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Effect of the Learning Environment on Dropout in Primary Schools in Katilu Division, Turkana County in Kenya

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Abstract:

It is the policy of the government to ensure retention of pupils in school until they complete the primary cycle. The study therefore inquired into the reasons why dropouts existed despite the government effort to increase access to basic education. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of the learning environment on dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid regions using a case of Katilu Division, Turkana South District in Kenya. The objectives of the study were to; investigate the effect of availability of learning resources, teacher factors and performance in testson dropout. Survey research design was used in this study. The target population was 12 head teachers, 237 teachers and 830 class six and seven pupils from the twelve primary schools in the division. Simple random sampling was used to sample 250 pupils and 32 teachers, these were 30% of each of the respondents. Twelve (12) head teachers were purposively sampled. Four (4) school dropouts and 4 community members were identified to participate in the study. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. Documents at the District Education Office were analyzed to determine the staff establishment and pupil enrolment in the Division. Reliability of data collection instruments was ascertained through test re-test method. Data was analyzed quantitatively using percentages and a chi-square. The study concluded that key determinants of dropout were inadequate desks, frequent teacher absence from the classroom, inadequate textbooks, punishment, poor performance in tests, and low teacher to pupil ratio and lack of participation in refresher courses by teachers. The study, therefore, recommends that proper planning for provision of conducive and adequate resources in the learning environment in primary school areas should be implemented in order to reduce wastage in form of dropout.

Keywords: Access, Dropout, Learning Environment, Learning Resources and Retention

1. Background of the study

The problem of dropout has been of great concern to many scholars and education systems world over. According to Education for All (EFA) goal by 2015, and the Dakar framework for action (2000), the United States and 163 other countries were committed to ensuring quality primary education to children world over. According to the report, 72 million children were not in school, 54% of them being girls. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 44% of the world with children out of school. It was also reported that fewer than 5% of disabled children were expected to reach the Education for All (EFA) goal of primary completion. Out of most of the girls who do enroll, millions dropout out of school each year, usually leaving without the basics of numeracy and literacy. It was further reported that most children in developing countries live in rural areas. It is therefore not surprising that 82% of out of school children live in rural areas.

According to UNESCO (2010), Sub-Saharan Africa has increased enrolment at five times the rate achieved in the 1990s with Benin and Mozambique registering rapid increases. In South and West Asia, the number of children out of school has been more than halved, with policies aimed at getting more girls into school. The report estimates that donors will have to bridge a financing gap of 16 billion US dollars a year in order to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015 in poor countries.

Vision and renewed commitment to basic education was sparked off by the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand (1990). The Dakar Conference of 2000 set as one of the Education For All (EFA) goals, to eliminate gender to enable both boys and girls to complete the whole cycle of primary schooling.

With the introduction of Free Primary Education Policy in Uganda, enrolment has tremendously increased from 2.5 million children in 1996 to more than 7.3 million in 2004. However retaining children is a current challenge, as despite a net enrolment ratio for boys and girls of 91%, only 31% of boys and 28% of girls reach primary 7 (Karlan & Linden, 2004).

In Tanzania, the government initiative through Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) was in two phases; 2002-2006, and 2007-2011. The initiative was to ensure that every child gets the best quality education. However the major threat has been increased dropout which is a test of internal efficiency in primary school education.

The government of Kenya has since independence (1963) been committed to the expansion of the education system to enable greater access and participation in order to produce a dependable human capital. The concern was to eliminate ignorance, disease and poverty. In the last four decades the government has established a comprehensive network of schools throughout the country to increase learning opportunities. Tuition fees were abolished in marginal areas following a Presidential Decree of 1971 to increase participation in education. In 2003 the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government intervened for the reintroduction of Free Primary Education. A total of Kshs.1, 020 was paid for each child in primary school in that year. Sifuna (2005) observes that, the policy has led to over-enrolment leading to overcrowding; therefore, overstraining the teaching and learning facilities. He states that the process to acquire extra levies from parents have led to serious dropout in that districts which registered an increased enrolment of up to 20% in 2003 did not register even 5% in 2007/8. An efficient education system would considerably reduce this wastage; the resources thereby saved could be used to provide instructional materials and thus relieve households of a heavy burden. It is therefore important that all stakeholders of education take up responsibility in order to improve primary schools particularly those in the ASAL in order to improve their quality with a view to eradicating dropout.

