

EFFECT OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ON ENROLMENT AND RETENTION OF STUDENTS IN PUBLIC DAY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KWALE COUNTY, KENYA

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International Academic Journal of Social Sciences and Education (IAJSSE) | ISSN 2518-2412

Received: 18th February 2025

Published: 24th February 2025

Full Length Research

Available Online at: https://iajournals.org/articles/iajsse_v2_i4_54_68.pdf

Citation: King`ondu, L. W., Mbirithi, D. M. (2025) Effect of cultural practices on enrolment and retention of students in public day secondary schools in Kwale County, Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Social Sciences and Education (IAJSSE)*, 2(4), 54-68.

ABSTRACT

Enrolment and retention of learners has emerged as a critical issue in Kenyan schools being subjected to debate and reforms, the most recent being 100% transition from primary to secondary schools since 2017. Despite efforts to comply with the regulation, enrollment and retention continues to be low. This research sought to establish the effect of cultural practices on enrolment and retention of students in public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County, Kwale. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the cultural practices effect on enrolment and retention was employed. Qualitative analysis was via content analysis on the data collected to provide insights on patterns in cultural practices. Quantitative analysis was through descriptive statistics quantifying the measurable enrolment and retention data in percentages and frequencies. It covered a population of 21-day public schools, 261 teachers, 21 principals, 21 PA chairpersons and 5,057 students. 10% of significant population and 20% of the small population provided the sample size. Therefore, 4 principals, 4 PAs, 26 teachers and 506 students were the sample size which totalled up to 540 respondents. The research employed a descriptive survey using interviews on principals and PAs and questionnaires on teachers and students to collect enrolment and retention data. Sampling was achieved by frequencies and percentages analytical statistics. Tables, charts, and graphs were utilized to illustrate the data. Through intervening measures, this research conceptualized these practices as independent variables to show improved enrolment and retention. In regard to ethical practices, a research permit was granted by NACOSTI while MOE Kinango Sub County

also provided permission for the researcher to carry out the investigation within the locality upon request. The study found out that initiation according to 65% respondents and early marriage affected enrolment and retention due to the challenging family responsibilities installed upon the affected learners and change of behaviour that discouraged participation in education, 39% of respondents family were polygamous, 25% monogamous while 36% other types of family setting. Economic activity limited the income generated in families making them unable to cater for the sake of their children's needs both at home and more so in school. The researcher concluded that the four cultural practices affected enrolment and retention. This study recommended sensitization, practice of a variety of economic activities and guiding and counselling as well as legal action against perpetrators of forced marriage to enhance enrolment and retention of the students in Kinango Sub County.

Key terms: Enrolment and Retention, Cultural Practices, Effect, Public Day Secondary Schools, Economic Activity

INTRODUCTION

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established that "everyone has the right to education." United Nations Conventions on the Child's Human Rights enshrined education as a cardinal human freedom. Education was presumed as a critical entity for eliminating poverty and pushing universal prosperity (World Bank, 2013). Education was also among the ways of promoting social and economic development (World Bank, 2009). In Argentina (Otega 2012) argued that accessing, retaining, and transitioning of students faced several challenges, focusing on discussing social gaps that resulted from education. In her study in China (Morline 2009) noted that educated individuals became more productive in society, unlike the less educated. Most countries that struggled to achieve development indicated significant gaps economically and cultural tenets that discourage enrolling and retaining learners' at distinct levels of learning. These economic gaps were due to gender, customs, or people being different. According to (Swidler, 2003) nothing was automatic when it came to youth being yielding members of society, or challenging about growing from childhood to adulthood. Adulthood was the second major and popular rite of initiation unlike in Western societies, where transition proved difficult because they lacked guidelines of adulthood rites to steer young persons through this crucial stage of their life. The initiates were separated from the community and away from the daily activities of life, to be taught ways and expectations of adulthood, rules and taboos of the society as well as morals and social responsibilities.

In Amhara, Ethiopia had 325 cases of girls' arranged marriages annulled yearly (UNICEF, 2014-2017). Early marriage is therefore a cultural practice that impedes enrolment and retention of learners especially in Kinango public day secondary schools. Cultural practices posed a challenge to enrolment and retention of learners (Isaiah, 2011).

