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An Unfinished Agenda: Why is the Boy Child Endangered?

John Koskey Chang'ach

Moi University, School of Education, Educational Foundations Department

Email: jkchangach@yahoo.com

Abstract

Persistent campaign for awareness of girl's retention in school has started bearing fruits, but in retrospect the society has ignored the plight of boy-child. The issue of the Boy-Child has not been adequately addressed (World Bank, 2005). Extensive analysis of data indicates that boy-child is at a higher risk of dropping out of school than girls. The trend of more boys dropping out of school started in a cohort comprising of 620,000 boys and 586,000 girls that joined standard one in 2005. By 2010, survival rate in the group had dropped to 558,000 boys and 562,000 girls. Never before had enrolment of girls in any primary school grade nationally had exceeded that of boys (UNESCO, 2003). This impedes the achievement of Universal Primary Education which is Millennium Development Goal, number two that by 2015 ensure that all boys and girls alike complete primary schooling. This paper seeks to examine the problems that hinder the boy child from achieving their dream as revealed in the transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Keiyo South district, Elgeyo-Marakwet County. It identifies the challenges to the achievement of education for all and proposes positive actions for the mitigation of the situation.

Key words: Boy-child, Challenges, Unfinished Agenda, Transition

Introduction

The boy child of the 21st Century is faced with tremendous challenges which unless properly guarded, the society is losing him. All children are future leaders of tomorrow and guardians of the future, and the first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals who are physically, psychologically, society and mentally well developed. These can be achieved through guidance and the education of the boy-Child who is the father of tomorrow. The negligence of issues affecting the boy-child is apparent and evident in most discourse and academic literature.

Access to education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access and securely acquired knowledge and skills is both a part of the definition of poverty and a means for diminution. Quality education is influenced by several factors which include access to education, retention rates, dropout rates and adequacy of instructional resources (World Bank, 2005). The lack of access to secondary education is increasingly seen to constrain countries' abilities to pursue effective growth and development strategies which is leading governments

and the funding community to place increased emphasis on the expansion of secondary education (World Bank, 2005).

International reports such as Education For All global monitoring report (UNESCO, 2003), indicates that at the national level, Kenya has virtually attained gender parity in enrolment at both primary and secondary education levels. However, close scrutiny reveals that serious gender disparities in enrolment exist between regions as regards access, retention, completion, performance and transition. Despite the introduction of Free Primary Education and other interventions, transition rates are still very low (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Republic of Kenya (2005), report indicates transition rates for both boys and girls from primary to secondary education has been identified by international community as a key measure towards education access for all.

Additionally, Sessional Paper no. 1 of 2005 notes that there are low rates in secondary sub-sector as a result of poor transition from primary to secondary. Education Production Function attempts to relate input and output in education sector. Education is viewed as an investment which utilizes resources from individuals and society and is expected to yield output.

In Keiyo South district, the enrolment and retention in both primary and secondary for both boys and girls are still very low as indicated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 KCPE Registered Candidates for the Years 2000-2009

S/NO	YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
1	2000	1819	1933	3752
2	2001	2216	2216	4332
3	2002	2220	2274	4494
4	2003	2273	2427	4700
5	2004	2424	2523	4947
6	2005	2521	2749	5270
7	2006	2486	2646	5132
8	2007	2807	2868	5675
9	2008	2663	2943	5506
10	2009	2640	2790	5431

Source: DEO'S Office, Keiyo South (2011)

It can be noted that over a period of time, the number of boys has been lower compared to that of girls which in turn influences the transition rates.

Table1.2 KCPE Registered Candidates

YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
2009	1530	1611	3141
2010	1549	1612	3161

Source: DEO'S Office, Keiyo South (2011)

The figures indicate that the number of boys who registered for the KCPE examination was smaller compared to girls for the two years.

Table 1.3 KCSE Registered Candidates

YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
2009	550	784	1334
2010	562	867	1631

Source: DEO'S Office, Keiyo South (2011)

The figures indicate clearly that the number of boys who registered for KCSE examinations was smaller to girls for the two years.

It is important to note that in a country such as Kenya where the girl child is given prevalence, leaves the boy child vulnerable in the foreseeable future. Equally of concern as regards to transition rates from primary to secondary education, so much attention and emphasis has been given to the girl child and thus ignoring the issues of the boy child. It is in response to the unfolding discrepancies that this paper focuses on the boy child and in specific factors affecting transition rates from primary to secondary school.

