



Effects of Retrogressive Cultural Practices on Learners in Public Primary Schools in West Pokot County, Kenya

¹Plapan, L. J. Cheruto, ¹Okutu A. Aggrey & ²Situma J
^{1,2}Kisii University, ²Koitalel Samoei University College
Email: iacne@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Retrogressive cultural practices upheld by the community living in West Pokot County affect provision of quality learning to primary school learners. This study aimed at finding out how these practices hindered the teaching and learning in public primary schools in West Pokot County. Its objective was to find out: how retrogressive cultural practices contributed to poor school attendance of learners. Its target population was 6,357 people, composed of grade 6 learners represented by their respective class-prefects, grade 6 parents represented by class representatives, all primary school head teachers, teachers, Sub-County Directors of Education (S/C DEs), Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) and the County Director of Education (CDE). A representative sample of 914 respondents was selected from the target population to participate in the study, using random and purposive sampling procedures. Questionnaires, Semi-Structured Interview Schedules and document analysis guide were used to collect information from the selected respondents. It used descriptive survey design. Analyzed quantitative data were presented in tables, while qualitative data were presented in narrations form. The study found out that: the retrogressive practice of FGM hindered girl child's education. The study recommended that: local leaders should educate the Pokot community to shun FGM, and more low-cost Boarding Primary Schools should be built in West Pokot County to keep children in school for a long time and avoid harsh Home Environment that hindered their learning.*

Keywords: *Retrogressive cultural practices, Learners, Quality education, Local community, Low-cost boarding primary schools.*

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1. Introduction

The term culture comes from Latin word cultura that stemmed from colore meaning “to cultivate”. It originally meant to cultivate land. In 16th century the word became cultivation of mind and in 19th century, the word changed to mean collectively the art of manifestation of human intellectual achievement (Ahamed, 2022). It refers to

pattern of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significant meanings. Culture is defined as all the ways of life that are passed from one generation to another (Marte, 2016). Another meaning of culture is the way of life for an entire society. It includes codes, names, dress, language, religion, rituals, art, norms of behavior, such as: law, mortality and systems of beliefs (Marte, 2016). Cultural practices (CP) refer to the traditions, customs, languages, values, beliefs, and

achievements of a group of people (Kivuyo & Otieno, 2024). Culture is a social environment in which we live work or attend school. Culture creates mood and atmosphere and influences the way we live.

The values that schools transmit can be seen as culture of the society as formal curriculum has many subjects. It is culture that forms the content of education. A society must provide its subjects with communication language which is crucial for education. Many societal values are imparted through various subjects. Culture is intertwined as education cannot be transmitted and becomes culture by itself. Culture and learning have interdependent cultural factors that influence learning.

These factors include values associated with cultural or ethnic groups, faith-based practices, family dynamics, background, relationships, language differences or barriers, social economic levels, access to educational materials and cultural standards for early education. (Julieflore, 2012).

Ahmed (2022) conducted a study on what is culture? What is its impact on education and found that culture has substantial impact on curriculum, impact on teaching method, impact on student behavior, impact on teachers and schools and that culture has tremendous impact on education. Culture impacts on how we learn, when we learn, where we learn and from whom we learn. Culture impacts on the total education system of a country and education of a country mirrors its culture. Culture is a social environment in which we live, work or attend school. Culture creates mood and atmosphere and influences the way we live.

In most parts of the world, gender disparities in education persist due to cultural beliefs and practices (Ndindeng, 2024). In South Asia, early marriage and gender-based violence significantly hinder girls' education (UNESCO, 2021). In many African and Asian countries, traditional norms often dictate educational priorities, disadvantaging girls and children from marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2022).

The Sub-Saharan African countries lag behind in terms of quality education. For example, on average, 30 per cent of the children are still out of school (UNESCO, 2022).

