? This study was guided by the Systems theory and augmented by Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs. The study employed a mixed approach and was based on descriptive survey design. The study population was 2209 Mijikenda girls and boys who sat for KCSE in 2018 and 2019 and 49 head teachers at the secondary schools in Kwale County. The sample size was 310 participants. The study found that there was an influence of perceived gender roles on the management of gender participation in schooling among Mijikenda community learners in public secondary schools in Kwale County. There were different influences of gender participation in schooling regarding the marriage expectations for girls. Thus, the study concludes that while some of the identified items were negative for the gender balances, others were positive. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education initiate education programmes that promote enrolment, transition, and academic performance in Kwale county.

Key words: *Academic Performance, Girls, Learners, Mijikenda Community, Perceived Role, Socio-cultural*

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1. Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of social, economic and political development, hence considered the only means of improving an individual's welfare (Marquez-Ramos & Mourelle, 2019). It is in the human knowledge today that education is the determinant of decision making. Based on decisions in the political arena, the choices of decisions influence both the economic and social policies. These policies affect distribution of resources through the factors of the built governance (World Bank, 2020). In this regard, education is now a vital requirement of entry into all initiatives for establishment

of development systems. Powers, Fischman and Berliner (2016) describe education as the tool for fighting against ignorance, poverty, and other vices.

It is natural that one's culture and way of upbringing affect their interpretation of what is around them and how they process information. This can be traced back in the works of psychologists like de Oliveira and Nisbett (2017) who studied on how Asians and Westerners think differently. In the research, de Oliveira and Nisbett found that many students from Japan and China have the holistic way of viewing the world so differentiated from that of their American counterparts. The America students view the world to exist in unique groups of

objects that could each be described differently by a set of rules. This is a clear indication of how cultural background influence learning and school performance (Lynch, 2021). Moreover, while there are several theories that explain determinants of school performance, three of the outstanding theories specifically explain socio-cultural dynamics; they include the cultural difference theory, the cultural deficit theory, and the expectation theory.

Girls' participation in formal education determines their future economic position in the society (Fatuma and Daniel, 2016). There is evidence that enrolment rates of girls and boys in secondary school have equalized in many regions. However, Stoet and Geary (2020) find that girls' chances of completing their studies are comparatively lower than those of boys. Stoet and Geary state that one of the reasons why this happens is that some parents feel that girls are less likely to compete schooling due to uncertainties in carrying pregnancies or being married.

USAID posits that quite over 61 million girls aged 6-14 years worldwide are out of school. In most countries that have reported civil conflicts, girls of this age are most likely to be out of schools because of related effect of conflicts. The report pints to many obstacles that face girls in accessing and getting quality education. For instance, the levels of poverty in society significantly affect more girls than boys as the later may go out to vend while the girls are limited and denied the opportunity. Apparently, even those who get opportunity get harassed due to the weak sex and more likely to be manipulated. The geographical isolation and related issues also affect more girls than boys. Traditional attitudes about the position of girls affect their options for advancement in most life aspects including education.

In sub-Saharan Africa, socio-cultural factors constrain girls' education (World Bank, 2020). Girls are more bound at the community level and specifically, in the household activities. In fact, in the economic aspects, the opportunity costs of schooling deny girls a chance to this eye-opening engagement. In support of this, the cultural aspect views girls' future roles as mothers and wives. This take affects the retention rates of girls and performance of those who remain in school. Understanding these factors and their influence on household decisions is the creation of ambivalence towards girl child education in part of the world.

Kenya has witnessed legal and policy frameworks that seek to strengthen and support girls' education at national level. The existing examples of Free Primary Education (FPE) introduced in 2003 and the 2006 Sexual Offences Act have increased enrolment and address of violence against women and girls receptively (ActionAid International Kenya, 2021). In addition to these, the formation of organs like the National Commission on Gender and Development (NCGD) in 2003 has seen coordination and facilitating of gender mainstreaming in national development. Through the Gender and Development policy (founded in 2007), NCGD has tried to enforce some rules and penalties put against violation of women and girls'-based guidelines. However, there is still evidence of significant problems of the policies implementation especially at decentralized levels. For instance, a survey by ActionAid International, Kenya (2021) in Wenje Division shows that despite increased school enrolment, there are no improvements in quality of education. In addition, the aim of the gender-based legislative and policy plans seem not working since there is still evidence of issues surrounding schoolgirls' safety and achievement within schools (ActionAid International Kenya, 2021).