Who is a Boy-Child?

It is paramount to define what is meant by boy child so that we start on common ground. Various policies, Acts and statutes define children differently. African Charter on the Rights of the Child defines a child as everyone below the age of 18. In this paper, boy-child is defined as a male offspring below the age of eighteen years.

Gender equity refers to the practice of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, access and control of resources, responsibilities, power, opportunities and services. It is specifically the elimination of all forms of discriminations based on gender (Republic of Kenya, 2007).

What is the Problem?

In Africa, for example, children are often needed to work on the family land and the loss of their labour is a cost to their parents, even if paid employment in the 'modern sector' is not available. This propels parents not to educate their children especially the boy-child so that

they work for the family. Boy-child often engages in manual jobs, does not attend schooling and exploited as result of child labour. Empirical studies contend that more emphasis should be placed on girl-child education in many countries (EFA, 2000). This had led to back grounding of boy-child thus detrimental. According to the EFA (2000) continuous lobbying and advocacy, and training to mainstream gender equity in the entire education system will have to be intensified. Development of realistic gender sensitive benchmarks and indicators is a critical variable in achieving EFA goals. Targeting of the girl-child, and in some instances the boy-child, is necessary if not essential for EFA. This has led the boy child to be relegated at the periphery and thus endangered. Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a worldwide problem. Although most studies on the long-term consequences of CSA have focused on women, sexual abuse of both boys and girls is common (Dube, 2005).

The Role of Boy-Child in Kalenjin Society

Among some Kalenjin Communities, the boys' education is sacrificed for the sake of livestock herding and labour. Among the Kalenjin boys are taught to be masculine. This takes place in the various institutions of society such as the family, school and church. Implicit in such education are beliefs that the boy child is stronger, more intelligent and more powerful than girl-child, and therefore does not need protection as girl child.

He is not expected to express his emotions or any weaknesses. For example, he is taught not to cry but always behave in a brave manner since boy child is socialized not to display their weakness; they tend to suffer in silence. These dynamics have not only contributed to the neglect of issues that affect the boy child among the Kalenjin. Society teaches males that they must be in control all the times. Therefore males tend to dominate in many aspect of life. The confounding power, control and domination imply that males do not have problems. Quite often males look well and confident on the outside, but are not so on inside thus cognitive discordance (Republic of Kenya, 2007).

Gender in Kenyan Context

Since attaining political independence, the Kenya government has been following policies geared toward social equality and non-discrimination. In the educational sector, considerable efforts have been made to ensure that regional, special needs and gender disparities are addressed. The girl-child has been fore grounded at the expense of boy-child thus reversing the gains so made.

According to Robinson (2009) it is not only in the work place where women are showing more aggressiveness and more promise. In our kids' school parents, teacher and children's meetings, it's always the girls who make comments, ask questions or offer prayers at the end of the sessions. The Headmaster has been trying to encourage the boys to come up and also make comments but at that point, the boys' heads are normally either bowed or they are pretending to be looking elsewhere. What is even interesting is that of the top 20 positions in class, 60% are often taken up by girls. This situation is more pronounced in central province where even at the national exam level, girls are now scoring higher than boys. The only provinces where boys

are still doing better than girls are Nyanza, North Eastern and Coast. Curiously those are also the last three provinces in terms of wealth distribution.

It is instructive to note that the Kenyan government is also signatory to major International Conventions and agreement that addresses human rights and gender equality issues. These efforts are aimed at the realization of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA). All this efforts are done in order to increase gender parity and equity while enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the system, and ultimately the life of individual citizen (IPAR, 1998).

According to World Declaration on Education for All (1990) Jomtien target are: the expansion of early childhood care and development; universal access to and completion of primary education by the year 2000; a reduction of adult illiteracy rates to one half of the 1990s levels by 2000, with an emphasis on female literacy; improved learning achievement; based on the attainment of defined levels of performance; expansion of basic education and training for adults and youths; improved dissemination of knowledge, skills, and values required for sustainable development.