West Pokot County is an Arid and Semi Arid Land (ASAL). ASAL areas have specific problems that affect access to education more than those counties from productive districts (Koech Report, 1999). Provision of quality learning in West Pokot is guided by values and principles stated in the Basic Education of 2013. The purpose of the Act was to implement section 53 of the Constitution of Kenya that guarantees every child to free and compulsory education. The Act also stipulates in section 28 that, the Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the National Education Board and the relevant County educational Board provide for the establishment of (a) pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, mobile schools and adult continuing centers within reasonably accessible distance, (b) appropriate boarding primary schools in semi-arid areas, hard to reach and vulnerable groups as appropriate (Basic Education Act, (2013). Despite the elaborate statement, basic education in the semi-arid Counties like West Pokot County is still wanting.

One of the objectives of the Policy Framework for Nomadic Education in Kenya (2015) is to ensure equitable access to relevant education by all the children in nomadic areas (Okutu, 2019). Despite the existing government plans intended to ensure access and equity of education provision in the country, issues of imbalance in enrolment, completion rates and academic achievement between children of pastoralist communities and the rest of the country have been and still are the subject of debate considering the huge disparities that exist to which many feel are not receiving the expected attention (Ayiro, and Sang, 2017).

In West Pokot County, approximately 30% of children of school going age are out of school due to various reasons, among them being retrogressive cultural practices (Owino, 2015).

Table 1: Number of Primary Schools per Sub County in West Pokot County

Sub County	Number of Schools
West Pokot	175
Pokot South	92
Kipkomo	139
Central Pokot	127
Pokot North	135
TOTAL	668

Source: TSC Sept, 2019

The number of schools indicated in table 1 above is still low, compared to a vast West Pokot County that has a surface area of 9,100 square kilometers, with a population of 777,180 persons, according to ACK - Kitale Strategic Plan (2019-2023). The concern of this study was the retrogressive cultural practices that inhibit children in West Pokot County to access basic education can be alleviated.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The cultural practices by West Pokot community, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (Wawire, 2015) have adverse effects on children's learning (Okutu, 2019). This practice has hampered provision of education (Kaliakamur, 2019). Most girls drop out of school and get married at a tender age. This has significantly lowered standards of education especially for girls (Ndege, 2010). This scenario prompted the conducting of this study.

1.2 Objective of the Study

Objective of this study was to:

- (i) Find out how retrogressive cultural practices contributed to poor school attendance of learners in Public Primary Schools in West Pokot County.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hindrance of Retrogressive Cultural Practices to Learning

Culture is a social environment in which we live, work or attend school. Culture creates mood and atmosphere and

influence the way we live. Cultural norms are critical in educational access and retention (Ndindeng, 2024). A major cause of gender disparities in education in many countries is cultural beliefs and practices. In South Asia, early marriage and gender-based violence significantly hinder girls' education (UNESCO, 2021).

In many African and Asian countries, traditional norms often dictate educational priorities, disadvantaging girls and children from marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2022).

A study by Boufares and Bouchaour (2024) looked at the components of the internal environment (organizational culture, organizational climate) that are considered among the most important variables in organizational behavior that help to spread the values of quality culture in educational institutions. The study aimed at defining the concept of quality culture in education and the possibility of its application in educational institutions; taking into account the importance of the two variables of the internal environment, represented by organizational culture and organizational climate. This was done by presenting the literary heritage of the subject of quality culture in education.

This study differed significantly from the current study since it looked at the concept of quality culture in education, while current study looked at retrogressive cultural practices that inhibited quality learning of learners in the area of study.

Kivuyo and Otieno (2024) conducted a study on, 'Assessment of cultural Practices and their Contribution Towards Quality Education in Public Secondary Schools in Arusha District, Tanzania.' The study examined the

contribution of cultural practices towards quality education in public secondary schools and the strategies for improving cultural practices for quality education in public secondary schools.

The study found that culture exerts a strong influence on education and is at the root of educational stagnation in Arusha District. By being educated with appropriate cultural practices, the students can fulfil the highest aspiration in their profession in the future.

Some of its recommendations were that cultural practices that affect quality education in secondary schools should be prohibited and parents should understand that they have responsibility to make sure that their children are protected and perform well academically. Orientations courses for the parents should be provided so as to allow parents to gain knowledge and skills on how to combat against the negative impacts of cultural practices to students' quality education.

