



EFFECTS OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ON MALE STUDENTS' RETENTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MBOONI WEST SUB-COUNTY, MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

In Mbooni West Sub-County, male student retention in public secondary schools remains a concern despite the government's provision of Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE). This study investigated the effects of cultural practices on male student retention, guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected through questionnaires and interview schedules. Validity was ensured through expert judgment. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, employing descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages, as well as inferential statistics including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically based on the study's objectives and presented in narrative form. The findings revealed that cultural practices significantly influence male student retention. Many boys are expected to perform household chores, leading to stress and eventual school dropout. While most students and parents identified cultural expectations as barriers to education, some respondents did not strongly link them to dropout rates. As all participants were male and directly affected, the study highlights the need for schools and communities to better understand and address the challenges boys face both at home and in school. It recommends the implementation of male-focused support programs, regular parent-teacher meetings to identify at-risk students, and greater teacher engagement with students' backgrounds. The government should also enforce policies addressing harmful cultural practices, and the Ministry of Health should promote family planning awareness to help parents manage resources and support their children's education.

Keywords: cultural practices, male students' retention

Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirms that everyone has the right to education. Following the 1990 Jomtien Conference, global efforts to expand access to education intensified. In Africa, countries like Kenya, Malawi, and Ghana introduced free basic education in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Despite these efforts, access to quality basic education remains a challenge (O'Flaherty & Liddy, 2018). The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the Salamanca Statement (1994) reaffirmed commitments to universal and inclusive education. However, while progress has been made in girls' education, male student

enrolment and retention have declined in many regions (UNESCO, 2012; 2015). Male students often face neglect, lack of support, and societal pressure to enter the workforce early (Tumwebaze, 2011). This trend is evident not only in Africa but also in countries like the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia, where boys underperform and have higher dropout rates (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012). In Asia and the Pacific, similar patterns are observed in countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines (UNGEI, 2012). In Kenya, despite constitutional guarantees for education, retention remains a challenge, especially among male students. In regions such as Central Kenya and Bungoma County, male students are increasingly turning to manual labor, dropping out of school due to economic pressure and feelings of neglect (Mureithi, 2010; Hamasi, 2013). While empowering the girl child is vital, failure to also support male students has led to negative outcomes including substance abuse and crime. In Mbooni West Sub-County, Kenya, there is little evidence of targeted efforts to improve male student retention, highlighting a growing gap that needs urgent attention.

Table 1: *Enrolment trend in Mbooni West Sub-County by male student for 2020-2023 cohort.*

ENROLMENT	YEAR	NUMBER
FORM ONE	2020	1490
FORM TWO	2021	1454
FORM THREE	2022	1419
FORM FOUR	2023	1359

Source: Ministry of education Makueni County 2020

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943), which outlines human motivation as a progression from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. While traditionally seen as a linear hierarchy, modern interpretations suggest that these needs can overlap and shift based on circumstances (Onah, 2015). In educational settings, especially among male students, unmet basic needs—such as food, safety, and emotional support—can hinder learning and contribute to school dropout (Mumbua, 2020). Cultural practices were found to both support and hinder the fulfilment of these needs. In some communities, boys are expected to work or provide for the family, affecting their ability to rest, feel secure, or belong in school. These cultural expectations can conflict with their developmental needs, increasing the risk of disengagement. Applying Maslow's framework with cultural sensitivity can help educators and policymakers develop more effective strategies to support boys' retention and success in school.

Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey design to explore how cultural practices affect male student retention in public secondary schools. A sample of 15 principals, 30 class teachers, 456 students, and 45 parents was drawn from a target population of 1,368 using stratified and simple random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interview schedules, and analyzed using SPSS version 27.

Results and Discussion

The main objective of the study was to assess the Cultural practices of male students' retention in public secondary schools in Mbooni West Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya.

Respondents' Background Information

In this study 486 questionnaires were administered to class teachers and students and 60 interview schedules were administered to principals and parents as shown in the table 2.

Table 2: Responses rates

Respondents	Sample Size	Number Returned	Return Rate (%)
Students	456	438	96.1
Parents	45	45	100.0
Class Teachers	30	27	90.0
Principals	15	13	86.7

From Table 2 the overall response rate was established to be 95.8 % which is quite high. Many studies accept a range of 50-60 % response rates as adequate for analysis and reporting while a few do not (Bailey, 2008; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013). Further, Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) classify a response rate of 50 % as adequate, of 60 % as good and above 70 % as excellent.

Influence of Cultural Practices on Male Student Retention

The study sought to establish how cultural practices influence male student retention in secondary schools. Four data sets were used to address the research question 'how do cultural practices influence male student retention in public secondary schools.