According to studies conducted by WHO regarding cultural practices in 28 countries in Africa, Tanzania had 15%, Uganda 20% while Kenya had 40% prevalence rates of traditional techniques, for instance, Female Genital Mutilation and early marriages. UNESCO (2010) study in Turkana, there are pastoral communities like the Samburu community which rely on nomadic practices, indicated that they move around searching for pasture and water for their livestock, a common occurrence Kinango Sub County. Yombo (2012) purported that only 40% of the students, which is a minimal percentage, enrolled in secondary institutions of education and graduated. This showed the majority were not retained therefore unable to complete the cycle for various reasons some of which were cultural practices. KNBS in 2002 brought to light that retained learners aged 15-18 years were 41%.

Ministry of Education (2019) reported that the rates of students' participation in public secondary schools in Mandera West Sub-county had been on the downward trajectory, despite education being highly appreciated as it promoted the growth of a nation via training of suitable human resources that aided in spurring output and eradicating impoverishment, ignorance, and disease (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

(Abagi, 2001) argued that marriage-oriented socialization caused drop out of girls from school for marriage. They also feared lacking husbands after attainment of higher qualifications in education because of the stereotypical suspicion that they may not make good life partners. In ASAL areas, Cultural practices were cited as the reason for the limited education access, rates of participation, and completion in Kenya since its independence in 1963.

Culture is the shared kind of living of a unit of people. That covers common knowledge, background, beliefs, and forms of expression, values, and behaviours that influence classroom interaction (Bishop, 2002; Bourdieu, 1948). Also, culture is conceived as common beliefs, motives, values, identities, and meanings of crucial occurrences that are an outcome of everyday encounters of community members that are passed across posterities (Sifuna, 2007). This implied that the cultural practices we participate in as we get involved in events and life scenarios shape and constitute a significant percentage of our learning. Cultural practices, therefore, had a considerable impact on how children participate in education.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary schools enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the lowest in the world. Of approximately 104 million secondary school-age children in SSA, only one in four that is 25% were enrolled in secondary school in 2006 (UNESCO, 2008: 330-331. In Kenya, the enrolment rate was 69.1% in secondary schools, despite the subsidized education in day secondary institutions (EFA Global Monitoring 2010.). In Kwale County, Secondary institutions gross enrolment stood at 29.8 only (EFA Global 2010), meaning that a percentage was not enrolled in schools. Cultural practices were the factors attributed to the above statistics. Due to the low enrolment in Kwale County, the researcher sought to conduct a study to establish the effect of cultural practices on enrolment and retention rates in public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County and recommended ways of improving enrolment and retention.

Purpose of the Study

This research examined effects of cultural practices on enrolment and retention of students in Kwale County, specifically in Kinango Sub County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researches revealed the factors which contribute to dismal enrolment and retention of students in ASAL areas. Still, the researches carried out before showed a gap which the researcher in this study set out to seal by conducting a study on the effect of cultural practices on enrolment and retention of learners. The net enrolment despite the governments' intervention of introducing free day secondary education in Kenya was at 69.1% in 2008 (EFA Global Monitoring, 2010). The gross Kwale County enrolment of Secondary Schools was at 29.8% (EFA Global, 2010). In this study the low enrolment and retention were attributed to the cultural factors namely initiation and early marriage, livestock keeping as a traditional economic activity and polygamous family setting in Kinango Sub-County. According to the World Bank (2014), in secondary schools in developing countries like Africa, enrolment rate levels were below 40% in the majority of countries. UNESCO (2012) argued that these varying

statistics resulted from different factors, which ranged from the government's commitment to compulsory and free education in secondary schools.

Eshiwani (1993) traces the source of unfairness in education in Kenya to colonial times. Kenya, back then, directed its resources on European and also several Asian schools during that time. More often than not, Kenya's ASALs earned little precedence in allotment of development resources. This was warranted by economic purposes that aimed to boost output in localities with well-known and attested prospects for a long time. Education which would have been a way of demystifying retrogressive cultural practices would have gradually helped the community to shade those practices and embrace education gradually. Other regions that were favoured are now way ahead of ASALs because they had the opportunity for education during colonial times. According to the World Bank Report (2013) in sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment and retention was impacted by poverty and practices like early marriage. The consequence of early marriage was teen pregnancies which are also rampant, and the most affected gender was the female (Achoka, 2007). Chalse (2011) indicated that children born to teen parents also had a high chance of becoming teen parents. The researcher concurred because there were always higher chances of history repeating itself. Williams (2010) indicated that most teen parents were unable to complete school hence affecting their future abilities to secure employment. In Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey, Liberia, and Morocco, for every two boys three to four girls discontinue their education (UNESCO, 2005).