The study by Kivuyo and Otieno was different from the current study because it was conducted in secondary schools in Arusha District –Tanzania while the current study was conducted in primary schools in West Pokot County – Kenya. More so, one of its objectives was about the contribution of cultural practices towards quality education, while the current study's objective was on how retrogressive cultural practices contributed to poor school attendance of learners in Public Primary Schools.

Nzisa (2014), conducted research on Effects of Culture on Students Performance in Kenya Certificate of Education in Matungulu District, Machakos County, Kenya. Basing on the findings of the study it was concluded that elements of school culture affect the performance of KCSE examination in Matungulu District. The study focused on effects of culture on students' performance while the current study focused on effects of retrogressive culture on primary school learners' education.

Yasar and Kalfa (2014), in a Study on, "Effects of Social Cultural and Educational Dynamics on the Education-Training Environment in Architectural Education; the Case Study of the Department of Architecture", revealed that education training environment is formed by social, cultural and education dynamics. Their study recommended that:

The university authorities should organize frequent cultural activities to improve quality time for students. For education –training, shopping, eating and walking safe environments should be provided to students. The number of lessons and their content should be controlled and the

best alternative determined for the students. The physical groundwork of education training together with living conditions should be improved. The curriculum should be supported with lessons of other branches and others.

This study focused on effects of social cultural and education dynamics on education-training environment in architectural education while the current study was on assessment of selected environmental factors on provision of quality learning, of which social and cultural effects was part of it.

Wawire (2015), conducted a study on, "Factors Affecting Girl Child Progression Rates in ASAL areas: A Survey of West Pokot Sub County." The survey revealed that the effects which were economic and cultural in nature negatively influenced girl child education progression rates more than any other factors. He further revealed that ASAL funds had less explicit effect as intervention matters. However, he further revealed that school feeding program and anti FGM Campaigns most vulnerable children's programs were more effective intervention matters in supporting girl child education. The study recommended that the Government emphasizes on mobile schools in ASAL areas, initiate special girl child educational fund as well as establishing low-cost boarding schools and put more centers in areas where vulnerable girl child progression rates in Primary education programs.

Unlike Wawire's study that focused on Girl-Child Education, the current study focused on effects of retrogressive cultural practices on provision of quality learning to both genders. Moreover, the other study was on a survey of West Pokot Sub County while the current study was done in the whole county of West Pokot.

Mucee et al (2014), conducted a study on Socio-Cultural Factors that Influence Access to Secondary School Education in Tharaka South Sub County, Kenya. The study revealed that most of the parents have between five to eight children and their parents are peasant farmers; prefer boys in accessing secondary school education. Early marriages, child labour and female genital mutilation were among cultural practices that hindered pupils' progress to secondary school education.

The study recommended that the Government should create awareness on the importance of family planning among girls and build more schools with boarding facilities. The study was on socio cultural factors that influence access to Secondary School education while the current study was on effect of retrogressive cultural practices on provision of quality learning in public primary schools in West Pokot County, Kenya.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This study used descriptive survey as its research design. Descriptive research was an appropriate choice as this research aimed at identifying, characteristics, frequencies, trends and categories of respondents. Since this study was set to investigate the environmental factors influencing the provision of Quality learning to pupils in Public Primary Schools in the area of study, the descriptive survey research design that allows volumes of data that can be analyzed for frequencies, averages and patterns was appropriate.

3.2 Area of Study

The study was conducted in West Pokot County. The county borders Republic of Uganda to the west, Trans-Nzoia and Elgeyo Marakwet Counties to the south, Baringo County to the east and Turkana County to the north. It has four Sub-Counties: West Pokot Sub- County (Kapenguria Constituency); North Pokot Sub-County (Kacheliba Constituency), Pokot Central Sub- County (Sigor Constituency), South Pokot Sub- County and Kipkomo Sub County (Although Kipkomo is a sub county was still under Pokot South Constituency). The county has eleven (11) administrative divisions. Kapenguria town is

the head-quarter of West-Pokot County. The County has surface area of 9100 square kilometers. Its population is estimated at 777,180 persons (386,000 males and 390,000 females) as of 2017 and was projected to grow to 987,980 persons by 2022. The population relies heavily on livestock and agriculture. Those who rear livestock only live pastoralist lifestyle. Those who practice agriculture grow maize, potatoes, beans, coffee and pyrethrum (ACK Kitale, 2019-2023 Strategic Plan).