Table 3: Students' Responses on the Influence of Cultural Practices on Male Student Retention

Cultural Practice	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
My family comprises of less than 4 members	128	29.2	153	34.9	25	5.7	89	20.3	43	9.8
My family comprises of 6 members	113	25.8	123	28.1	26	5.9	92	21	84	19.2
Some boys engage themselves in early marriages	88	20.1	70	16.0	44	10	110	25.1	126	28.8

Am left home to take care of the younger siblings	154	35.2	153	34.9	38	8.7	54	12.3	39	8.9	
Parents with children and above didn't pay school fees for their son	7	115	26.3	95	21.7	111	25.3	65	14.8	52	11.9
Inheritance of parent assets can make one drop out of school	81	18.8	65	14.8	37	8.4	119	27.2	136	31.1	

N=468

Table 4: Number of Children to each Parent

Number of Children	Frequency	Percent
2	4	8.7
3	11	23.9
4	12	26.1
5	14	30.4
6	5	10.9
Total	46	100.0

Table 5: Parents' Responses on the Influence of Cultural Practices on Male Student Retention

Cultural Factor	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Do boys help you in household chores	28	60.9	18	39.1
Family inheritance and possession of assets has influenced boy child retention in school?	26	56.5	20	43.5
Do early marriages hinder the retention of boy child in school?	30	65.2	16	34.8

N=46

Table 6: Teachers' Responses on the Influence of Cultural Practices on Male Student Retention

Cultural Practice	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%

Boys from families of 2-5 members drop out of school	2	7.4	8	29.6	7	25.9	7	25.9	3	11.1	
Parents with children and above don't pay lunch fee	6	2	7.4	10	37	8	29.6	6	22.2	1	3.7
The cultural beliefs on boy child values of education hinders boy child retention	3	11.1	8	29.6	7	25.9	7	25.9	2	7.4	
Early marriage makes the boys to drop out of school	2	7.4	8	29.6	4	14.8	4	14.8	9	33.3	
Parents who side with boys' misbehavior influences boy child retention	10	37	12	44.4%	3	11.1	3	11.1	0	0	
Boys from families with more than 7 members drop out of school	4	14.8	7	25.9	6	22.2	9	1	3.7		

N=27

Table 7: Principals' Responses on the Influence of Cultural Practices on Male Student Retention

Cultural Factor	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
In your opinion do you think size of the family has influenced the male student retention?	8	61.5	5	38.5
Do the cultural practices influence the male student retention?	12	92.3	1	7.7

N=13

The findings show that students from large families, especially those with up to six or more children, face financial challenges that affect school retention. Both students and parents indicated that limited resources and cultural expectations, such as boys helping with household chores or prioritizing inheritance, contribute to dropout rates. While most principals (92.3%) agreed that cultural practices affect male student retention, teachers had mixed views, particularly on early marriage and family size. Permissive parenting was also identified by

81.4% of teachers as a key factor in male dropout. To examine these patterns, a composite variable on cultural practices was computed using SPSS version 27.

Table 8: Correlations of Cultural Practices and Male Student Retention

		Students		Parents		Teachers		Principals	
		CPS	MSR	CPS	MSR	CPS	MSR	CPS	MCR
CPS	Pearson	1	-	1	.086	1	.011	1	.122
	Correlation		.423**						
	Sig – 2- tailed		.000		.568		.955		.691
	N	438	438	46	406	27	27	13	13
MSR	Pearson	-.423**	1		0.086	0.011	1	0.122	1
	Correlation								
	Sig – 2- tailed	.000			.568	.955		.691	
	N	438	438	46	46	27	27	13	13

**Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (Sig- 2 tailed)

Table 8 shows a moderate negative correlation between cultural practices and male student retention based on student responses ($r = -.043$, $p < .001$), indicating that such practices negatively affect their school attendance. This aligns with Awour (2012), who found that cultural factors contribute to male dropout. However, no significant relationship was found from the perspectives of parents ($p = .568$), teachers ($p = .955$), and principals ($p = .691$), highlighting a disconnect between students and other stakeholders. These findings contrast with previous studies (e.g., Ntaiyia et al., 2021; Koskei, 2021), which emphasized the role of socio-cultural practices in male student retention.

Conclusion

The study found that cultural practices significantly influence male student retention in school. While dropout rates reflect institutional effectiveness, they also represent a societal loss of human capital. In the Kamba community—where this study was conducted—factors such as gender roles, large family sizes, and early marriages were identified by male students as key barriers to retention. However, responses from teachers, principals, and parents suggested that the influence of culture on dropout rates may vary across communities, indicating that causes are context-specific.

Recommendations

To improve male student retention and completion in public day secondary schools, principals should implement targeted interventions such as male-focused welfare programs and motivational initiatives. Compulsory parent-teacher meetings should be introduced to raise awareness about the value of education and identify dropout risks early. Teachers are encouraged to build stronger relationships with male students by understanding their backgrounds and challenges. At the policy level, the government should enforce laws against harmful cultural

practices that contribute to absenteeism. Additionally, the Ministry of Health should promote family planning to help parents manage resources and better support their children's education, especially boys.

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