Communities in ASALs have lagged and failed to keep pace in education, (Government of Kenya, 2003). Historical background played a critical role. However, cultural practices are inescapable whether one accepts or repudiates them (Scanlon, 1964). Elijah (2013) stated that Polygamy was an acceptable phenomenon in most African societies. In Kinango Sub County, most families were polygamous, contributing to too many children. The homesteads for the various wives were further apart, and the man could only stay in one at a time. In some cases, the man completely abandoned some homesteads, the primary reason being the inability to support all of the families financially. This made the boys in the homesteads to take up the fatherly roles to help their mothers and take care of their siblings. Bronfenbrenner (1987) argued that positive interactions between the schools and families contributed to the emotional and cognitive abilities of the child. Sanchez (2013) complemented this argument by stating that any positive interaction between parents and children in education had a positive school attachment. The converse of this was also true. This was well documented in Ngau's (1991) works in his studies of school dropouts in primary school in Kenya. He argued that parents provided enough support for their children to enable them to stay in the learning institutions. Parents contributed significantly to their children's moral and mental growth (Onyango, 2000). Some families were prominent while others were smaller, and this set in place the level of competition for the available resources (West, 1980). Otunge (2004), argued that large families were associated with overcrowded homesteads, which harmed the children's behaviour, mainly where the family lived in tiny houses so that some children ended up living according to their wishes including refusing to go to school. This was well documented in (Ruther, 1980), who argued that large families had several social and economic disadvantages. Schuler (2017) says

that there are a variety of ways that parents and guardians could participate in the learning of their children by supporting their involvement in education related activities.

Initiation rituals are observed worldwide to mark the end of social childhood, and one is considered an adult. The individual is admitted to a particular social group. Therefore, Initiation served those two functions. The forms of Initiation in the study included circumcision of boys, social roles education, sex education and dress code education for girls, who were then ready to get into marriage in their tender age to start giving birth to children UNESCO, (2000). This worsened because some communities encouraged marriage immediately after circumcision and other substitute rites of passage (Dumas, 2004 and Lewin, 2007).

According to African Educational Trust, (2013), livestock-keeping communities knew education was essential, but the right to education should never come at the expense of someone's source of livelihood. The economic activity of a community had a critical influence on the education sector, especially on the children's enrolment and retention ability. This was based on the fact that these economic activities helped to generate income. (Shinali, Thinguri, and Githui, 2014) observed that over 60% of the school aged in Kenya aren't enrolled in any educational institution because of their parent's low-income status. They enumerated several reasons directly related to the parent's income status. According to Njeru and Orodho, (2003), poverty was a critical factor that affected people's participation in education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research sought to establish the effect of cultural practices on enrolment and retention in public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County. Descriptive survey design by interviewing respondents and administering questionnaires was used. This design was applicable because of its suitability for measuring the characteristics of a larger population (Orodho, 2003). It also involved people describing aspects of a population, namely opinions, beliefs, and attitudes that form cultural practices that influenced enrolment and retention of learners in public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County. It also enabled the researcher to collect, summarize and present data (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). It covered a population of 5,360 respondents. Kinango Sub County had 21-day public schools, 261 teachers, 21 principals, 21 PA chairpersons, and a population of 5,057 students. A researcher can get a 10%, significant population sample. For a population that is small at least 20% is required. In addition, selection surpassing 30 to 500 is a great exhibition for a population (Gay, 2000 & Sakaran, 2016). Consequently, a sample of 540 respondents consisting of 4 PA's, 4 principals and 26 teachers and 506 students was selected. This helped to accommodate reasonable time for the research and little cost. 550 questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students. 512 were issued to students while 28 were issued to teachers. All questionnaires were returned, representing 100% return rate. To determine reliability and suitability the questionnaires were pretested on respondents who were selected. 8 interview schedules were carried out, 4 principals and 4 PA's of public day secondary schools. The researcher personally met the respondents, acquainted herself and created a rapport then agreed on when the interview was to be carried out. The researcher applied a one-on-one interview during which the interviewees were requested to respond to the questions honestly. The analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data analysis involved gathering of data via open-