3.3 Target Population

The target population is defined as a population which the researcher wants to generalize the results of the study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The target population was drawn from 668 Primary schools in County of West Pokot. It included 668 Primary Schools' Head Teachers, 155,947 Grade 6 pupils, 4994 teachers, 05 Sub County Directors of Education, 21 Curriculum Support Officers, and 01 County Director of Education. 668 Parents' representatives of grades 6 were selected to represent the entire population of parents. This was because such representatives were assumed to have been parents in their respective schools for a good number of years (6 years), to be able to know environmental challenges their respective schools could be facing. A summary of target population is shown in table 2 below:

Table 2: Target Population

S/No	Category of Respondents	Target Population
1	Pupils	155,947
2	Teachers	4994
3	Curriculum Support Officers	21
4	Parents Representatives grade 6	668
5	Head Teachers	668
6	Sub County Directors of Education	05
7	County Director of Education	01
TOTAL POPULATION		161,838

3.4 Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to sample the County Director of Education, all Sub-County Directors of Education and all Curriculum Support Officers to get in depth information on sampled schools. Random sampling was used to sample the Head teachers, teachers, parents'

representatives and prefects of grade 6 pupils in all the 20 Zones in West Pokot County.

3.5 The Sample Size

A summary of the respondents that were sampled to participate in the study and their respective percentages is shown in table 3 below:

Table 3: Respondents' Sample size from West Pokot County Zones

S/ No	Category of respondents	Target Population	Sample Size	%
1	Head Teachers	668	134	20%
2	County Director of Education	01	01	
3	Teachers on duty	4,994	499	10%
4	Parents Representatives of grade 6 Prefects	668	134	20%
5	Curriculum Support Officers	21	07	30%
6	Grade 6 Prefects	668	134	20%
7	Sub County Directors of Education	05	05	
TOTAL		6357	914	

3.6 Research Instruments

Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis guide were used to collect relevant data for this study. Four sets of questionnaires consisting of both open and closed ended items were constructed for: Head teachers, Parents' Representatives of grade 6, Grade six prefects and Teachers. Interview schedules were used to solicit information from County Director of Education (CDE), Sub County Directors of Education (S/C Des) and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs). Document analysis guide or check list was used to collect and analyze relevant documents from Education Offices.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Categories of Schools

There were three categories of Public Primary Schools in Study (West Pokot County). Thus Day Schools, Boarding Schools and Day/Boarding Schools. Majority of schools were Day-Schools which constituted 65%. Boarding Schools constituted 20% while Day and Boarding Schools constituted 15% of the total number of schools. Since West Pokot County inhabitants are nomads, school-going children's education is normally affected when they migrate with their parents in search of greener pastures for their livestock. To mitigate this challenge, the government had established low cost boarding primary schools in the entire county, in line with section 3.3 of the Policy Framework for Nomadic Education in Kenya (Okutu, 2019). Such schools also assist in discouraging female circumcision practices. However, majority of schools are still Day Schools, as shown in Table 4 and figure 1 below:

Table 4: Categories of Public Primary Schools that Participated in the Study

Categories of Schools	Frequency	Percentage
	<i>f</i>	%
1) Day Schools	87	65%
2) Boarding Schools	27	20%
3) Day and Boarding Schools	20	15%
TOTAL	134	100%

