



International Journal of Academic Studies

Influence of Learner-Related Factors on Learners' School Access and Participation in Central Division of Narok County, Kenya.

Florence Kanorio Kisirkoi^{a,*}, Fredrick Odhiambo^a

^a Maasai Mara University Narok, Kenya.

* *Corresponding author:* Florence Kanorio Kisirkoi; *e-mail:* kisirkoiflorence@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 12th August 2016
Received in revised form 17st September 2016
Accepted 22th September 2016

Key words:

Basic education
Influence
Access
Participation
Learner
School

ABSTRACT

Education plays a critical role in human development yet some learners' school participation and access in Kenya tend to be inconsistent. The purpose of this study was to establish the learner-related factors that influence learners' school access and participation in Central Division of Narok County, Kenya. The study was conducted in public primary and secondary schools in central Division of Narok County. Descriptive Survey Research Design was employed and stratified random sampling technique was used to select the schools from the Division. The study respondents were selected using simple random sampling. The sample included 48 teachers, 8 secondary school principals, 24 primary school head teachers, 68 class eight pupils and 44 form one students. Data was collected using questionnaires. A pilot test was conducted in one secondary and three primary schools. Test-retest reliability method was employed to establish the reliability and stability of the instruments. A correlation co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The results indicated that physical condition of the learner, use of drugs, learners' attitude towards school, learners' age and their maturity, gender influence their access and participation in school. The study recommended promotion of policies and practices that maximize inclusion. Open and flexible practices should be incorporated in curriculum implementation, giving consideration to equity, diversity and opportunity for all learners. Teachers should be empowered through continuous professional development activities such as refresher training to equip them with skills which motivate learners to learn and be retained in school.

1. Introduction

Education of high quality as a basic human right should be made accessible to all. Quality education is integral to the development of the individual, society and enhancement of democracy in a nation. This study was influenced by lessons of Confucius (551-479) who in his teaching argued that education should be open to all and that there should be no class distinction since all people are capable of improving themselves through education ([Starr, 2012](#)). This is in agreement with the Kenya Vision 2030 ([Republic of Kenya, 2007](#)) where the country is committed to reforming the education sector to make it accessible to all and more responsive to the 21st Century demands. It also aims at establishing a knowledge-based economy. Critical undertakings are required to improve the education sector and in particular concerns pertaining to the level of access, retention and completion as a large number of students have remained out of school with many failing to transit to higher education levels ([UNICEF, 2007](#)). Children need not only to be put in school but also to be retained in school to acquire quality education that exploits their full potential and meets their learning needs and the needs of the country for social, political and economic development of the country.

Though education has been at the heart of the government of Kenya, there has been declining enrolment and participation rates of children in schools in the Central Division of Narok County which is mostly inhabited by pastoralists. This scenario is worrying because school enrolment has been increasing in both primary and secondary school levels of education in the rest of the country. One of the objectives of this study was to investigate learner-related factors that influence learners' school access and Participation in central Division of Narok County, Kenya. This comes at a time when Kenya is reviewing school curriculum and the issues identified, if timely addressed, could lead to improvement of quality of learning in the area.

1.1 The influences of learner School Participation

Some factors that determine whether a learner is able or not able to participate in school relate to the diverse needs of individual learners. According to [UNICEF \(2010\)](#) children with disabilities are not only substantially less likely to be in school but also even where they are in school, they are less likely to complete their primary education and make a successful transition to secondary school. [Singhal \(2009\)](#) points out those children with disabilities have

five and a half times the chance to be out of school than their non-disabled peers. [Mwaura & Wanyera \(2002\)](#) argued that learners with various forms of special needs and health problems, which are not easily seen and are not associated with chronic illnesses, may be unable to follow school routine due to problems with hearing, sight and decreased motor fitness. Such a situation often leads to school dropout. Learners should therefore be valued and their unique needs addressed. None of them should be exposed to any form of discrimination. A society in the 21st century should desist from a situation reported by [Sifuna & Otiende \(2006\)](#). They observed that the ancient Spartan education system discriminated against children who were seen to be unfit for life due to their noticeable disabilities. The culture of inclusivity should be inculcated in the education system which should include nurturing of learner's special talents. However education in Kenya has been reported to lack programmes for children with special talents ([Republic of Kenya, 2012](#)), a situation that adversely hinders their retention in school because they may feel left out, without effective participation in school and some of them end up dropping out of school and their talents remain unexploited.

