

Socio-Cultural Factors that Influence Access to Secondary School Education in Tharaka South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Access to secondary school education in Tharaka South Sub-county is low. This poor accessibility to secondary school education cannot be associated with inadequate facilities because the government, NGOs and school sponsors have provided enough resources. The purpose of the study was to establish socio-cultural factors that influence students' access to secondary school education in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi county of Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of study was 17 secondary school principals, 17 class teachers, 1654 students and 96 primary school head teachers. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique which included four secondary school principals, four class teachers, 165 students and 9 primary school head teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Data entry and analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows. Findings were presented in form of percentages and frequencies and presented in form of figures and tables. The findings indicated that 80% of the parents of students in secondary schools have attained primary school education therefore affecting negatively their attitudes towards accessibility of students to secondary school education. The study revealed

that most of the families have between five to eight children and their parents are peasant farmers; therefore prefer boys in accessing secondary school education. Early marriages, child labor and Female Genital Mutilation are among cultural practices that hinder pupil's progress to secondary school education. The study recommends that the Government should create awareness on the importance of family planning, initiate more programs to discourage early marriages, Female Genital Mutilation and child labor among girls and build more schools with boarding facilities.

Key words: Access, secondary school education, social cultural factors, family size, formal education, social class

Introduction

Education forms the basis upon which economic, social and political development of any nation is founded. Investment in education can help to foster economic growth, enhance productivity, contribute to national and social development, and reduce social inequality (World Bank, 1998). UNESCO (2005) argues that the level of a country's education is one of the key indicators of its level of development. Globally, education is recognized as a basic human right. Globally, education is recognized as a basic human right. The Human Rights Charter treats education as one of the human rights.

According to KER (2004) the provision of education and training to all Kenyans is fundamental to Governments overall development strategy. Kenya's human resource is central to the country attaining its goal of industrial development and technological advancement. Universal access to basic education and training ensures equity for all children to enroll in schools including the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Education is also key in the protection of democratic institutions and human rights through well informed citizens. The Government has thus introduced major reforms and innovations in all sectors including education with a view to addressing these broad National goals.

Secondary school education, previously neglected is now the fastest growing segment in education sector. However participation rates for secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa are lower than any other region of the world with access is biased in favor of the wealthier populations (Sela, 2001). Access to secondary education in Kenya is still very low. The transition rate from primary to secondary school grew slightly from 41.7% in 2002 to about 52% in 2005 (ROK, 2006). The low

access to secondary school education, together with the high unemployment rate, poses a great challenge to the Government of Kenya. Increased access to secondary education can have implications on welfare. Individuals with secondary school education are less likely to be affected by poverty than those with lower level of education (Oire, Mwabu & Manda, 2004). One of the challenges facing Kenya is to raise the education standards of the regions that lag behind in enrolment to bring them to par with other areas. This is a way of reinstating the goal of universal school enrolment to which Kenya is committed (ROK, 2007).

In Kenya one of the Ministry of Education's objectives is to enhance access, equity and quality at all levels of education and training by 2010 (ROK, 2005). It was also the major goal and commitment of the government of Kenya to attain EFA by 2015. This is in line with the government commitment to the international declarations protocols and conventions as resolved in worlds conferences on EFA (Jomlien-Thailand, 1990 & Dakar, Senegal 2000) and by the Millennium Development Goals (ROK, 2005). However according to a survey carried out by USAID, the GER of secondary schools in Kenya was 49% compared to 112% of primary school pupils in 2005.

Despite the government initiative of establishing free secondary education, development of day schools, providing bursaries to the needy students and providing support for the development of school infrastructure, the secondary sub-sector continues to face challenges, particularly the low participation rates, low transition rates from primary to secondary schools and from secondary to tertiary (particularly to universities) as well as gender and regional disparities (ROK, 2005). There is low enrolment rate at secondary level especially in marginal areas such as Tharaka South Sub-County. This might have been contributed by factors like poverty levels, inadequate education facilities, social cultural factors including Female Genital Mutilation and early marriages (Ngware, Onsomu, Muthaka, & Manda, 2007). Although the transition rate from primary to secondary schools raised from 42 percent in 2002 to 60 percent in 2006, this is below that of developing countries on the road to industrialization and those with middle income status (ROK, 2007). High disparities in access to secondary school education still remain a challenge as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Gross Enrolment Rate and Net Enrolment Rate, 2005-2009

| | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Pre-primary | | | | | |
| Gross enrolment rate | 37.7 | 58.8 | 59 | 59.8 | 60.6 |
| Net enrolment rate | 32.9 | 33.6 | 42.1 | 43.0 | 49.0 |
| Primary | | | | | |
| Gross enrolment rate | 107.6 | 103.8 | 108.9 | 109.8 | 110 |
| Net enrolment rate | 82.8 | 83.5 | 91.6 | 92.5 | 92.9 |
| Secondary | | | | | |
| Gross enrolment rate | 28.8 | 32.4 | 38 | 42.5 | 45.3 |
| Net enrolment rate | 20.5 | 22.5 | 24.2 | 28.9 | 35.8 |