Kenya has undertaken a number of reforms in her education system since independence. The reforms have been geared towards improving the quality of the education and increasing its relevance to the needs of the country including providing manpower in industry, administration and technical sectors (Ominde, 1964). Among the basic rights according to the United Nations Human Rights Charter, is education. The government has therefore since 2003 provided Tuition Free Education in primary schools in order to realize the above goals. The President reiterated the government's commitment to support Free Primary Education (FPE) through provision of instructional materials, teachers and provision of Quality Assurance and Standards Services (Press, 2004). The government's rationale for the Free Primary Education Policy was to increase access, participation, retention and transition rates while reducing wastage in form of dropout and repetition. Dropout and repetition are strong indicators of inefficiency in the education system in developing countries (Psacharo-Paulos and Woodhall, 1985). In arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya, the persistence of dropout has caused gender disparities in primary schools. This makes the education system not able to realize equity and equality in terms of distribution of educational resources.

This study therefore recognizes the previous Studies conducted by United Nations Children's' Education Fund (UNICEF, 2008) in North Eastern Province who identified early pregnancy among girls, poverty, nomadism, preference for boy-child education and culture as causes of the dropouts. In Katilu Division, enrolment rose with the re-introduction of Tuition Free Primary Education in 2003. However the dropout rate for 2002 was 10% whereas for 2003 it was 4%, in 2004 the dropout rate equally fell to 3.9%, but in 2005 it rose to 4.8%, in 2006 it was 5.0%, in 2007 it rose to 5.2% and in 2008 to 5.5% (District Education Office, Turkana South, 2008). Katilu Division is therefore among the Divisions that experienced high dropout rates in the District. The study therefore sought to establish the effect of the learning environment on dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the effect of the learning environment on dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas, using a case of Turkana County.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

To establish the effect of the learning resources on dropout in Primary Schools in Turkana County.

To establish the effect of teacher factors on dropout in Primary schools in Turkana County.

To establish the effect of performance on dropout in Primary schools in Turkana County.

4. Significance of the Study

The study results will document the effects of the learning environment on dropout in primary schools in Kenya. This will form a basis for further studies and utilization by all stakeholders of education. The study findings will provide education planners and implementers with relevant information in addressing the problem of wastage in form of dropout. The study findings will also provide information on further research for scholars who are interested in this area of study.

5. Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study was carried out in Katilu Division of Turkana District. The division has 12 primary schools most of which have both boarding and day facilities. The target population was 12 head teachers, 237 teachers and 830 class six and seven pupils from the twelve primary schools in the division. Simple random sampling was used to sample 250 pupils and 72 teachers, these were 30% of each of the respondents. This is supported by Kerlinger(1973) who asserts that a sample size of 30% is a representative of the total population. Twelve (12) head teachers were purposively sampled. Four (4) school dropouts

and 4 community members were identified to participate in the study. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. The researcher administered questionnaires to the pupil's orally in order to clarify questions where possible. Oral interviews were administered to school dropouts, head teachers and the members of the local community. Documents at the District Education Office were analyzed to determine the staff establishment and pupil enrolment in the Division. Reliability of data collection instruments was ascertained through test re-test method in the neighboring Primary schools. After scoring, the two sets were adjusted by using Spearman Brown formula of prediction: The instruments were considered reliable at a value of 0.5. The computed reliability value of 0.99 is higher than 0.5, showing the data collection instruments were reliable. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics through percentages and inferential statistics through the chi square.

