**INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL NORMS ON DROPOUT RATES AMONG GIRLS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GARISSA TOWNSHIP**

**ABSTRACT**

Globally, education has been identified as one of the pillar to promote intellectual knowledge and enhance development in society. Efforts have been laid to promote education among the children to ensure equality in accessing education. However, there has been concern related to the girls dropping out of schools and this has become a global issue. Many countries continue to experience a proportional experience of increased public school dropout rate among the girls. This study investigated assessed the influence of cultural norms on girls dropping out from public secondary schools in Garissa Township, Garissa County. This study targeted a population comprising of 11 secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County, 316 teachers, 11 Principals and 7,922 students with a sample size of 327 comprising participants. This study used purposeful sampling method to include all the five principals of girl’s public secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County. For teachers, all the five HOD, guidance and guidance in girl’s public secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County were included. For students, the study used simple random method to select 10% of 3,169 girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County making a total of 317 students. The study used a mixed-methods research methodology, combining both quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews. Questionnaire and interview schedules were be used to collect data. Reliability of the questionnaire was conducted by use Cronbach's alpha whereas validity was carried out by engaging specialists in the fields of curriculum to thoroughly examine and improve the survey questions. For piloting purposes, the researcher picked 1 public secondary school from the neighboring Ijara Sub-County. Pilot study was done on 10% of the sample size and thus the total respondents were 33. These comprised of 1 principal, 1 HoD of the guidance and counseling department and 31 girls in public secondary schools in Ijara Sub County, Kenya. The data analysis encompassed the utilization of SPSS for quantitative analysis and thematic analysis for qualitative analysis, enabling a thorough investigation of the research inquiries. Cultural norms had statistically significant influence on girls dropping out from public secondary schools in Garissa Township, with positive correlation of 0.702. The study recommended for engaging community in educational campaigns. The study's results are expected to provide valuable insights for implementing specific interventions and policies aimed at addressing cultural norms obstacles and decreasing the incidence of females dropping out of public secondary schools in Garissa Township.

**BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Globally, education has been identified as one of the pillar to promote intellectual knowledge and enhance development in society. The under-representation of girls in schools is a serious problem in many parts of the world and especially in Africa. In the wake of today’s occurrences among them women becoming breadwinners because of incidences like divorce, education of girls is being considered equally important in any society in order to make them self- reliant. Efforts have been laid to promote education among the children to ensure equality in accessing education. However, there has been disturbing trend of inequality in accessing education among the youths in various countries worldwide due to gender imbalance. One of the features that has been projected to cause this gender inequality is socio-economic factors such as cultural customs. A report by UNESCO (2021) concerning global education monitoring indicated that socio-economic factors like poverty and cultural customs has played a bigger role in accelerating the issue of girls’ dropping out from public schools

 In Africa, the case of gender inequality contributed by socio-economic factors has been observed. Most traditional African communities do not value girls’ education compared to male. Several studies in the African context have identified socio-economic factors as the main contributor to this issue. A study conducted by African Union (2021) found that the level of income among most African communities was the main driver contributing to girls’ drop out form schools. The report pointed out that social factors including cultural customs did not respect and recognize girl’s education as important compared to male education. Therefore, most families did not prioritize investing their resources to girl’s education compared to male.

Macro strategies (free school uniform distribution, free education, and school feeding program) and micro strategies (scholarships, child- friendly school environment, guidance and counselling, and child safety) have been put in place for mitigating school dropout in Ghana (YeboahEbong, 2016). Indications of the research were that leaving school early among students in cities or towns and rural areas is mainly as a result of child labour, pregnancy and poverty among others.

The rate of student dropout in Tanzanian secondary schools is about 36%. A study by Mduma (2019) aimed to produce an approach driven by data to assist in identifying and predicting students likely to drop out of school. This was focused on facilitating an intervention program. 122 research articles, 4 focus group discussions, 2 round table surveys involving 38 participants, and 3 datasets from Tanzania and India were used. Majority of the respondents said age, parents’ income, and students’ gender contributed to the students’ dropping out of secondary schools.

In Kenya, through free primary education (FPE) and free day secondary education (FDSE), the Kenyan government intended education to be affordable and accessible to all children in Kenya (Musangi et al., 2017) as well as address low-quality education, illiteracy, and low completion rates (Oprong, 2016). In addition, the Kenya Government has other programs meant to boost access, retention, and quality of education, like infrastructural development interventions (Constituency Development Fund (C.D.F) schools and Centres of Excellence); Digital Literacy Programme (DLP), which is under implementation; Sanitary towels programs; low-priced boarding schools and mobile schools in ASALs; Tusome Project (2015-2018); School Health and Nutrition Programme; Kenya Primary Education Development (PRIEDE) Project (2016-2019); and Policies for re-entry after thematic areas which include early pregnancy (1994), inhibitive cultural practices, and education in emergencies.

