

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

Purpose of Study: This study investigated the effects of cultural practices on male student retention, guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943).

Problem Statement: 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).

Methodology: A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data was 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.

Result: Cultural practices significantly influence male student retention. Many male students 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.

Recommendation: There is need for 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: *Secondary education, Mbooni West Sub-County, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.*

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) asserts that "everyone has the right to education." Following the Jomtien Conference in 1990, where the Education for All (EFA) agenda was established, global efforts intensified to expand access to education. In Africa, countries such as Kenya, Malawi, and Ghana have implemented free basic education programs to meet commitments outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Despite these initiatives, access to quality basic education, recognized as a fundamental human right, remains a challenge in many regions (O'Flaherty & Liddy, 2018).

The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) reaffirmed the global commitment to achieving universal primary education by 2015. One of its goals was to ensure that all children have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education. Similarly, the Salamanca Statement (1994) emphasized inclusive education, declaring that every child including those with special educational needs has the right to attend school (Stacey, 2019). Education plays a critical role in socio-economic and individual development. However, the number of boys enrolling and staying in school remains low in many countries (UNESCO, 2012). A mid-decade EFA review revealed that while enrolment, attendance, and achievement improved for girls, boys experienced declining enrolment rates (UNESCO, 2015).

According to Tumwebaze (2011) boys often face neglect, fewer adoptions, and limited support in children's homes, which contributes to higher dropout rates at the secondary level. While some regions focus on improving girls' education such as Somalia, Mali, Liberia, and Ethiopia (Kitetu, 1998; Nyagah & Mwangi, 2013) others, including Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, are increasingly concerned about high male dropout rates. In industrialized countries, boys tend to underperform compared to girls (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012). For instance, a Canadian study (2004) found more girls enrolled than boys, with socio-economic background identified as a major factor.

In the United States, former President Obama expressed concern over high dropout rates, describing the situation as unacceptable (White House Secretariat, 2009). Across Asia, male dropout rates vary, with India at 12% and the regional average around 5% (Smith, 2011). A 2012 U.S. report indicated a decline in male college graduates, while female graduates increased (Farrell & Gray, 2012). UNESCO (2018) similarly reported that males globally are falling behind in education. Chin (2018) found that male educational outcomes remain poor, particularly in Jamaica, where schools are perceived as feminine spaces with curricula that alienate boys. According to Campbell (2013), boys often see education as irrelevant because many successful individuals in their communities dropped out.

In Asia and the Pacific specifically Malaysia, Thailand, Mongolia, and the Philippines male student enrolment is also lower than that of girls (UNGEI, 2012). In Malaysia, parents

believe boys can find employment without completing school (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2011; UNGEI, 2012). Yet, education remains vital to national development (Mwikya, 2018). Haugan et al. (2019) emphasized that failure to retain students undermines societal progress. Despite constitutional guarantees in Kenya since 2010 mandating quality and compulsory education for every child (Cheneket, 2017), challenges persist. For example, while Kenya's primary school completion rate rose from 88% in 2010 to 90% in 2013, it has since declined possibly due to reduced attention to retention and socio-economic barriers.

In Kenya's Central region, male students have been overlooked in favor of the girl child. As a result, many male students turn to manual labor, working on farms, in quarries, and in rice fields (Mureithi, 2010). In Bungoma County, male education is increasingly endangered (Hamasi, 2013). A survey by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2012) found that students from poor households are less likely to complete secondary education. While efforts to empower girls have been commendable, they have left some boys feeling neglected and powerless, leading to increased substance abuse, school dropout, and criminal activity. Hamasi (2018) warned that continued neglect of male education could lead to the complete marginalization of male students. In Mbooni West Sub-County, Kenya, there appears to be no targeted effort to retain boys in secondary school. For example, below is a trend for Mbooni West Sub-County.