ended questions to teachers and students and interviews to principals and PAs, structuring and interpreting it to understand what it represented. Content analysis was done on the qualitative data so as to identify the patterns that would come out of the text. Quantitative analysis was used on data that were quantified and acquired through questionnaires and interviews. This included data on enrolment and retention rates which were measurable in numbers and percentages. Presentation of facts acquired in the analysed data was displayed in tables, diagrams, graphs, and charts.

Findings Of The Study

This study presented findings on the effects of cultural practices on enrolment and retention of students in public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County, Kwale County based on the analysis of these study objectives:

- ❖ To examine the effect of Initiation on learners` enrolment and retention.
- ❖ To find out the effect of early marriage on enrolment and retention.
- ❖ To establish a polygamous family setting influence on enrolment and retention.
- ❖ To determine the effect of livestock farming on enrolment and retention of students.

Initiation

This study examined the effect of initiation in regard to student`s enrolment and retention in the study area.

Figure 1: Initiation

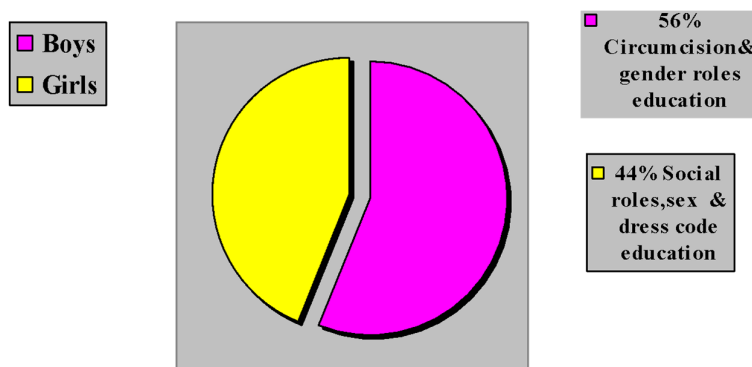
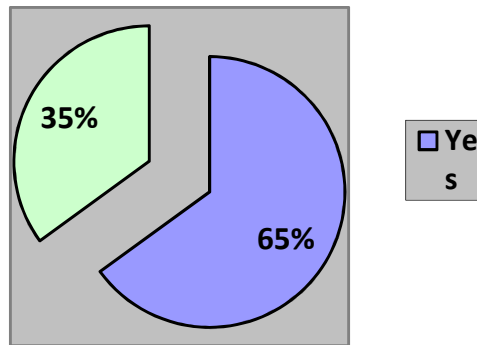


Figure 1 shows, 223, 100%, girls had undergone initiation in the form of social roles, sex education and dress code education while 283,100%, of the boys had undergone circumcision and gender roles education. The gender roles took a lot of the student`s time since they had to do them right after school as parents are busy doing menial jobs to generate income and taking care of livestock. The result is undesirable especially on the girls where they fail to enrol in school, not concentrating in classroom, ailments and eventually withdrawing from school

According to 17 teachers` response, (65%), initiation affected enrolment and retention because once these initiation rites took place most children considered themselves grownups. They drop out of school to take up parental responsibilities for themselves or to aid their parents feed their several siblings especially in polygamous family setting. 9 teachers, (35%), said it didn`t have an effect as indicated in the figure 2.

Figure 2: Students' involvement in initiation



The PA's revealed that after initiation, the boys were given a lot of freedom and treated as grownups. They were even built a house where they ended up misusing it by engaging in intimate activities with the opposite gender. Some ended up marrying without their parent's knowledge. They therefore practiced truancy and in the long run they ended up dropping out of school because they could not catch up and felt demoralised.