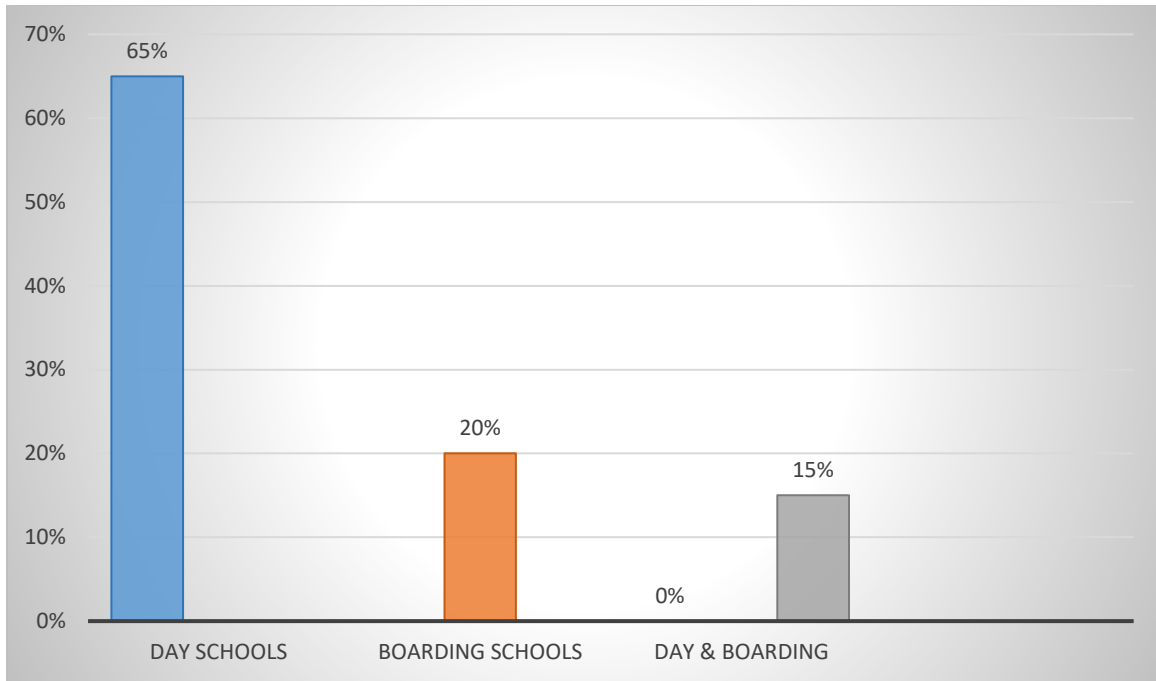


Figure 1: Categories of Public Primary Schools that Participated in the Study

4.2 How Retrogressive Cultural Practices Have Contributed to Poor School Attendance of Learners in Public Primary Schools in West Pokot County

The researcher sought information from respondents on how retrogressive cultural practices had contributed to poor school attendance of primary school learners in West Pokot County. Information received from respondents was as summarized in table 5 below:

Table 5: Impact of Retrogressive Cultural Practices on Grade 6 Learners

Questionnaire Items	H/Teachers n = 98		Teachers n = 427		Parents' Reps n = 100		Class Prefects n = 126		Total n = 751	
	f Y N	% Y N	f Y N	% Y N	f Y N	% Y N	f Y N	% Y N	f Y N	% Y
COMMUNITY PRACTICES FGM AFFECTS GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE AREA	7 20 8	8 20 0	2 191 3 6	5 45 5	7 30 0	70 30	8 46 0	6 37 3	4 287 6 4	62%
	9 08 0	9 8 2	2 130 9 7	7 30 0	8 13 7	87 13	1 24 0 2	8 19 1	5 175 7 6	77%

Key

- n* - Total number of respondents in each category
- f* - Frequencies
- Y - Yes
- N - No

Information in table 5 above shows that majority of respondents – 464 (62%) indicated that Pokot Community still practiced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). More so, majority of the respondents – 576 (77%) said that FGM affected girls’ education in West Pokot County.

FGM is one of cultural practices that brings about gender inequalities in accessing education. According to Dabrowsky, et al. (2024), gender inequities are often linked to gender norms, which develop in the early years, impacting the experiences of children and their relationships. These norms pervade decision making processes of schools and communities, and impact on children's access to education.