However, the most notable positive progress has been in the following areas:

- a) Programmes initiated and implemented for the reduction of adult illiteracy rate;
- b) Various policies and programs have been put in place to develop non-formal education and other alternative and complementary approaches;
- c) Teacher education programmes have worked well. For example, out of 192,306 of the total number of primary school teachers only 3.4% are untrained;
- d) Initiatives to build partnership in the provision of education among key partners, the communities, individual investors, religious organizations, civil society and external donors have given positive results;
- e) Initiatives to address the internal efficiency in education, for example health and nutrition programmes, the Girl-Child projects, have increased retention of children in school, and has also reduced the gender gap between boys and girls;

Together with affirmative action, of significance is “reduced gender gap”; empirical research revealed in Kenyan context is that in some regions boys have been surpassed in enrolment and performance which is wake-up call and forms a basis of this paper.

This paper provides a framework for planning and formulating a gender responsive education at all levels. It is extrapolated that its implementation will bring to fruition the overall goal of the educational and employment sector that is, to provide equitable education for all Kenyans regardless of gender. Education has a critical role to play in addressing issues of gender equality and equity in Kenya. The overall goal of the government is to promote equal access to education for both boys and girls irrespective of their social-economic status (IPAR, 1998).

Findings of the Study

Socio-Cultural Factors

The teachers were asked to state the socio-cultural factors that influence boys’ transition rate from primary to secondary. The study revealed that 75.8% of teachers agreed that negative

parental attitude affects boy's transition. Further, it was revealed that lack of positive role model affects transition as agreed by 79.3% of respondents. Majority of the teachers 82.4% accepted that customs and beliefs such as traditional circumcision affect the transition of boys to secondary school. Data from the interviews indicated that early marriage, single parenting, drug and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, Unemployment, elders are no longer in control, child labour, parents negligence-don't care attitude, social activities such as video, pool, discos, athletics/games/sports and that church has "captured the girl-child."

Economic Factors

Information on economic factors affecting transition was also sought from the teachers. It is instructive that 89.7% agreed that poverty was a major challenge. The finding agrees with other studies that observed that the existence of uneven distribution of educational opportunities between the poor and non-poor regions, both in urban and rural areas. These studies have shown that the poor tend to have more limited access to educational opportunities than the non-poor (Myers, 1997; Margetts, 2000; Fabian, 2002). It was also clearly noted that the inheritance of properties from parents made the students feel contented and thus no serious need to transit to secondary school. Other issues included Politicians "hand-outs" and belief that girl "payback" unlike boys.

School related Factors

The teachers were also required to give school related factors that affect transition. The teachers felt that insensitive school environment affects boy's transition. It was revealed that the long distance from home to school was a problem. In most instances parents would prefer girls to go to boarding school while the boy goes to the day school. Other factors included lack of mentors; class repetition, victimization, inadequate facilities, poor academic performance and majority of teachers in primary schools are female. This concurs with Brostrom (2000) who suggested that negative experience of transition is often due to problems associated with the school rather than the child. The study further revealed that majority of the teachers agreed that lack of effective guidance and counseling affects boys' transition rates.

Conclusion

Despite the education challenges discussed above, the right to protection in education is expressed in terms of legal and legislative framework providing for free expression, access and development of individuals within education system. Only education will give boys knowledge that would expose the fallacies behind socio-cultural practices that make them feel "superior." They are to be made aware of the need to take action to alter their situation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- a) Advocate for boys education among communities/parents and other stakeholders. Sensitize them against negative social cultural practices and encourage the re-entry of boys just like girls counterpart who drop out of schools
- b) Guidance and Counseling in schools be enhanced
- c) Parents should be sensitized on importance of sending children to secondary school level so that they can actively participate fully in the society.
- d) There should be a proper linkage and interaction between primary and secondary to enhance transition.
- e) Establish centres of excellence 'Starehe Boys Centre Model' in each County for boys
- f) Undertake continuous review of curriculum/policy documents to ensure gender sensitivity
- g) Ensure gender balance in School Management Committees (SMC), Board of Governors (BOG) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTA).
- h) Implement affirmative action on bursaries and support infrastructure improvement, particularly for boys' schools.
- i) Teachers/society and stakeholders at large should shield boy child from harmful practices such as drug abuse, alcohol and other deviant behaviors'.
- j) A series of gender sensitization and awareness campaign workshops and seminars and affirmative action are needed to improve boy child access and participation in education.
- k) There is need to identify and recognize successful professional men within the District who can act as role models or mentors to the boys.
- l) There is need to reinforce legal support for affirmative action program to eliminate discriminatory practices and also ensure that positive steps are taken to increase the number of boys enrolment and retention in both primary and secondary school.

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