Early marriage

According to the 26 teachers (100%), a number of students had dropped out of school in the classes they represented. Teachers attributed these cases majorly to early marriage among other reasons. Students who got circumcised were ready for marriage after attaining teenage. Some married while in school and the same girls married had either dropped out of school or were never enrolled after completing primary education. Eventually, the boys dropped out because of the challenges of balancing family roles and their studies. According to the principals, one cause cited for dismal enrolment and retention was early marriage in cases where parents wanted to gain dowry or when the girl succumbed to teenage pregnancy and she ended up being married off to avert shame in the family.

In response to the number of primary school classmates who had withdrawn from school, 271 (54%) indicated very many, 228(45%) revealed that few were not in school. 7 (1%) said all their classmates were in school. According to 267(53%), the majority of those not in secondary school completed only class eight, 197(39%) dropped out in secondary school while 42 (8%) dropped out in primary school.

The cause of students not joining secondary school or dropping out was attributed to early marriage or lack of school fees resulting in early marriage among other reasons.

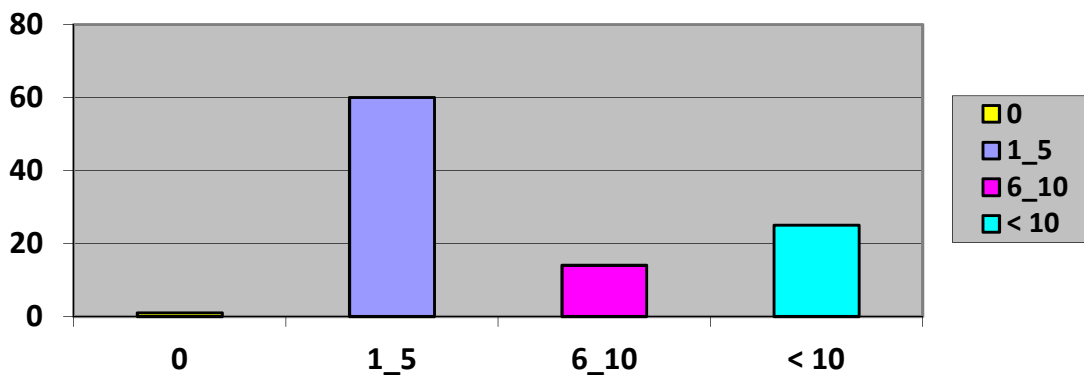
When asked how many had dropped out of their class in 2023, the students responded as follows:

No.of those who dropped out in 2023	Response	
	F	%
None	3	1
1-5	298	60
6-10	71	14
More than 10	127	25
Total	499	100

Table 1: Dropped out in 2023

The reasons for dropping out as shown in figure below cited included early marriage and school fees.

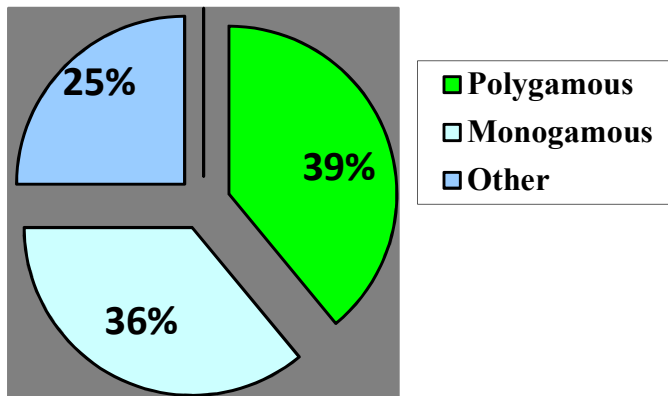
Figure 3: Dropped out in 2023



Polygamous family

According to the students, the figure below shows 218, (39%), stated other types of family setting, 182(36%) came from monogamous families while 127(25%) came from polygamous family setting

Figure 4: Type of Family Setting



From the figure below, 80 percent of the students felt that the polygamous marital status of their parents affected their education in secondary schools negatively mainly because they had no ability to provide the key education requirements because of the high number of children in the family. The fathers rarely met their children after school time, (because of the various families) which made it impossible for the children to express and request for their educational needs. This left a heavy load on the mother who also expected to get financial help from the father. In addition, such irresponsible parents were not able to provide the much needed basics for their children. According to the PA's polygamous family setting is another culture thought to affect enrolment and retention. They revealed that most of the families in the community are polygamous. This resulted in too many children in the family for parents without a constant source of income. They stated that at times men, the heads of those families ended up abandoning the other wives and children and only took care of one family. This forced the children of the abandoned families to step in and provide for themselves and siblings hence dropping out of school or not getting enrolled because of lack of money. Some children too felt the parents were not interested in their educational activities and end up quitting entirely.

