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## **DETERMINANTS FOR RETENTION RATES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NORTH HERR SUB COUNTY, MARSABIT COUNTY, KENYA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study was to assess determinants for learner's retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County, Marsabit County, Kenya. It adopted Vincent Tinto's model of learner's departure in investigating the phenomena.

**Problem statement:** The Kenya government has continued to improve the provision of education for all (EFA) as evidenced by the introduction of free primary education which was started by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in 2003. Despite effort by the government across the country, learners in North Horr Sub County which has nomadic and pastoralist communities have experienced challenges in acquiring the basic education because of social-cultural factors such as cultural rites, early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) among others.

**Research methodology:** The study employed a descriptive survey research design and obtained data from 5 head teachers, 50 members of teaching staff and one Area Education Officer (AEO), using questionnaires and interview guides. SPSS was used to compute mean, percentages and standard deviation while thematic analysis was used on qualitative data.

**Findings:** The study established that there was high rate of gender imbalance in primary schools in North Horr Sub County, Marsabit County. This was attributed to culture-related factors such as pastoral lifestyle, cultural values, community's negative attitude towards education, engagement in domestic work, social-economic characteristics, and environmental factors.

**Conclusion:** The study noted that retention rates in primary schools in North Horr Sub County of Marsabit County were low especially for girls across all the years which was attributed to social-cultural and social-economic factors.

**Recommendation:** The study recommended that communities and the Ministry of Education should construct more boarding schools, establish mobile schools; sensitize parents on the need for education as an alternative to pastoralism life, and provide guidance and counseling to pupils.

**Keywords:** *Enrolment, retention, education, dropout, socio-cultural factors*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Despite the undisputable role of education as a prerequisite for development, as well as the measures on education for all, the global monitoring report (2010) pointed out that 72 million children were not enrolled in schools. Enrolment and low retention of children in schools has remained a global challenge particularly for marginalized groups. Fowler and Luna (2012) refer to student retention as students' continued study until successful completion. Namukwaya and Kibirige (2014) show that, most of the factors that influenced student retention were culture-related. They included pastoral lifestyle, strong cultural values, negative attitude towards education and engagement in domestic work. In Somalia, Jama (2015) indicated that the most significant factor that affects the retention rates of female students is early marriage and domestic labor.

In Kenya, learners retention in primary schools has also been a challenge for instance, Makorani and Muli (2017) observed that the aspects of family background, such as, parent's level of education, gender of children in family, economic background of the family and aspiration of the family affect retention rate of pupils in public primary schools in Hindi Division, Lamu west sub-county. Ndemba (2014) indicated that cultural factors such as early marriages, cattle rustling among others had contributed to the poor retention of pupils in schools in Turkana Central district, Kenya. The perception that girls are not meant to receive education has also contributed to the low enrolment in the region. All these literature calls upon the government to develop policies to govern enrolment and retention ratios in public primary schools is not compromised by socio-cultural factors in North Horr Sub County of Marsabit County. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate determinants for learner's retention in public primary schools in North Horr Sub County, Marsabit County, Kenya and stimulate various policy options in order to identify strategies that can improve retention of learners in public primary schools.

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Kenya government has continued to improve the provision of education for all (EFA) as evidenced by the introduction of free primary education which was started by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in 2003. It aimed at relieving parents of the financial burden of educating their children with a goal to increasing the number of pupils completing primary school education. Despite effort by the government across the country, learners in North Horr Sub County which has nomadic and pastoralist communities have experienced challenges in acquiring the basic education because of social-cultural factors such as cultural rites, early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) among others.

The study by Galgallo (2014) established that the extent to which pupils' involvement in household economic activities usually affects their retention levels in public primary schools. However, the study used cross-sectional research design which does not help determine cause and effect on variables. Jama (2015) did a study in Qardho District, Karkar Region, Somalia and revealed that the most significant factor in the district that affects the retention rates of female students was early marriages followed by domestic labor/chores. In addition, the study used cluster random sampling technique which is prone to biasness and higher sampling error. Despite these studies pointing out a situation similar to that of North Horr Sub County, no scientific study that has been carried out to intervene on the situation. This study aims to provide empirical evidence on determinants for learner's retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County, Marsabit County, Kenya.