6. Research Findings and Discussions

6.1. The Effect of the Learning Resources on Dropouts

The first objective of the study was to establish the effect of the learning resources on dropout in Primary Schools in Katilu Division, Turkana South District. In this objective, the study sought to find out the effect of availability of desks and text books on dropout. Desks are furniture that is used by pupils in the classrooms for sitting and writing while learning. The study sought pupils opinion about the availability of desks in Primary schools. The results of the finding are summarized in table 1:

Response	Expected (fe)	Observed (fo)	percentage%
Strongly agree	120	105	42
Disagree	120	120	48
Neutral	5	8	3.2
Agree	2	7	2.8
Strongly agree	2	10	4
Total	250	250	100

Table 1: A summary of pupils opinions on availability of desks
Source: Survey data

The results from table 1.1 shows that, 48% of the pupils disagreed that there were enough desks in the classes, 42% strongly disagreed, 6.8% agreed whereas 3.2% were neutral, that is, they were not sure if there were enough desks in the classes or not. Pupils' responses showed that the primary schools studied had insufficient number of desks, therefore, making them either to stand or sit on the floor during class hours. Pupils were also asked to buy their own desks, therefore raising the cost of schooling. As a result, pupils from poor socio-economic backgrounds opted out of school for lack of money and means to acquire desks. The finding agrees with the finding of UNESCO (1984) in India that the primary school facilities like benches and desks affect the child's learning experiences. This was an unfriendly environment for their schooling. The findings were also in agreement with Christenson (2002) who found out that participation in the classroom is an engagement that required a conducive classroom climate, lest that would aggravate dropouts. This implies that inadequacy of desks was seen as one of the determinants of dropouts in primary schools in Katilu Division.

Text books on the other hand are important learning resources in the school. The study investigated from teachers to determine if availability of text books determined dropout, this is shown on table 2:

Responses	Expected (fe)	Observed (fo)	percentage%-----
Strongly disagree	20	13	40.6
Disagree	10	9	28.1
Neutral	2	1	3.1
Agree	0	7	21.9
Strongly agree	0	2	6.3
Total	32	32	100

Table 2: Teachers opinion on availability of text books
Source: Survey data

The results from table 1.2 show that, 40.6 % of the teachers strongly disagreed that, the ratio of the text books to pupils was very inadequate, 28.1% said the text books were inadequate, 3.1 % remained neutral, 21.9% said the ratio of text books to pupils was adequate, whereas 6.3% said the text books were very adequate. The study established that lack of text books could easily discourage pupils from going to school due to fear of being send away from school by teachers for lack of text books. It was also established that pupils lost interest in learning for lack of text books. Furthermore, teachers were of the view that the nearest text book centers were

either in Lodwar town, 150 kilometres away or in Kitale, over 300 kilometres away. According to Smith (2003), classroom practices and lack of resources have an impact on retention of pupils. The finding supports the findings of Alcazar, Rogers, Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer and Muralidharan (2006) that carried out research in Peru and found out that teacher absence caused pupils to drop out of school. Textbooks ensure that teachers are acquainted with the necessary knowledge to teach. They also ensure that pupils do personal study, practice reading and do exercises. When the proportion of text books per pupil was inadequate, it made it costly for learners to remain in school, hence, likely to drop out of school.

6.2. Effect of Teacher Factors on Dropout

The second objective of the study sought to investigate the effect of teacher factors on dropout. Teacher factors were: teacher attendance, teacher to pupil ratio and refresher courses attended by teachers.

The study therefore sought the opinions of learners on teacher attendance. The results of the finding are summarized in table 3 :

Responses	Expected (fe)	Observed (fo)	Percentage%
Strongly disagree	50	19	7.6
Disagree	170	128	51.2
Neutral	10	48	19.2
Agree	10	48	19.2
Strongly agree	10	7	2.8
Total	250	250	100

Table 3: A summary of learner's opinions on teacher attendance

The results in table 1.3, show that 51.2 % of the pupils disagreed that teachers attended classes regularly, 7.6 % strongly disagreed, 19.2 % of the pupils agreed while 19.2% were neutral. Only 2.8% agreed that teacher attendance was adequate. They cited reasons such as teachers going for salaries, meeting their family members and laxity on the part of school administrations as causes of teacher absence. The study established that teacher absence aggravated the problem of lack of concentration in studies and therefore lack of meaning in schooling. Teacher absence did not also promote individual pupil attention by teachers. The finding supports the findings of Alcazar et al, 2006, who carried out research in Peru and found out that teacher absence caused pupils to drop out of school. According to Chaudhury, (2005), teacher absence has an implication on the quality of the school. Furthermore, Ghumab and Lloyd (2007) study in Pakistan describe how a shortage of female teachers to teach girls, affected schools in rural areas therefore supporting this finding that teacher absence was a determinant of dropouts.