Livestock farming (traditional economic activity)

The PA's felt that since it is the major source of income for most of the parents, it affected enrolment and retention of students because they did not earn enough money to take care of family needs and educational requirements for their children. The PA's felt the area is also drought prone and therefore the livestock died during severe drought therefore reducing level of income more. Also the parents involved their school going children into moving the livestock to areas where they can find pasture and water. According to the principals, the economic activity practised by most of the parents was livestock keeping. However, the animals were not many because of limited pasture and water due to the unpredictable rains. Some students drop out of school eventually due to lack of consistency in learning. Continued drought caused the death of the animals. Families moved further from the settlement areas where schools are located to search for water and pasture for their livestock, withdrawing their children from schools during this period. The community too did not believe in selling their animals to pay for education because of the value they attached to them. There was therefore

little money generated from livestock keeping. This resulted in dismal enrolment and retention rates in the area of study. Hidden costs and school fees are still a great challenge to participation of students in education. This shows implications on retention paused by low income in most of the communities especially for those that depend on livestock as their source of income. The researcher sought to find out the schools' enrolment from the principals. Table 2 shows the responses of principals in the schools sampled.

Table 2: Enrolment in day public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County

Year	A			B			C			D		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2023	157	86	243	159	111	270	121	98	219	171	127	298
2022	185	100	285	181	169	350	139	123	263	147	112	259
2021	167	113	275	193	157	350	147	131	278	167	129	296
2020	142	103	245	149	122	271	139	117	256	139	107	246
2019	114	104	228	127	133	260	132	121	253	117	76	193
2018	97	90	187	117	149	266	112	103	215	92	53	145
2017	77	59	136	101	117	218	97	81	178	77	49	126
2016	78	52	130	81	79	160	77	57	134	69	53	122
2015	76	52	128	29	77	106	62	49	111	51	39	90

Source: Principals' Interview

Figure 5 : Enrolment in day public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County

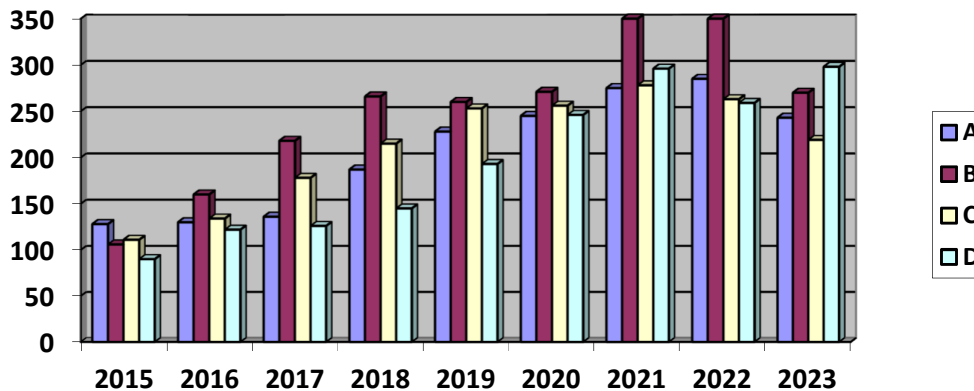


Figure 5 shows enrolment of students in public day secondary schools in Kinango

Sub County. A, B C and D represent the schools run by the sampled principals. The schools were registered as two stream schools with a capacity of 45 students per class and 360 students population. Since 2015 to date of this interview, no school had met its required capacity with