Management of gender participation in schooling in education has been a challenge for many countries around the globe. This is evidenced by the development plans hosted at UN where the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which elapsed in 2015 focused. More so, the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) have a special address on gender disparities. This challenge, especially for school managers is not unique for public schools in Kwale county. The county is dominated by the ancestral Mijikenda community which is known for its strong cultural practices, including marriage and funeral celebrations. The differences in educational outcomes among the Mijikenda boys and girls including academic performance has been significant over years. The results have shown the county being ranked among bottom 5 in KCPE County order ranking with means scores of 218 and 214 in 2013 and 2012 respectively. In 2014 KCSE results, the county was on the spot with a school that had 102 candidates scoring 2 C-, 1 D+, 62 D- and 37 E. Insights in the school revealed significant disparities in performance between boys and girls where girls had worse results. Complaints from teachers pointed on issues including unwanted pregnancies among girls because of exposure to social events such wedding parties and taarab music events as practiced by Mijikenda Community. The County has over 64 secondary schools with at least 6 pure girls and only 3 pure boys' and the rest mixed. This implies that the concern is on girl child more than it is for boy child.

Despite all effort that has been shown in addressing the education issues that affect the female students, there is still a gap. The putting up of legal framework to check on the inadequacies affecting girl child in school, introduction of free primary education and related policies have seen the improvement in enrolment and some significant completion rates in general. However, the concern of girl child performance in comparison to the boys' still needs attention. ActionAid International Kenya (2021) report that the few female teachers in schools and lack of representation in the School Management Committees (SMCs) means lack of role model for girls and a quorum to address girl student needs in school. This is a culmination of the cultural beliefs and practices that exist within the communities, including Mijikenda, where the power of culture rules the day with less research recommendations against the

trends. These challenges are at the helm of the school head teachers and affiliated educational managers including the ministry of education. Thus, the need to study socio-cultural dynamics influencing management of gender participation in schooling among Mijikenda community. The study was conducted to answer the research question; what is the influence of perceived gender roles on the management of gender participation in schooling among Mijikenda community learners in public secondary schools in Kwale County?

2. Literature Review

In Ethiopia, Regasa and Taha (2015) assessed the influence of academic performance of female students. The study also dwelled on the status of the academic performance of the students. The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative data from secondary sources. using 23 household heads, the study used interviews to collect data about the students' academic performance. Moreover, the study included other research instruments including Focus group discussions, structured questionnaire and documentary analysis. The researchers analyzed the collected qualitative data using categorization and summarization. The analysis of quantitative data used SPSS version 16.0. More specifically, quantitative data analysis entailed crosstabulation, while presentations composed of tabulations. The analysis involved descriptive statistics including frequencies, mean and percentages.

The study reported that female students' academic performance was significantly affected by their parent's perceptions. A arrange of psychological characteristics, including attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of parents on their female students' academics determined their performance. The study attributed the poorly recorded academic performance among the female girls in the study area to the perceptions of their parents. The study recommended that the stakeholders in the Australian education sector should take up the role of reaching out to parents for change of perceptions towards the education of their girls. The stakeholders were cited to include GOs, NGOs, policy makers, local leaders, students and parents.

In Mpumalanga, a rural location in South Africa, Mokoena and van Breda (2021) explored the factors affecting the perceptions of learners in academic performance. Using a sample of the black forty girls and forty boys from a local school, the study entailed structured interviews among them. Data analysis entailed thematic analysis where the results showed that perceptions of black learners affected their effectiveness in learning. This implies that the learners were affected on insights and from pedagogical dialogue.

In a different study in the Zimbabwean schools, Mutekwe et al., (2012) studied on girl students' perceptions of gender and academic achievement. Using

a qualitative research approach, and interviews among female learners, the study took about one month. The collected data was then analyzed through content analysis. The study also used the frequencies of the occurrences of the thematic areas and presented using tables. The study reported that the female students were naïve and worried about their role in society in relation to academics. The learners indicated that they felt a little disadvantaged compared to their boy's counterparts in treatment because of the cultural inclination. The girls further reported that their role in society across the school, home and church dictated on their feelings which affected their academic performance.