Adequacy of teachers in a school was seen to be necessary in order to effectively have a pupil- centered approach to learning. This study therefore sought to establish if the ratio of teachers to pupils was adequate. The teacher's opinions are summarized on table 4 :

Response	Expected (fe)	Observed (fo)	Percentage
Strongly disagreed	20	13	40.6
Disagreed	10	9	28.1
Neutral	2	1	3.1
Agreed	0	7	21.9
Strongly agreed	0	2	6.3
Total	32	32	100

Table 4: Teacher to Pupil Ratio

Source: Survey data

However, table 1.4 shows that, 40.6% of teachers strongly disagreed that the teacher to pupil ratio was adequate, 28.1% disagreed, 3.1% were neutral, 21.9% agreed and 6.3% strongly agreed. The study established that there were only 72 teachers in the 12 primary schools with a pupil population of 5650. Teacher to pupil ratio is therefore 1:78 above the expected 1:40. This implies that individual pupil attention by teachers was minimal and that teachers used the lecture method to teach the large classes. The finding agrees with the finding of UNESCO(1987), which established that most primary schools in rural India had inadequate teachers and that led to wastage in form of dropouts. These findings are in agreement with the findings of UNESCO (1987) India which established that many primary schools had inadequate teacher: pupil ratio. This scenario reflected a situation where the teacher was the centre of knowledge as opposed to the learner-centred approach to learning. UNICEF (2005) report states that Kenya still requires 3100 primary school teachers to merge the pupil enrolment. According to curriculum implementers, every teacher is entitled to teach at least 40-45 pupils per session in order to allow for classroom interaction and a pupil- centred approach to learning. The study therefore confirms the findings of UNESCO (1987) that pupils may drop out of school due to lack of individualized teacher attention due to a shortage of teachers.

Refresher courses are trainings or workshops that keep teachers on track or updated or informed on emerging issues in education, subject areas and general life. The study sought teachers' responses about the refresher courses they had attended. Table 5 gives the summary of the findings on refresher courses attended by teachers.

Courses	Expected (fe)	Observed (fo)	Percentages
None	0	14	43.8
HIV/AIDS training	5	2	6.3
Better health course	2	1	3.1
Child rights	2	1	3.1
Guidance and counseling	5	7	21.9
Dealing with visual impairment	7	3	9.4
Intelligence quotient	0	1	3.1
Primary school basic hygiene	5	1	3.1
Financial management	6	2	6.3
Total	32	32	100

Table 5: Refresher Courses attended by teachers

Source: Survey data

From table 1.5, 43.8% of teachers had never attended refresher courses whereas 56.2% had attended at least a course. The study further established that 21.9% of the teachers had attended guidance and counseling courses. The results also showed that 6.3% had attended HIV/AIDS training, 3.1% better health courses, 3.1% child rights, 9.4% dealing with visual impairment, 3.1% Intelligence Quotient Education 3.1% Primary School Basic Hygiene whereas 6.3% had attended a Financial Management course. The study established that the teachers who had attended at least one or more of the above courses were equipped with knowledge and skills and were also placed in administrative positions such as class teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, heads of subjects and in charge of extra-curricular activities. Brock and Cammish (1997) study established that the main quality issues which affected school attendance were related to inadequacies in teacher quality (subject knowledge, pedagogy and attitudes to learners). The finding indicates that, those teachers who had not attended the courses were not adequate in management, therefore, likely to cause wastage of pupils in form of dropout.

6.3. Effect of Performance in Tests on Dropout

The third objective sought to find out the effect of pupil performance in tests on dropout. Tests provide an evaluation of pupils in order to determine whether they have properly understood what they have been taught. It was therefore important for the study to establish pupil performance in tests using performance records prepared by teachers. Table 6, gives a summary of the findings:

Item	Expected (fe)	Observed (fo)	Percentage
Very poor	5	1	0.4
Poor	40	41	16.4
Fair	140	135	54
Good	55	61	24.4
Very good	10	12	4.8
Total	250	250	100

Table 6: Performance in tests

Source: Survey data

The results from table 6, show that 54% of the pupils performed fairly in tests, 24.4% were good, 16.4% performed poorly, 4.8% were very good while only 0.4% of the pupils were very poor. This implies that the performance of the pupils in tests was fair. According to Coclough (2000), poor school quality is associated with poor academic results, with higher levels of repetition and dropout. In the target schools, the tests offered include; summative tests, continuous assessment tests, end of term exams, end of year exams and mid-term exams. The study as such established that a small percentage of those who performed poorly could easily drop out of school due to discouragement making this factor one of the determinants of dropouts in the primary schools in the area of study.