Source: KPPRA (2010)

Table 1 presents GER and NER between 2005- 2009. Secondary school GER increased from 28.8 per cent in 2005 to 45.3 per cent in 2009, while NER increased from 20.5 per cent in 2005 to 35.8 per cent in 2009. The government aimed to address the issue of access to secondary education by raising the transition rate from primary to secondary level by 60 percent to 75 percent by 2012 (ROK, 2007). To address disparities between male and female students and between different socio-economic groups and regions the government intends to attain gender parity at secondary school level and attain regional equity in school enrolment (ROK, 2007).

Tharaka South Sub-County seems to be most hard hit by this situation. In the year 2009, the total standard eight pupils who sat for KCPE in Tharaka South Sub-County were 1953. Out of these, there were 979 boys and 974 girls as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: No. of Standard 8 Candidates and Form 1 Enrolment for the past 5 years

| Level | Gender | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|------------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Standard 8 | Boys | 899 | 880 | 979 | 807 | 834 |
| | Girls | 941 | 924 | 974 | 733 | 771 |
| | Total | 1840 | 1804 | 1953 | 1530 | 1605 |
| Form One | Boys | 462 | 411 | 531 | 573 | 474 |
| | Girls | 252 | 241 | 275 | 265 | 298 |
| | Total | 714 | 652 | 816 | 838 | 772 |

Source: Tharaka South Sub-County Education Office 2012

Table 2 presents number of standard eight candidates and Form 1 enrolment for the past five years in Tharaka South Sub-County. Enrolment of boys increased from 462 in 2007, 540 in 2009 to 573 in 2010. Enrolment of girls in this same level increased from 252 in 2007, 276 in 2009 to 298 in 2011. However the total number of students who were enrolled in the past 5 years was less than half of the total standard 8 candidates who qualified to be enrolled in form one. Out of 7127 pupils who qualified to be admitted in form one in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, 4049 of them did not access *to secondary school education*. This represents 56.8 percent of those who would enroll in secondary schools. This poor accessibility to secondary school education cannot be associated with inadequate facilities because the government, NGOs and school sponsors have provided enough resources including establishment of mixed day secondary schools. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the social cultural factors influencing access to secondary school education in Tharaka South Sub-County.

Research Methodology

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi county of Kenya. The study focused on public secondary schools drawn from Tharaka South Sub-County. Tharaka South Sub-County borders the old Meru South and Meru Central Sub-County to the West, Tharaka North Sub-County, Mwingi Sub-County to the East and Mbeere Sub-County to the south. The Sub-County is within Tharaka Constituency. The Sub-County is vast and sparsely populated to the Eastern part and densely populated to the Western part. The topography of the land is undulating with residual hills such as Kijege and Ntugi. Other features include Tana River which passes along the borders of the sub-county and Mwingi sub-county with its tributaries running across.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The descriptive survey design was used in this study aimed at collecting information from respondents on the factors influencing access to secondary school education. Descriptive studies are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual or of a group (Kothari, 2004). The design gave firsthand information on the socio cultural factor that affects access to secondary school education in Tharaka South Sub-County. The target population was a total of 1824 where 17 were principals, 17 were class teachers, 96 were primary school head teachers, and 1654 were Form two and Form three students. A sample of 182 respondents selected through

stratified random sampling technique was engaged in the study. The study used both an interview schedule and a structured questionnaire to collect data from the sampled students and teachers. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' characteristics

It emerged from the results that 65% of students' respondents were boys and 35% were girls. This indicates that most of students at secondary school level in the Sub-county are boys. This could be attributed to the fact that girls are expected to get married therefore parents prefer to invest in the education of their sons (Hazans et al., 2005). The results also indicate that 6% of the students were aged below 15%, 71% were aged between 15 and 18 years, and 23% were over 18 years old. The study also revealed that only 47% of standard eight pupils transited to secondary schools in Tharaka South Sub-County.

Influence of Family Sizes to Student's Access to Secondary School Education

An analysis of respondents' family sizes revealed that 57% of the respondents were from families whose number of children ranged between 1 and 4 while 43% were from families with between 5 and 8 children as depicted in Figure 1. This show that a significant number of students in the sub county are from large sized families and this may be explain why preference is given to boys when it comes to enrollment in secondary schools. Parents opt to use the limited resources to educate boys other than girls.