The teacher plays a critical role in a learner's school participation. As instructors

teachers should thoroughly understand the differences and the diverse learning needs of all of their learners. [Shim \(2007\)](#) while commenting on the philosophy of Confucius noted that the philosopher was a careful student of character who took care of each learner. He noted that Confucius made an analysis of every individual student and then worked towards shaping his instruction according to learner uniqueness. A different picture is painted of the Kenyan education where research indicates that teaching in primary schools is teacher centred with limited learner interaction, enthusiasm and participation in their own learning ([Kisirkoi, 2014](#)).

[Felder & Brent \(2005\)](#) reported that individual learners have unique learning styles, approaches to learning and intellectual development levels that have implications for teaching and learning. Similarly, [Abucay \(2009\)](#) asserts that the pupil's difficulty in learning may be due to intellectual factors such as special intellectual disabilities, learning factors such as poor mastery of what has been taught, limited background of the content and faulty study methods. Other hindrances to learning which Abucay reported were physical factors such as health, visual and physical defects, nutrition and physical development. Emotional and social factors such as pupil-teacher relationships in the classroom and the

social interaction of relationships among pupils were other identified hindrances to learning. It is extremely essential that teachers understand the diverse learning needs of learners including their special needs which pose obstacles in their learning process. Such learners may not gain much from the instructional approaches unless they are modified to address their special needs and suit their level and capability.

Gender and age group of the learner are said to have profound effects on households schooling. [Onsomu et al., \(2006\)](#) noted that student's age has a highly significant negative effect on their participation in school. They also argue that as some children's age advance, especially more than that of their classmates, their likelihood of dropping out of school increases. [Ricardo et al., \(2010\)](#) supports these findings by noting a big likelihood of over age children dropping out of school towards the end of primary school than children who are in the appropriate age for their grades. They explain further that as children grow the opportunity cost to them of remaining in school increases especially if they are from poor households.

2. Materials and Method

The study employed cross sectional survey research design to obtain the research data. The design allows the researcher to get a snapshot of the current behavior, attitudes, opinions and beliefs in the population ([Gay et al., 2009](#)).

[Kothari \(2004\)](#) further argues that descriptive survey research design is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or a group using samples and then making statements about the population on the basis of the sample analysis. In this study stratified random sampling was used to select 24 primary schools and 8 secondary schools in the central Division of Narok County. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling. The study sample comprised 24 head teachers of primary schools, 8 principals of secondary schools, 48 teachers, 68 primary school pupils and 44 secondary school students, making a total of 192 respondents.

2.1 Apparatus

The study used questionnaires developed by the researchers to gather data from all the subjects. [Kothari \(2004\)](#) supports the convenience of use of the questionnaire and argues that it is cheap and can reach respondents who are spread out in a wide geographical area. Test-retest reliability method was employed to establish the reliability and stability of the research instruments and a correlation co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained. Content validity was established using the objective as the criteria and it was found that the instruments developed covered sufficient content to help address the objective adequately. A pilot test was conducted in one

secondary school and three primary schools. The findings were analyzed and the errors in the instruments were corrected, revised and the instrument was made ready for use in the study. The researchers administered the questionnaires to the respondents face to face and waited for them to fill in and then collected them. Qualitative data were organized into themes using content analysis technique and analyzed, while descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data. Results were presented in form of tables, frequencies and percentages.

3. Results

The findings of the study were based on Learner –Related Factors that Influence Access to Basic Education

3.1 Primary school pupils’ and secondary school students’ views on the learner – related factors influencing access to basic education

The study sought to establish from the point of view of the learners themselves the factors that affect their efforts of joining and participating both primary and secondary school. The questionnaires were administered to a total of sixty eight (68) pupils and forty four (44) secondary school students. The primary school pupils and the secondary school students were combined for purpose of data analysis and the responses of 99 who participated in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Primary School Pupils’ and Secondary school Students’ Views on the Learner –Related Factors Influencing Access and participation.

Learner related Reasons for failure to join Primary and Secondary Schools	Yes	Not sure	No
a) Handicaps (lame, stammerer, deaf, visually impaired, learning disability).	59(59.6)	11(11.1)	29(29.3)
b) Drunkenness/use of Drugs	78 (78.8)	6(6.1))	15(15.2)
c) Negative attitudes towards formal education.	69(69.7)	15(15.2)	15(15.2)
d) Dislike methods of teaching by some teachers	72(72.7)	10(10.1)	17(17.2)
e) Good relations exist among pupils themselves	67(67.7)	4(4.0)	28(28.3)
f) Learner’s gender is important in school access	59(59.6)	14(14.1)	26(26.3)
g) Age (feeling too old to continue with school)	66 (66.7)	15(15.2)	18(18.2)