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The issue of girls’ dropping out of public schools has been documented by various authors. Most regions including the north-eastern part of the country have shown a huge percentage of girls dropping out of schools due to socio-economic challenges. Dagane and Aden, (2021), offer that North eastern continues including Garissa County grapple with the issue of socio-economic challenges. Gender role have limited the access of quality education among the female students with Abdi and Ahmed (2021) indicating that traditional beliefs among the communities have taken a strong ground such that most households prioritize practicing informal practices rather than formal practices regarding schooling. The issue of early marriages has also been well documented and in most case is prevalent in Garissa County thus, contributing massively to public school dropout among the girls (Save the Children, 2021).

However, in Kenya, the government has acknowledged that there are still existence of gender-inequalities in various part of the county and polices are being developed to encourage gender equality. Some of the transformative campaigns being encouraged in the county include creating awareness that promotes gender equality and encouraging education to all evenly (Republic of Kenya, 2021). For this reason, this study aimed to explore deeper in this issue to come up with findings that will call for enhanced recommendations to leaders and policy makers to formulate policies that will curb this issue in the region.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The concern related to the girls dropping out of schools has become a global issue worldwide. Girl child education plays a significant role in society by providing explicit knowledge and on economic development of individual girls and the society at large (Mackatiani, Mackatiani & Atieno, 2022). The government of Kenya is working very hard to help learners at all levels so as to remain in school and complete their studies as evidenced by for instance provision of bursaries and subsidized secondary school fees. Despite these interventions by the government, statistics show that more than 10% of girls who enroll in form one do not stay in school to complete secondary education (Oduya, 2020). The non-completion of high school by girls will limit students’ opportunities and achievement and increase the burden in the society. Additionally, school dropout among girls may impede realization of Kenya Vision 2030's Social Pillar which aims to create a fair, democratic society, with education and training serving as the main catalyst.

Studies have been conducted and opined that socio economic conditions could be contributing to school dropout by girls (Kisaka,2015; Mackatiani, Mackatiani & Atieno, 2022; African Union, 2021; RoK, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). In particular, Kisaka (2015) study reveal lack of gender balance in terms of dropout in schools in Garissa and Ijara Constituencies. This is as a result of ignorance and the nomadic lifestyles which bind the communities to cultural practices while suppressing girl child education. The impediments for girls education range from the societal culture and beliefs, general parental attitude towards female education, societal biases towards duties of females in the home as well as some factors that operate within the school. However these past studies have left a gap in that they have not been specific to Garissa Sub County and have left out the relative influence of cultural norms on girls dropping out of secondary school. This study sought to feel this gap by concentrating in Garissa Sub County and showing the relative influence of cultural norms on girls dropping out of secondary school.

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**RESEARCH** **OBJECTIVE**

To determine the influence of cultural norms on dropout rates among girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township.

**THEORETICAL REVIEW**

This study was based on the ecological theory as proposed by Bronfenbrenner(1979). This theory provides a holistic understanding regarding the multifaceted issues that influence human development in various ecological systems. It would thus mean that the environment such as cultural and economic environment influence human activities such as girls education. The theory matches with this study in that there are multifaceted issues that hinder girl child in accessing quality education in different environmental contexts. The theory interconnects cultural norms with school, individual, and community regarding cultural and social norms. Therefore, by examining deeply the interplay between different ecological systems, this study intends to reveal how cultural customs and social dynamics play a role in contributing girl’s dropout rate in public secondary schools.

**EMPIRICAL LITERATURE**

In its Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025, the African Union highlighted how gender inequalities have affected the attainment of quality education among the girls revealing that girl’s child has been marginalized in effort to acquire necessary education in public schools. World Bank (2021) report offer that cultural standards combined with economic constraints have been among the key impending features that create a complex web of obstacles that prevent girls throughout the African continent from advancing in their education.

Chege et al. (2019) portlays the significance of community attitudes in influencing girls' educational paths is shown by a study conducted by in the rural areas. The study highlighted how much a girl's capacity to overcome challenges and continue her education is influenced by the support from her community. Kisaka (2015) explored the lags facing education of girls in secondary schools in Ijara and Garissa Constituencies, Kenya. The study found out that there was no gender balance in terms of dropout, enrollment rates, completion rates and transition rates in schools in Garissa and Ijara Constituencies. That was attributed to ignorance and the nomadic lifestyles which bind the communities to cultural practices while suppressing girl child education. The impediments to girls education ranged from the societal culture and beliefs, general parental attitude towards female education, societal biases towards duties of females in the home as well as some factors that operate within the school.

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**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Mixed-method research methodology was used in the study, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies to thoroughly investigate the cultural norms influence on the dropout rates of girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township. The quantitative phase entailed gathering and analyzing numerical data from students using structured questionnaires, enabling a methodical investigation of the frequency and statistical associations of identified elements. Simultaneously, the qualitative phase utilized interviews with principals and teachers to get a more profound comprehension of the subjective experiences and perspectives of the difficulties encountered by girls in pursuing their education. Target population for this study was a population comprising of 5 public secondary schools for girls in Garissa Township Sub County, 5 HOD guidance and counseling, 5 Principals and 3169 girls.