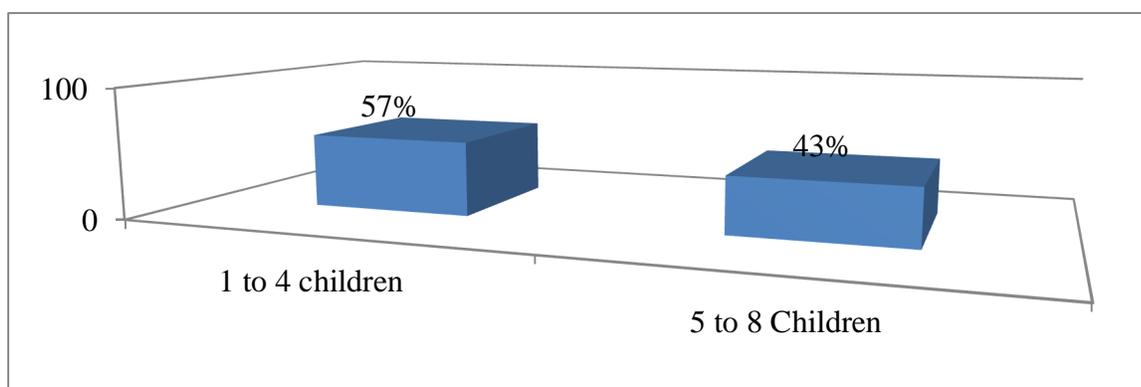


Figure 1: Family sizes

Students from families with five to eight children complained of being sent home more than four times per term due to school fees. This shows that children from large families are exposed to poverty and lack of school fees. Wedge and Essen, (1982) argues that children who grow up in large or single parent families perform poorly academically, drop out of school earlier, have lower aspirations for further education and generally have low family income.

The study also sought to determine whether parents/guardians and siblings of the respondents' encouraged them to work hard in school. The results in Table 3 indicate that 43% of students were encouraged by their brothers or sisters, 27% by their fathers 16% by their mothers and 14% by their guardians. This shows that parents are only 43% of the respondents 'were encouraged to work harder by their parents. This means that some parents were not concerned with the academic performance of their children. This can be attributed to the parents' low level of formal education. Black Salvenes, (2003) argues that more educated parents are likely to encourage their children to enroll in secondary schools.

Table 3: Encouragement to work harder

| Person | Freq | % |
|----------------|------|----|
| Father | 45 | 27 |
| Mother | 26 | 16 |
| Guardian | 23 | 14 |
| Brother/Sister | 71 | 43 |

Cultural Factors that Influence Students' Access to Secondary School Education

The study also sought to establish the cultural factors that influence access to secondary school education in Tharaka South Sub-County. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

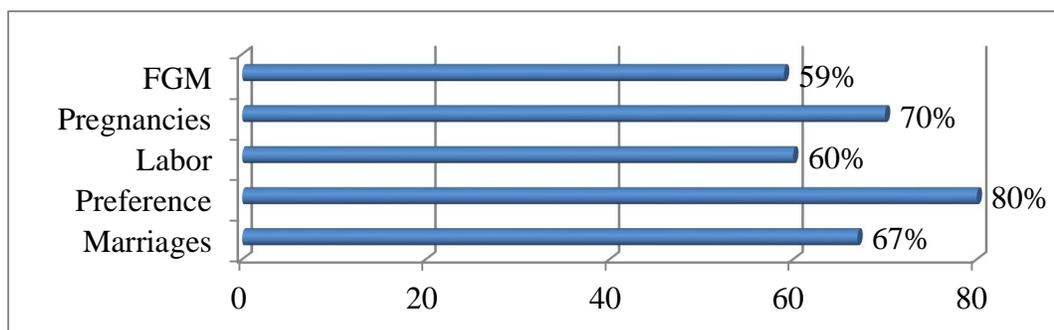


Figure 2: Cultural factor influencing access to secondary education

According to the results in Figure 2, gender preference is the major factor influencing access to secondary school education as noted by 80% of the respondents. This is because most parents in the Sub-county prefer enrolling boys in secondary school level of education than girls. The findings confirms those of Hazans et al., (2005) who found that girls often out-marry into the family of their husbands, thus parents prefer to invest in the education of their sons. Papanek (1985) states that the way resources are distributed including educational resources brings about gender differences. The other cultural factors include early marriages, as stated by 67% of the respondents, FGM; unplanned pregnancies and labour as indicated by 59%, 70% and 60% of the respondents respectively.

The findings are in line with those of Hazans et al., (2005) who argues that communities that practice pastoralist and FGM value early marriages of their daughters more than education. Some get unplanned pregnancies and are thus forced to marry at tender age and others are given out by their parents. Children here are engaged in activities such as herding cattle, weeding in the farms, harvesting and working as house helps (Papanek, 1985).