The results shown in table 1 indicates that the respondents agreed that physical handicaps

of the learner, use of drugs, age, gender and negative attitude towards formal schooling,

teaching methods used by some teachers, pupil-pupil relationship influenced access and participation of learners in primary and secondary school. It was established that 78 (78.8%) of the respondents selected use of drugs, 72 (72.7%) felt that methods of teaching used by some teachers played a role in the level of school access. A total of 69 (69.7%) and 67 (67.7%) felt that learner attitude towards formal education and relationship between pupils themselves respectively could determine access and participation of learners in school. Another 66 (66.7%) felt that a notion of feeling too old to continue school could be a factor, while 59 (59.6%) agreed that handicaps had a role in learner access of school and participation. Possible contribution of gender was supported by 59 (59.6%) of the students. Such perspectives seem to imply that any remedies that need to be undertaken should address those factors related to the learner since they determine school participation. It was further established that 82% of the respondents had

knowledge of a person who had dropped out of school because of many factors presented in this article. This means that drop out and low participation in formal primary and secondary education are problems that are known to most of the people in the Division. When asked whether they were confident of joining secondary school and later proceed to higher education 98% of the pupils indicated their confidence which means that most of them had the wish to pursue their secondary and higher education but such factors as identified could hinder their level of access and subsequent retention in formal schooling.

3.2 Head teachers' views on the learner-related factors influencing access to basic education

The twenty four primary school head teachers were selected to provide appropriate information on the learner related factors influencing access and participation in school. Their perceptions were presented in table 2.

Table 2. Head teachers' views on the learner – related factors influencing access.

Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) Physical handicaps	--	16 (66.7)	3 (12.5)	5 (20.8)	--
b) Drunkenness/ use of drugs	5 (20.8)	8 (33.3)	3 (12.5)	8 (33.3)	--
c) Learners attitude towards formal education	10 (41.7)	8 (33.3)	6 (25.0)	--	--

d) Age and maturity of the learner	12 (50.0)	9 (37.5)	--	3 (12.5)	--
e) Learner's gender	6 (25.0)	13 (54.2)	--	5 (20.8)	--

Table 2 indicates that most of the head teachers 16 (66.7%) agreed that learners' handicap condition was a factor influencing access to both primary and secondary education, only 5 (20.8%) disagreed. A total of 13 (54.1%) agreed that drunkenness and use of drugs among the pupils was also another significant factor influencing learners' school access and participation. Learner's attitude towards school was supported by a total of 18 (75.0%) of the head teachers who agreed that it influences learner school access and participation. The age and maturity of the learner was another factor and 21 (87.5%) head teachers agreed that it was a factor influencing

learner school access and participation. Gender of the learner was supported by 19 (79.2%) of the head teachers who agreed with the given statement. This shows that the learner-related factors in the opinion of the head teachers determine the learners' progress in school.

3.3 Teacher's Views on the learner- related factors influencing access to basic education

The views of the teachers were also sought on whether factors such as physical handicaps, use of drugs, attitude of the learners towards education, the age and gender of the learner influence learners' school participation and access. Table 3 presents a summary of their responses.

Table 3. Teachers' views on the learner- related factors influencing access

Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) Physical handicaps	5 (10.4)	16 (33.3)	3 (6.3)	14 (29.2)	10 (20.8)
b) Drunkenness/ use of drugs	7 (14.5)	20 (41.7)	6 (12.5)	8 (16.7)	7 (14.5)
c) Learners attitude towards formal educ.	8 (16.7)	31 (64.6)	4 (8.3)	5 (10.4)	--
d) Age and maturity of the learner	13 (27.1)	20 (41.7)	7 (14.5)	6 (12.5)	2 (4.2)
e) Learner's gender	4 (8.3)	14 (29.2)	13 (27.1)	10 (20.8)	7 (14.6)

From the results in table 3, it is clear that half of the teachers 24 (50%) disagreed while 21 (43.7%) agreed that handicaps may influence transition. The learner's attitudes

towards formal education had the highest number of agreement with a response of 39 (81.3%) agreeing. The age and maturity of the learner was supported by 33 (68.8%)

respondents agreeing. Possible use of drugs was supported by 27 (56.25%) while the learners' gender got the least support of 18 (37.5%) in agreement while 17 (35.4%) disagreed.

3.4 Secondary school principals' views on the learner- related factors influencing access to basic education

The secondary school principals were also required to provide information on the learner related factors that influence access and participation of learners in school. The responses from the secondary school principals who responded were presented in table 4.