The study concluded that female learners were ore affected by perceptions on their general life in regard to academic performance. The study recommended that the stakeholders in the education sector consider and deliberate on ways of ensuring gender sensitivity and especially considerations for the female students. This is needed to be observed across the society in school, homes, churches and every socialization places.

In a different study in Zimbabwe, Mutekwe et al., (2012) studied on perceptions of girls' students and their academic achievement. Using a qualitative approach, the study used interviews to collect data from the female students. Combined with focus group discussions among the sampled learners, the collected data was analyzed through content analyses aligned to emerging themes. Data analysis entailed thematic grouping of findings and presented by content analysis approach. The key issues in the themes were grouped and frequency tables formed for determination of means. The study reported that the girls felt that disparity in treatment existed between them and the boys. The findings posited that the differences in performance between the girls and boys were attributed to such disparities in treatment. In conclusion, the treatment of the girls in schools was found to be in a different manner from the boys. The researchers suggested that gender considerations in issues of child treatment should be given attention. While the society expects girls to perform certain roles, the expectations affect the emotions and perceptions of female students.

How parents perceive the role of girls is a determining factor in determining Education chances for girls due to the fact that these parents control the former decision of the girls to attending school. David, Mulera, Ndala and Nyirongo (2017), studying a primary school in Malawi reported that compared to girls, boys received more parent-supplied exercise books. In Kenya, on the other hand, mothers had higher preference investing in their daughter's education with the explanation that daughters were observed having high level of family responsibility in terms of providing financial assistance to the family compared to sons. However, a similar observation was made in both Kenya and Malawi where none of the fathers gave preference to girls' education. This similar observation about mothers' preference was also made by David, Mulera, Ndala and Nyirongo (2017).

3. Methodology

This study was guided by Systems theory. The Systems Theory was augmented by Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs. The study employed a mixed approach and was based on descriptive survey design. The location of the study was Mijikenda Community in Kwale County. The study population was 2209 Mijikenda girls and boys who sat for KCSE in 2018 and 2019 and 49 head teachers at the secondary schools in Kwale County. The sample size was determined from the recommendation made by other researchers (Morgan, 1977). From the table the sample that corresponds with a population of 1649 is 310 participants who were distributed equally across the area of study. This implies that the number of KCSE graduate girls was 146 while those of 2019 was 136. The sample of head teachers was 9. Head teachers were purposively selected while students were selected using simple random sampling. The study employed questionnaires and document analysis to collect data. Piloting of the questionnaire was done in 2 schools located in the neighboring Mombasa County. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed from the two tests to determine the reliability of the instrument. Validity was determined using expert judgment in the department of education administration and management at Mount Kenya University. The descriptive statistics that were used in the analysis of the data gathered included frequencies, mean and percentages. Correlation analysis of the collected data helped in establishing whether independent variables have an association with the dependent variable.

4. Results and Discussion

The study investigated the objective through the students' questionnaire item using a nested table. The item required the students to rate the level of influence of perceived role of girls on the academic performance by each of the identified statements. The data was collated and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Influence of Perceived Role of Girls on the Academic Performance

		not at all influential	slightly influential	somewhat influential	very influential	extremely influential	Total
Cooking for family members	F	26	57	77	47	13	220
	%	12.1	25.8	35	21.3	5.8	100
Taking up mother roles in her absence	F	26	40	69	65	20	220
	%	11.6	18.3	31.3	29.6	9.2	100
Fetching water	F	31	50	75	51	13	220
	%	14.2	22.9	33.8	23.3	5.8	100
Helping mother in kitchen and other house chores	F	29	46	71	58	16	220
	%	13.3	20.8	32.1	26.3	7.5	100
Taking care of siblings	F	33	55	70	51	11	220
	%	15	25	31.7	23.3	5	100
Waiting and taking instructions from male figures	F	33	47	67	58	15	220
	%	15	21.3	30.3	26.3	7.1	100

Table 1 shows that the largest portion of the students 77(35%) considered "cooking for family members" somewhat influential in academic performance of the girls. The table shows that extremes were also rated with more girls 26(12.1%) rating the statement as not at all influential while the fewest 13(5.8%) rating it as extremely influential. This depicts some varied perceptions on the role of girls as cooking for family members and its effect on gender participation in schooling.