6.4. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis stated that there was no statistical significant relationship between the learning environment and drop-outs in Primary Schools in Katilu Division, Turkana South District. A Chi-square was used to test the null hypothesis. The following variables about the learning environment were tested: Availability of desks, teacher attendance, proportion of text books, teacher: pupil ratio, administration of punishment to pupils, performance in tests, and courses attended by teachers. The results of the analysis are presented in table 7.

Desks			Teachers' attendance			Proportion of text books		
Value	df	Sig	Value	Df	Sig	Value	df	sig
24.25	7	.001	16.61	3	.001	15.5	4	.001
Performance in tests			Teacher: pupil ratio			Courses attended by teachers		
Value	df	Sig	Value	Df	Sig	Value	df	sig
22.54	6	.001	15.5	3	.001	12.69	2	0.01

Table 7: Chi-Square on the relationship between learning environment and dropout

The analyzed results of the learning environment above are as follows:

The computed chi-square value for desks was 24.25. The results computed at degree of freedom 7 gave a significant value of .001 which is below the p value =0.05. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between the number of desks and dropout in arid and semi-arid areas was rejected and therefore the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between the number of desks and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas accepted.

The next variable was teacher attendance of class. The chi-square value was 16.61. The results interpreted at degree of freedom 3 gave a significant value of .001. This was below the value of p= 0.05. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between teacher attendance and dropout in arid and semi-arid areas was rejected and therefore the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between teacher attendance and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas accepted.

The third variable was the proportion of text books. The chi-square result was 15.5. Interpreted at the degree of freedom 3, the significant value was .001. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between the proportion of text books and dropout in arid and semi-arid areas was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between the proportion of textbooks and dropouts in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas accepted.

The fourth variable was performance in tests. The chi-square was 22.54. The result was interpreted at the degree of freedom 6. It gave a significant value of .001 therefore rejecting the null hypothesis which stated that, there is no significant relationship between performance in tests and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi arid areas and accepting the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between performance in tests and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas.

The fifth variable was teacher to pupil ratio. The computed chi-square value was 15.5. Interpreted at degree of freedom 3, the significant value was .001, therefore below the value p= 0.05. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between a low teacher to pupil ratio and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas was rejected and therefore the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between teacher to pupil ratio and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas accepted.

The last variable was the courses attended by teachers. The chi-square value was 12.69. It was interpreted at a degree f freedom 2 and gave a significant value of 0.001. The computed value is less than p=0.05. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between courses attended by teachers and dropout was rejected and therefore the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a relationship between courses attended by teacher and dropout in primary schools in arid and semi-arid areas. **Conclusions**

From the study it can be concluded that the school environment played a major role in retaining pupils in the school and therefore increasing retention and promotional rates. The quality of the school encompasses the teacher qualifications, their administrative skills, the school buildings, teacher attendance, school facilities including classrooms, textbooks and other learning materials. It is important that the quality of the school was maintained because it also affected the performance of pupils in tests. A qualitative school is therefore, more of a home for the pupils and as such they would hardly drop out from such an environment.

6.5. Recommendations

1. The researcher recommends that situation analysis was done again in arid and semi-arid areas in order to develop a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of children in such areas, given their nomadic life styles. Teacher training programmes and the development of school infrastructure should be in tandem with the needs of such a curriculum. The developed curriculum would therefore attract more learners to school hence it would address their needs.
2. The study, therefore, recommends that proper planning for provision of conducive and adequate resources in the learning environment in primary school areas should be implemented in order to reduce wastage in form of dropout. The non-governmental organizations can also supplement the efforts of the government in this aspect.

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