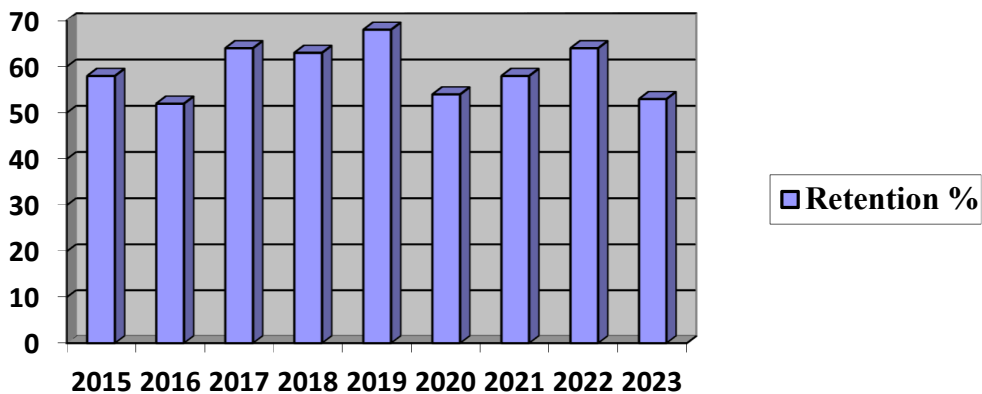
the highest having had an enrolment of 350 students in 2021 and 2022 respectively. The study found out that students` enrollment in public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub-County did not meet the schools capacity. In 2015 the sub county experienced an enrollment of 31%. The retention rate was at 58%. The highest enrolment rate experienced was in 2022 at 80% while retention for the same year was at 64%. In the year 2023, enrolment is at 71% a drop of 9% from 2022 while retention is at 53% a drop of 11% from 2022 retention rate. The principals cited poverty, early marriage, and witchcraft, family issues especially in polygamous families, negative attitude towards education, initiation and lack of role models in the society as most were uneducated as possible reasons why there were students not enrolled or retained in schools.

Table 3: Retention Rate in Public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Retention Rate %	58	52	64	63	68	54	58	64	53

Source: Principals interview

Figure 6 : Retention Rate in Public day secondary schools in Kinango Sub County



The researcher sought to find out the causes of students not retained in schools as shown in **table 3** and **figure 6**. The principals disclosed that there were instances of learners dropping out in their schools. Some of the reasons cited included early marriage, family problems, and lack of school fees, witchcraft, drugs and substance abuse. 3 principals (75%) agreed that cultural practices affected enrolment and retention while 1 principal (25%) felt that cultural practices had no effect on enrolment and retention.

4 principals (100%) revealed that their schools experienced low enrolment. The reasons for low enrolment cited included cultural practices, perception that education was not of no value,

financial constraints and inadequate role models in the community. The researcher sought to find out how long the PA's had held that position to determine their suitability in providing the information needed. All the PA's stated they had been the parents' representatives for 2 years. They also affirmed that there were cases of learners not enrolling and dropping out of school. The possible reasons revealed included lack of school fees, early marriage, witchcraft, ignorance on the value of education and livestock farming where kids were retained at home to look after the parents' livestock. The PA's revealed that cultural practices were a major factor that affected enrolment and retention of students.

Conclusion

The study concludes that cultural practices affect enrolment and retention of students in public day secondary schools. Early marriage, polygamous family setting, initiation and livestock keeping, the traditional economic activity, affect transition and contribute to dropout in public day secondary schools. The traditional economic activity doesn't generate enough money to cater for school needs especially in the polygamous family settings with many children. Initiation through sex education, gender roles education, dress code education and circumcision make students who were not properly guided and undergoing the rites thought they were ready for parental responsibilities as they engaged in activities that led to unwanted pregnancy which at times resulted in early marriage. The cultural practices make students indulge in activities that are not school related making them lose focus, lack consistency and feel discouraged when they don't keep up with school activities causing them to drop out of school.

Recommendations

The study recommends parents should be sensitized on other economic activities that can help them generate more income to cater for their children's needs. In as much as polygamous family setting is a norm in the community, parents should be advised to take responsibility for their children and supervise their children's activities at home and school. The government, NGOs, local leaders and churches should encourage the community to practice guiding and counselling before initiation and after. The study recommends that initiatives that are community based should be conducted through "barazas" organized by NGOs, in churches and chiefs to educate and create awareness to parents on the merits of education. The government should involve more people especially in the remote areas to share information on children who succumb to early marriage and bring the parents and those involved to book in cases of forced marriage.

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