## **1.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this study was to examine determinants for learner's retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County, Marsabit County, Kenya.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Retaining pupils within the school systems until they complete a particular level has been a great concern in many regions of the world. Many studies have been carried out seeking to identify the factors affecting retention of learners in learning institutions. For instance, Rasto (2015) focused on factors influencing pupils' enrolment in public primary schools in Scotland. The study found out that most of the schools do not have enough charts and maps for use thus not often do teachers go to class with them. As for adequacy of latrines, it was found out that pupils queue at the latrine for a long time which means that most of the schools in primary schools in Scotland did not have enough latrines. The study recommended that an evaluation study be done to determine retention of pupils in public primary schools in Scotland.

A study carried out by Jama (2015) evaluated the relationship between socio-cultural factors and girls' retention rate in secondary schools in Qardho District, Karkar Region, Somalia. The study found that the retention rates of female students in the district are still very low. The most significant factor in the district that affects the retention rates of female students is early marriages followed by domestic labor/chores. The study recommended intervention measures to improve the retention of female students in secondary schools in Qardho District be initiated by the government.

Namukwaya and Kibirige (2014) study examined factors affecting primary school enrolment and retention of pupils in Kotido District, Uganda. The study elicited an understanding of the multifaceted nature of the factors affecting enrolment and retention of pupils in schools in Kotido district, Uganda. Results show that majority of factors are culture related: pastoral lifestyle, strong cultural values, negative attitude towards education and engagement in domestic work. Other factors included social economic characteristics and environmental factors among others. The study recommended that future strategies to improve enrolment and retention in schools should be broad-based to address Karimojong people's culture as well as socio-economic characteristics.

A study carried out by Njue (2015) focused on factors that influence retention of primary school pupils in Maparasha, Kajiado County in Kenya. The key finding of this study were that, cultural practices, parent's level of education, income level of the family and how pupils are treated in school affected retention of primary school pupils in Maparasha. Therefore, it is important to engage the community in income diversification projects so as to increase household income levels and hence encourage parents and guardians to retain their children in school.

Looking keenly into the above studies, there seems to be factors closely related and linked in affecting pupil's retention in schools. The factors include: available environmental factors such as facilities in a school; socio-cultural factors such as early marriages, domestic chores, pastoralism, and negative attitudes towards education. However, the studies were carried in other regions like Kajiado and Lamu and not in North Horr Sub County.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design because it enables the findings to be generalized to a larger population. The respondents were 56 comprising of 5 head teachers, 1 Area Education Officer and 50 teaching staff. For collection of data, questionnaires and interviews were

used. Validity and reliability of research instruments was effectively done before collecting the required data. Data obtained from the questionnaires was first edited and cleaned before being used. Qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed thematically in line with study objectives and presented in narrative form. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and presented in tables and charts.

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Retention of Learners in schools

The respondents were asked to rate the retention rate in North Horr Sub County for the last five years. Their findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Retention Rate**

Rates	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	8	15.4
High	11	17.3
Low	24	46.2
Moderate	9	21.2
Total	52	100

The results in Table 1 shows that majority 24(46.2%) of the respondents indicated that the retention rate in primary schools in North Horr Sub County was low, followed by 9(21.2%) of those who indicated that it was moderate, 11(17.3%) agreed that it was high and 8(15.4%) very high. From the interviews, the response from the A.E.O shows that Female Genital Mutilation, Herding and early marriages are the major factors affecting retention in schools. Considering that Marsabit County is inhabited by pastoralist community people move with their children at the expense of going to school. These findings are in line with the findings of Kemunto (2015) study on the influence of socio-cultural and school factors, on retention and academic performance of students in mixed primary schools in Rachuonyo South Sub-County in Kenya. This study established that most of the girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy and others were married early, due to wage labour as compared to boys, more male students were influenced by their peers while majority also learnt to take drugs from their family members