Table 4. Principals' views on the learner- related factors influencing access to school

Response	Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) Physical handicaps	--	3 (75)	--	--	1 (25)
b) Drunkenness/ use of drugs	1 (25)	2 (50)	1 (25)	--	--
c) Learners' attitude towards formal education	3 (75)	1 (25)	--	--	--
d) Age and Maturity of learner	--	3 (75)	--	--	1 (25)
e) Learner's gender	1 (25)	2 (50)	--	1 (25)	--

From table 4 it is clear that the learner's attitude towards schooling was viewed by the principals as contributing the greatest influence on their school access and participation, with 100% agreement. Majority of them gave similar responses in agreement on the remaining four factors of handicaps, drunkenness, age and maturity of the learner and the learners' gender at 75% response. Most of the principals agreed that learner participation in basic education is determined by all the five factors; physical handicaps, drunkenness, learner's attitude towards formal education, learner's age and maturity and the learner's gender. The principals also stated that some pupils live with single parents who earn income from alcohol brewing in the slum areas of Narok Town

exposing their children to substance abuse. They also cited lack of proper child upbringing by the parents and peer pressure among the learners as denying the learners proper concentration in studies hence leading to poor performance in examinations. Failure in examinations has reduced the rate of retention in school in the division.

4. Discussions

The findings indicated that all the factors provided which were: physical condition of the learner, use of drugs, learners' attitude towards formal education, age and maturity of learner and gender of the learner influence access and participation in school in Narok Central Division. In this category of factors, learner's

attitude towards formal schooling was observed to have the largest influence on participation in basic schooling because it determined whether they would drop out or proceed with their education. It was however clear from the findings that the learners had positive attitude towards schooling. Most of the respondents agreed that the physical condition and health status of the learner determined the ability and desire to progress in education. This finding was in agreement with that of [UNICEF \(2010\)](#) and [Mwaura & Wanyera \(2002\)](#) where it was established that children with disabilities were not only substantially less likely to be in school but even for those who were in school their chances of retention and completion was limited. Children with special needs and health problems may be unable to follow school routine due to problems with hearing; sight and decreased motor fitness and were likely to drop out of school if their special needs were not addressed.

It was also found out that the learner's gender determined whether or not their educational progress would be achieved and the female gender was the most affected. [Wango et al., \(2012\)](#) reported a rather worrying situation where teachers were blamed for the widespread prevalence of gender-inappropriate teaching learning methods, including holding negative attitude towards girls especially in Science, Mathematics and Technical (SMT) subjects.

This finding is in agreement with findings by [Onsomu et al., \(2006\)](#) and [Ricardo et al., \(2010\)](#) who established that the issues of gender and age among the learners were in particular, key hindrances to learner transition to secondary schools. As the age of the pupil advances more than that of the classmates the pupils, especially girls, would most likely opt to drop out of school instead of proceeding on to higher levels.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From this study the factors that influence learner access and participation include physical handicaps, Drunkenness and use of drugs, Learners attitude towards formal education, age and maturity of the learner and learner's gender. Other factors from literature review include teaching methods used by some teachers and pupil-pupil relationships.

It was recommended that curriculum reforms should be geared towards promoting policies and practices that maximize learning opportunities for all students and enhancing meaningful learning outcomes. Schools should promote practices that facilitate all learners to transit to the next level smoothly to help them to fulfill their personal goals before they start feeling that they are older than their classmates. Schools should implement government policies that raise the level of inclusivity for all learners giving consideration to equity, diversity and

opportunity for all to accommodate learners with different special needs. Such learners should be provided opportunities to participate in activities performed by other learners in the school. The teacher needs to play the role of a facilitator of all learners in the learning process to motivate each learner to remain in school and learn.

The government and the society may also step in to provide facilities for learners with special needs. A leaf could be borrowed from Jamaica where cost effective measures have been put in place such as linking students in preservice teacher training with schools. There is peer teaching and some special schools have been converted to resource centers that provide expertise to cluster of inclusive schools ([UNESCO, 2009](#)).

The parents require to improve child rearing practices to reduce learner drunkenness and unbecoming behaviour. The government needs to intensify continuous teacher professional development and monitoring of teaching effectiveness. The teachers should practice inclusiveness and address learning needs of each learner. The Teachers in the 21st Century require training and refresher courses to make them compliant and responsive to the demands of inclusive education which is essential in providing learning environments that are inclusive and flexible in

accommodating and catering for diverse needs of all learners.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the contribution of the Secondary school Principals and Students, Primary school head teachers, teachers and pupils of Central Division, Narok County for their cooperation throughout this study and for providing data that enabled us conduct this study. Special thanks go to Dr. Khamadi for his contribution during the research process.

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