To select the desired sample, the study used purposeful sampling method to include all the five principals and all the five HoDs, guidance and guidance of girl’s public secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County. For students, the study used simple random method to select 10% of 3,169 girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township Sub County making a total of 317 girls. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation and inferentially using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis with the help of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 27) and presented using frequency tables and charts. Qualitative data was analyzed verbatim.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This researcher distributed 317 questionnaires to the students of which, 264 were filled and returned. This represents a response rate of 83.28% which was good. Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) guides that a response rate of at least 70% is good.

This study assessed the influence of cultural norms on dropout rates among girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township. It explored the components of cultural norms including gender discrimination, early marriages, initiation into adulthood, and child labor availability. Descriptive statistics on the components of cultural norms was done and findings are as presented in the table below.

Table 1-Components of Cultural Norms

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| --- |
|  |
|  | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Gender discrimination | 264 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.8977 | .94374 |
| Early marriages | 264 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.0530 | .90048 |
| Initiation into adulthood | 264 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.2045 | 1.05180 |
| Child labour availability | 264 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.0038 | .98080 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 264 |  |  |  |  |

The descriptive statistics for the components of cultural norms, specifically focusing on gender discrimination, early marriages, initiation into adulthood, and child labor availability, as presented in Table 1, were analysed to understand their effects on the educational development of girls. For gender discrimination, the mean score was 2.8977, which suggests a moderate perception of gender inequality in the school environment. As regards early marriages, the mean score was 3.0530, also indicating a moderate occurrence or perception of early marriages in the context studied.

Initiation into adulthood had a mean score for initiation into adulthood of 3.2045, showing that this cultural norm is moderately prevalent, with participants reporting initiation into adulthood as having a moderate impact on educational development. Child labor availability mean score was 3.0038, indicating that child labor is seen as moderately available or prevalent in the community. Overall, the data reveals that while cultural norms like gender discrimination, early marriages, initiation into adulthood, and child labor availability are perceived to have a moderate impact on the educational development of girls, there is notable variation in how individuals perceive and experience these factors. This diversity in responses could suggest differences in the way cultural norms influence educational opportunities and development across different communities or groups.

**CORRELATION ANALYSIS**

The null hypothesis that there is significant influence of cultural norms on dropout rates among girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township was tested using correlation analysis, the test being conducted through SPSS software at 95% confidence level.

**Table 2-Pearson’s Correlation Analysis of the Cultural Norms and School Dropout**

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|  |
|  | Average Dropout | Cultural norms |
| Average Dropout | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .702\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 |
| N | 264 | 264 |
| Cultural norms | Pearson Correlation | .702\*\* | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |
| N | 264 | 264 |
| \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). |

The decision criteria were that a p value >0.05 would be an indicator of evidence in support of the null hypothesis and would thus lead to acceptance of null hypothesis whereas p value <0.05 would be an indicator of lack of evidence in support of the null hypothesis and would thus lead to non- acceptance of null hypothesis. The results of the Pearson's Correlation Analysis in this study show a strong positive relationship between the cultural norms and dropout rates among girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township. Specifically, the correlation coefficient (r) was found to be 0.702, which reflects a significant positive association between the two variables. This suggests that as the influence of cultural norms increases, the dropout rates among girls in these schools also tend to increase.

Furthermore, the p-value statistic for the correlation was reported as 0.000, which is well below the standard significance level of 0.05. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the study failed to accept the null hypothesis, thereby concluding that there is a statistically significant relationship between cultural norms and dropout rates. The correlation being significant at the 0.05 level, as indicated by the significance value of 0.000, further supports the conclusion that the influence of cultural norms is substantial enough to impact the dropout rates. This result underscores the importance of addressing cultural factors that may contribute to the higher dropout rates among girls in the region.

From the interview schedule, seven principals and seven HoD guidance and counselling rated cultural norms as having a high contribution to school dropout by girls in their school. The other four principals and four HoD guidance and counselling felt that cultural norms had a moderate contribution to school dropout by girls.

**CONCLUSION**

The study revealed a significant influence of cultural norms on dropout rates among girls in public secondary schools in Garissa Township. The findings indicated that cultural factors such as gender discrimination, early marriages, initiation into adulthood, and child labor moderately impacted the educational development of girls. Among these, initiation into adulthood had the highest mean score, suggesting a notable presence of this cultural norm, followed by early marriages and child labor. Gender discrimination was also perceived as a moderate concern in the school environment.

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**RECOMMENDATION**

Given the moderate prevalence of gender discrimination, early marriages, and initiation into adulthood, it is crucial to engage the community in educational campaigns to challenge harmful cultural norms. These campaigns should focus on promoting the importance of girls’ education and addressing the cultural biases that limit their opportunities. Community leaders, religious leaders, and local influencers can play a key role in shifting attitudes toward girls' education. Early marriage was identified as a significant factor influencing dropout rates. Schools should establish support systems specifically for girls at risk of early marriage, providing counseling services, legal assistance, and safe spaces to discuss concerns. Schools could also collaborate with local organizations that work on preventing child marriage and raising awareness of the long-term benefits of education for girls.

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