##### 4.2 Influence of Retention Rate and Drop out across Gender

Respondents were further given a list of statements to indicate their level of agreement regarding influence of rates of retention and drop out across gender in primary schools in North Horr Sub County. The findings are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Influence of Retention Rate and Drop out across Gender**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>
Girls are engaged in household work to enable adults to work outside the home	4.06	1.145
Children are forced to look after their animals instead of enrolling in schools	4.00	0.863
Girls prefer marriages to completing schools	4.29	0.605
Parental perception on education influence rate of retention and drop out across gender	4.04	0.839
Parental level of education influence rate of retention and drop out across gender	4.48	0.610

The results in Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents strongly agreed with the statements that, parental level of education influenced rate of retention and drop out across gender and that girls prefer marriages to completing schools as shown by mean score of 4.48 and 4.29 respectively, which varied significantly as shown by respective standard deviation of 0.610 and 0.605. These findings concur with the findings of Njue (2015) which focused on factors that influence retention of primary school pupils in Maparasha, Kajiado County in Kenya which established that parent’s level of education was one of the factors that affected retention of primary school pupils in Maparasha.

Respondents agreed on the statements that girls are engaged in household chores to enable adults to work outside home, parental perception on education influences rate of retention and drop out across gender, and that, children are forced to look after their animals instead of enrolling in schools. This is shown by mean score of 4.06, 4.04 and 4.00 respectively with respective significance variance of 1.145, 0.839 and 0.863. From the interviews, on the effects of nomadic lifestyle on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County; the respondent reported that their lifestyles both as individuals and community makes them highly vulnerable in terms of poverty and insecurity which adversely affects the education of the children leading to high dropout. These findings are consistent with the findings of a study by Ndemba (2014) which focused on factors influencing retention of pupils in public primary schools in drought prone areas in Turkana central district, Kenya. The study had reported that the perception that girls are not meant to receive education, contributed to their low enrolment in the region.

### **4.3 Initiation as a Cultural Rite and Student Retention**

The study sought to determine the extent to which initiation as a cultural rite of passage impacted on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County. The findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Initiation as a Cultural Rite and Student Retention**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation(SD)</b>
Content of knowledge imparted to the children during that time of initiation affects student retention	4.1	0.431
Initiation ceremonies are carried out during school time which affects student retention	3.9	0.823
Girls who attend the initiation ceremonies encounter mistreatments, abuse and sometimes they miss their precious school time.	3.5	0.785
After the initiation ceremonies, girls change their behavior and thus some of them feel they cannot cope with formal education.	3.8	0.705
Girls drop out of school to pursue other womanly responsibilities of getting married and having families after initiation	4.4	0.601

The results in Table 3 indicates that majority of the respondents strongly agreed on the statements that girls drop out of school to pursue other feminine responsibilities such as getting married and having families after initiation. In addition, the content of knowledge imparted to the children during that time of initiation affects student retention as indicated by mean score of 4.4 and 4.1 respectively, with significance variance of 0.601 and 0.431 respectively. From interview respondent agreed that initiation ceremonies were carried out during school time which affected student retention and that after the initiation ceremonies, girls changed their behavior and thus some of them felt they could not cope with formal education. This is in line with the findings of a study by Malawoni (2013) which revealed that, initiation ceremonies have affected the primary school students’ academic performance negatively due to clash with the school calendar.

Respondents agreed that initiation ceremonies were carried out during school time which affected student retention. In addition, it was revealed that girls, who attended the initiation ceremonies, encounter mistreatments; abuse and sometimes they miss their precious school time as indicated by mean score of 3.9, 3.8 and 3.5 respectively and significance variance of 0.823, 0.705 and 0.785 respectively. These findings concur with the findings of a study carried out by Rehema et al. (2014) which established that the girls who attend the initiation ceremonies encounter mistreatments, abuse and sometimes, they miss their precious school time.