How FGM affected the learning of girl-child in West Pokot County was brought out clearly by respondents vide the qualitative data that were generated open-ended segments of the questionnaires and interview schedules from area Education Officers (CDE, S/C Des & CSOs). In explaining how FGM affects girls’ education one of the CSOs said:

During circumcision exercise, some girls may bleed profusely and sometime they get shock and others do not recover from shock and die. There is also looking down on girls who do not persevere during mutilation as they are known as cowards and this distabilises

the Pokot girl and is married by old men who could not marry for one reason or another. They therefore drop out of school.

After circumcision, Pokot girls loose interest in going to school and start thinking of getting married. One of the parents who appeared to be against this cultural practice and who knew a lot on this practice said:

The Pokot community practice the most severe type of FGM called infibulation, where clitoris is cut off and the girls are told to put the feet together so that the wound saws up leaving only a small opening for menses and urine. The canal is completely closed. This is done to preserve virginity. And during the first encounter with a man, such a girl is given a present when she bleeds. She is therefore regarded as a well behaved and disciplined girl. She is then given a reward - a cow called “chesarwa”. That is, a cow given to a woman for her virginity. Once girls have undergone FGM they are no longer girls, despite their age. They are now brides - “Mrar.”

The issue of school gets out of their mind completely.

To emphasize this point of why Pokot girls prefer to be circumcised, which affects their learning, another parent said:

When an uncircumcised girl becomes pregnant, the community says “kakios”. But if she conceives after undergoing FGM they say “Kasikisyo”. Meaning when a girl gets pregnant before FGM, she is regarded as a child who was not ready for child bearing. On the other hand, the circumcised girl is seen as a lady who is ready and with capacity to give birth and take care of children. Such practices and thinking are detrimental to girl-child’s education among the Pokot community.

These girls have been made to believe that female circumcision is a best practice and they aspire to undergo it, yet it adversely affects their learning. This thinking is as a result of the environment they are living in.

On remedial actions on FGM, respondents made several suggestions. They included: leaders in West Pokot County should campaign against FGM by amplifying its negative effects on education of girl-child. Women leaders in the county should craft alternative rites of passage to counter FGM as a traditional rite of passage. National and County Government of West Pokot should jointly build more rescue centers for girls who opt to run away from parents forced circumcision and marriage. Parents should be educated on health hazards of Female Circumcision.

One Sub-County Director of Education said that:

It is important for the community to know that FGM can cause injury to the initiates. The circumciser may injure the adjacent tissues. This may lead to pelvic infections. It can cause infertility and valval abscesses. The victim can develop keloids, dermoid cysts and neuroma. Some develop injury to call bladder and develop fistula and a girl becomes smelly. FGM also causes sexual dysfunction for some women.

This finding corroborates well with a study conducted in 2016 by Security Research Information Centre (SCRIC), on “An Assessment of Social Impact of Conflict in Turkana and West Pokot Counties”, which recommended

that the Government should enforce law on compulsory education and sanction leaders and citizens who condoned Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which was a leading cause of poor education among Pokot and Turkana girls.

In agreement with these findings, a study by KNEC (2020) reported prevalence of absenteeism among pupils, with close to two thirds (60.6%) of the pupils reporting to have been absent from school in the third term of the year preceding the study (2018). On retention and completion, the study revealed that pupil drop out was rampant as evidenced by the more than three quarters (77.7%) of the Head teachers reporting that their schools had experienced cases of pupil dropout in Class 7 (KNEC, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on research objective which was on how retrogressive cultural practices contributed to poor school attendance of learners in primary schools in West Pokot County, it can be concluded that female circumcision has affected negatively the girl child education in West Pokot County.

5.2 Recommendations

The study found out that FGM hindered girl-child’s education in West Pokot County. It therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. The government should build more Low-Cost Boarding Primary Schools in West Pokot County to keep children in school for a long time and avoid harsh Home Environment that hindered their learning.
2. More so, local leaders should play a major role in educating the Pokot Community to shun FGM.
3. National and County Government of West Pokot should jointly build more rescue centers for girls who opt to run away from home due to their parents’ intention of forcing them to be circumcised.

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