The table reflects similar trends for the rating of the statement "Taking up mother roles in her absence" would influence academic performance of the girls. While the largest portion of the respondents 69(31.3%) rated it somewhat influential, the fewest 20(9.2%) rated it as extremely influential. This implies that different girls had varied perceptions on taking up of mother roles in her absence. This was in relation to the influence of their performance in academics and thus depicting the effect on gender participation in schooling.

Table 1 depicts the same trends in rating of the perceptions towards the outlined girl roles including Fetching water, helping mother in kitchen and other house chores, Taking care of siblings, and Waiting and taking instructions from male figures. These statements are rated somewhat influential by the largest portions of the students across the results. The table also shows that the fewest of the girls across the results rated the

statements as extremely influential. This depicted the qualitative results from the head teachers who pointed out the culture effect on academic performance of girls among Mijikenda community in Kwale County.

One head teacher noted:

> *This is a community context where every girl is expected to participate in the family like a mother to that family. They have the responsibility to even provide water for the family. They thus stay keen to ensure compliance and serve their families depicts being students. This is not the same for the boys which becomes an advantage for male students* [KI 03].

This implies that the discussions about how the perceived role of girls in the African traditions affect how they attend other activities. This specifically points to the Mijikenda community which still embraces the traditions.

The study used the collected data to conduct correlation analysis between the gender participation in schooling and various identified tasks perceived to be girls' role in the larger African context, and specifically for Mijikenda community. The results were presented using Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis between Perceived Role of Girls on the gender participation in schooling

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender Disparity	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	220					
2. Cooking for family members	Pearson Correlation	-.117	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.070					
	N	220	220				
3. Taking up mother roles in her absence	Pearson Correlation	-.063	.141*	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.334	.029				
	N	220	220	220			
4. Fetching water	Pearson Correlation	-.046	.060	.024	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.483	.352	.707			
	N	220	220	20	220		
5. Helping mother in kitchen and other house chores	Pearson Correlation	-.031	.059	-.090	.041	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.637	.361	.166	.524		
	N	220	220	220	220	220	
6. Taking care of siblings	Pearson Correlation	-.104	.119	-.107	.046	.071	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.110	.066	.097	.481	.270	
	N	220	220	220	220	220	220

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows that there was weak negative correlation between gender participation in schooling and most of the identified items perceived as the descriptions of the rile of girls among the Mijikenda community. The correlation between gender participation in schooling and Cooking for family members (r=-.117) and Taking up mother roles in her absence (r=-.063) and Helping mother in kitchen and other house chores (r=-.031); and Taking care of siblings (r=-.104). This implies that any increase in any of the four perceived roles of girls among

the Mijikenda community would decrease G gender participation in schooling gender disparities of the girls. On the contrary, the table shows a weak positive correlation between Gender disparities and fetching water (r=-.043). This implies that an increase in the item would increase the gender participation in schooling of the girls. However, the changes would be insignificant at .05 as all the significant levels are greater than the critical p-value of .05.

The results reflect the findings in the US where Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2014) studied homework environment and the context under which it took place. The findings showed that the homework experiences for girls affected their academic performance. The study also revealed that the academic beliefs for girls' academic achievement were pegged on the roles assigned at home.

The revelations also conformed to the qualitative findings through the interviews where one key informant posited:

> *It is critical that while there are key roles and expectations that girls need to accomplish, giving them an opportunity to study like boys would change their academic achievement goals as accomplishment* [KI 01].

The findings are consistent with the views posited by the teachers in the above descriptive statistics that perceived role of girls affected their participation in education hence gender disparities. This happens in different dimensions including time for studying, place of study as well as room for discussing with peers that may not be residing at their homes. Similarly, there are cases of girls missing on study opportunities like boys especially during holidays and weekends where boys would be allowed to group up with whoever they wanted compared to the girls who were restricted.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study found that there was an influence of perceived gender roles on the management of gender participation in schooling among Mijikenda community learners in public secondary schools in Kwale County. There were different influences of gender participation in schooling regarding the marriage expectations for girls. Thus, the study concludes that while some of the identified items were negative for the gender balances, others were positive.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education as the main stakeholders in management of public primary schools ought to initiate education programmes that promote enrolment, transition, and academic performance in Kwale county. For instance, introduce special mentorship programmes targeting girls. Parents, sponsors and the school community ought to also help secondary schools by providing a conducive environment which enables the girls stay in schools which is affected when they lack are tagged along their perceived roles in the family.

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