**4.4 Marriage as a Cultural Rite and Student Retention**

The objective of this question was to determine the extent to which marriage as a cultural rite of passage impacted on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County. The respondents were given a list of statements to indicate their level of agreement regarding how cultural rites of passage impact on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County. The findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Marriage as a Cultural Rite and Student Retention**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>
Early marriages impact learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County	4.46	0.641
Circumcision impact learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County	4.57	0.537
Female genital mutilation impact learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County	3.73	1.548
Rite of eldership impact learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County	3.29	1.499
Rite of adulthood impact learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County	4.58	0.696

The results in Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents strongly agreed on the statements that rite of adulthood, circumcision and early marriages impacted on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County as shown by mean score of 4.58, 4.57 and 4.46 respectively with respective standard deviation of 0.696, 0.537 and 0.641. These findings agree with Macharia (2018) on how home environmental conditions positively or negatively influences a child's participation and retention in school, and revealed that cultural factors such as early marriages, pregnancy, working at home, and negative attitude towards the education, cultural beliefs and practices were responsible for the low participation in school.

Respondents agreed on the statement that female genital mutilation impacted on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County as shown by a mean of 3.73 which varied significantly as shown by standard deviation of 1.548. This agreed with Ondiek (2010) study which found that girls dropped out of school to get married due to FGM, peer pressure and a feeling of maturity that is achieved after the rite.

Respondents indicated a moderate extent that rite of eldership also impacted on learner retention in primary schools in North Horr Sub County as shown by a mean of 3.29 with a standard deviation of 1.499. This contradicts with the findings of Nawose (2016) which reported 50% of learners dropped out due to the practice of cultural rites such as rite of eldership in Turkana, Kenya.

The Area Education Officer explained that the community values Female Genital Mutilation which gives girls false believe that they are adults and they need not to be in school. He further explained how after the ceremonies, girls change their behavior and thus some of them are unable to cope with formal education. As a result of the change of behavior, girls reported dropping out of school to pursue other feminine responsibilities of getting married and having families. According to head teachers, the FGM as initiation rite promotes early marriage which subsequently affects schooling. Boys also go through initiation rites that promote manhood and the responsibilities that come with it. Once the boys are exposed to this situation, they feel that schooling process is waste of time hence they drop out and consider starting family life through marriage as explained by the Area Education Officer. These responses are supported by Malawoni (2013) who revealed that, initiation ceremonies had affected the primary school students' academic performance negatively due to clash with the school calendar, dropout, early marriage and pregnancies for girls in Malawi.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

This study concluded that most of the learners dropped out of school due to initiation ceremonies, early marriages and poor parental perception towards education which ultimately affected the retention rate of learners in school. It is also very clear that parental perception on education influence rate of retention of pupils in primary schools. As seen from the research, children are forced to look after parent's animals instead of enrolling in schools, and that girls are not meant to receive education. Initiation ceremonies have affected the primary school pupils' academic performance negatively due to clash with the school calendar. From the study, it stood out clearly that initiation ceremonies are carried out during school time which affects pupil's retention. This is because, after the initiation ceremonies most of them change their behavior and feel they cannot cope with formal education. Home environment conditions such as household tasks at home, and negative attitude towards education from parents and other siblings may negatively influence a child's participation and retention in school. The study also concluded that cultural factors such as early marriages, pregnancy, cultural rites such as rite of eldership, adulthood, boys' circumcision and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) practices are responsible for the low participation in school hence low retention.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommended there is a great need for the government to invest in increasing access to education for boys and girls in primary schools in North Horr Sub County. Given the documented role of education as a catalyst for economic and social development, a sensitization on the factors that influence educational attainment would enable policy makers to adopt strategies to improve the allocation of resources, with the objectives of increasing school completion and reducing the inequality in attainment. This calls for need to support the intervention measures to improve the retention of both female and male learners in primary schools in North Horr Sub County.



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