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

Despite these statistics much is yet to be done to access the extent to which socio-economic determinants influences the male students' retention in public secondary schools, hence the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a foundational psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943) in his seminal article *A Theory of Human Motivation*, published in the *Psychological Review*. Maslow's model posits that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy, beginning with physiological needs and progressing through safety, love and belonging, esteem, and ultimately self-actualisation. According to the original framework, individuals must generally satisfy lower-level needs before advancing to higher-level ones. However, contemporary interpretations suggest these levels may overlap, with unmet lower needs potentially regaining prominence even after higher needs have been partially fulfilled (Onah, 2015).

This dynamic view is particularly applicable in educational contexts where students' needs are shaped by shifting home, school, and community environments. Maslow's theory was applied in this study to examine the specific needs of male students within the school and

broader community context (Mumbua, 2020). It provided a lens through which to understand how unmet basic needs such as food, shelter, emotional security, and social inclusion impede boys' ability to fully engage with schooling, contributing to higher dropout rates.

Crucially, cultural practices emerged as both potential supports and barriers to the fulfilment of these needs. For instance, in some communities, boys are expected to take on labor intensive roles or contribute economically to the household, which may compromise their ability to meet physiological and safety needs related to rest, nutrition, and personal security. These practices also affect social needs, as expectations around masculinity and labor may limit boys' sense of belonging within the school environment. When cultural norms conflict with the fulfilment of foundational needs, the likelihood of school disengagement increases. Thus, integrating cultural awareness into interventions aligned with Maslow's framework can help educators, policymakers, and families better support male students by blending culturally sensitive practices with strategies that address their holistic needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell (2011) a descriptive research design is appropriate when the aim is to obtain information that describes existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, or values. The choice of this design was informed by the nature of the research problem, which required a systematic collection and analysis of data to describe the prevailing conditions affecting male student retention from the perspectives of various stakeholders. In the context of this study, the design facilitated an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic determinants of male students' retention. Specifically, the researcher sought to establish the relationship between cultural practices and male student retention. Target population comprised of 38 Principals, 76 class teachers (form two and form three), 1,140 students (form two and form three) and 114 parents (form two and form three male students) all totaling to 1,368 from which a sample of 15 Principals were selected using purposive sampling, 30 class teachers and 45 parents were selected using simple random sampling and 456 students were selected using proportionate random sampling considering the public secondary school.

According to Kaneko and Matsumoto (2016), 40% of secondary school principals, class teachers, parents, and male students were included in the study. The study was conducted in 15 public secondary schools, which were selected using simple random sampling from 38 public secondary school. 15 principals were selected using simple random sampling. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30 class teachers from the 15 schools. One teacher from form two and form three. 45 parents for form 2 and form 3 were selected, where in each school 3 parents were selected using simple random sampling from the two strata and 456 boys were selected, where a total of 30 boys were selected from each school, in form 2 and 3 the researcher selected 15 boys each using simple random sampling. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies percentages, tables, pie charts and bar graphs) and inferential statistics (Pearson Moment Correlation) to determine the significance and relationship between the variables. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to assess the socio-economic determinants 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

Results in Table 2 depicts that 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 7 children and above didn't pay school fees for their son	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

To confirm the observation above, the researcher also considered responses given by parents concerning number of children. These responses were to the question ‘how many children do you have?’ whose results are displayed in Table 4.

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

Three items were used to collect data from parents dealing with cultural practices as they affect male student retention. Table 5 shows frequencies and percentages of parents’ responses to the three of the practices. These data are used to triangulate on the issue of effect of cultural practices on male student drop out.

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 below indicates that majority of teachers felt that about 81.4% of male students whose parent’s side with their misbehavior dropout of school. This is after 12(44.4%) agreed and 10(37%) strongly agreed that ‘Parents who side with male students’ misbehavior influences male student retention’. Such parents practice permissive parenting styles where they view themselves as equal to their sons and do not take up the responsibility of disciplining them.

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 6 children and above don't pay lunch fee	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 below indicates the principal responses on cultural practices on male students.

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

Table 3 indicates that a total of 128 (29.2%) students strongly agreed that they came from families with four members, and an additional 113 (25.8%) strongly agreed to be from families with six members. This suggests that a significant number of students (55%) from families with up to six members faced financial difficulties paying school fees. This observation is supported by data from parents in Table 4, where the highest frequency (30.4%) was recorded for families with five children. This aligns with a study by Mueni and Maithya (2018), which found that large families, like those with five children, experience greater financial demands for boy retention. Rumberger and Rodriguez (2011) also noted that larger families tend to have higher dropout rates. Furthermore, 48% of

students in Table 3 agreed (21.7%) or strongly agreed (26.3%) that families with more than seven members were unable to pay school fees for their sons.

Regarding family size, Table 7 shows that 61.5% of principals attributed male student retention issues to it, although teachers expressed mixed feelings in Table 6. For instance, while 37% of teachers agreed that families with up to five children cause dropouts, and 44% agreed that parents with about six children struggled with fees, others disagreed or were undecided. In addition to family finances, cultural factors also play a significant role, as triangulated by responses from parents, teachers, and principals. Table 5 reveals that a majority of parents (60.9%) agreed that male student help with household chores, a finding similar to Cheneket (2017), which showed 67.14% of parents engaged their male children in domestic tasks. Overwhelming male student with chores can lead to school dropout, though equipping them with such skills can also be seen as beneficial for their future.

A substantial number of parents (56.5%) also agreed that family inheritance and possession of assets influence male student retention, suggesting that male student with assets may prioritize them over education. Koskei (2021) supports this, stating that some cultural practices prioritize asset possession over education. The perception of early marriage also varied. While 65.2% of parents saw early marriages as a hindrance to male students' retention, 34.8% disagreed, showing a level of tolerance. This tolerance was also evident among teachers, with 33.3% in Table 6 strongly disagreeing that early marriage causes male students to drop out. This tolerance can be problematic, as studies like Mukherjee and Sekher (2017) confirm that early marriage affects male students, leading to dropouts as family matters take precedence over education.

Regarding parental behavior, a majority of teachers (81.4%) believed that male students' whose parents are permissive regarding their misbehavior are more likely to drop out. This is supported by 44.4% of teachers agreeing and 37% strongly agreeing that permissive parenting influences male student retention. Research by Pedditzi, Fadda, and Lucarelli (2022) confirms that this parenting style significantly contributes to male student dropout. Ultimately, the principals' responses in Table 7 indicated that 92.3% agreed that cultural practices influence male student retention. To further explore these issues, a composite variable, 'Cultural Practice' (CPS), was computed in SPSS version 27 for each dataset.

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	-	1		0.086	0.011	1	0.122	1
	Correlation		.423**						
	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 presents a moderate negative correlation between cultural practices and male student retention in school, based on student responses ($r = -.043$, $p < .001$). This suggests that, according to male students, cultural practices adversely impact their continued enrollment and contribute to increased dropout rates. Participation in such practices may

ultimately lead some male students to disengage from formal education. These findings align with those of Awour (2012) who similarly found that cultural factors significantly influence male student dropout. However, the same table shows no statistically significant relationship between cultural practices and male student retention as perceived by parents ($p = .568$), teachers ($p = .955$), and principals ($p = .691$), indicating a divergence in perspectives. These results stand in contrast to previous studies (e.g., Ntaiya et al., 2021; Koskei, 2021), which have identified socio-cultural practices as influential in shaping 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.

RECOMMENDATION

To improve male student retention and completion rates in public day secondary schools, school principals should implement strategic interventions, such as male-focused welfare programs and motivational initiatives tailored to boys' needs. Compulsory parent-teacher meetings should be introduced to sensitize parents on the importance of education and to facilitate early identification of factors leading to dropout. Teachers are encouraged to build deeper relationships with male students by understanding their backgrounds and the challenges they face. At the policy level, the government should enact and enforce legislation targeting harmful cultural practices and individuals contributing to absenteeism and dropout among boys. In support of this, the Ministry of Health should enhance public awareness on family planning, enabling parents to manage family resources more effectively and support their children's education, particularly that of boys.

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