The study further assessed the proximity of secondary school in the Sub-county and the findings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Proximity of Secondary Schools

| Proximity | Freq | % |
|-----------|------|----|
| Very far | 101 | 61 |
| Far | 56 | 34 |
| Near | 5 | 4 |
| Very near | 2 | 1 |

The results (Table 4) indicates that majority of students' (61%) go to school very far away from their homes, 34% indicated that their schools were far, 4% stated that their schools were near and 1% schooled very near their homes. This is a clear indication of absence of enough secondary schools in the region. Hazans et al., (2005) argues that the distance to the closest school has a negative effect on enrolment.

Influence of Parents' Level of Formal Education to Students' Access to Secondary School Education

The study sought to establish the influence of the level of parents' formal education on access to secondary education in the District. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Parents' level of formal education

| Level | Freq | % |
|---------------------|------|----|
| University/college | 2 | 1 |
| Secondary school | 6 | 4 |
| Primary school | 138 | 84 |
| Not attended school | 19 | 11 |

The results in Table 5, indicates that majority of the respondents (88%) had parents who had attained primary education. 1% had parent with university education, 4% had parents with secondary education and 11% of the respondents stated that their parents had not attended school. This shows that the level of illiteracy in the District is high as compared to other areas and this can be attributed to lack of access of students to secondary school education. Since most of the parents did not go to school or went up to primary level, they do not see the sense of educating their children. The findings confirms the findings of Black (2003) that more educated parents are likely to enroll their children in better schools and encourage them to enroll in tertiary institutions. Therefore the more educated parents are the more their children are likely to proceed to the next level of education.

Influence of Parents Social Class on Students' Access to Secondary School Education

The study further sought to establish the influence of parents' social class on Access to secondary education. The results are presented in Figure 3.

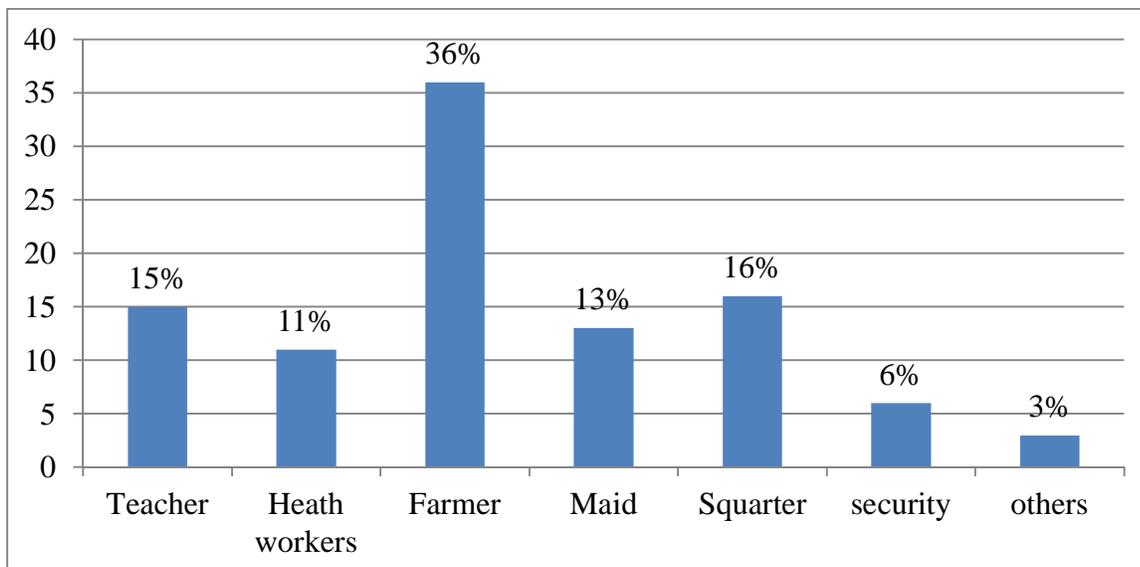


Figure 3: Occupation of the parents

The results in Figure 3 shows that 15% of the respondents’ parents were teachers (either primary or secondary), 11% were health workers, 36% were peasant farmers, 13% were maids, 16% were squatters, 6% were security officers and 3% had other types of occupations. This shows that most of parents in the District were farmers. This is a clear indication that the social class of majority of students’ parents was low. Most of them cannot meet their basic needs and pay for their children’s’ education and therefore most children cannot access secondary education.

When asked to indicate whether they studied at home, 24% of the respondents confirmed that indeed they studied when at home while 76% did not as illustrated in Figure 4. This shows that majority of students did not study when at home.

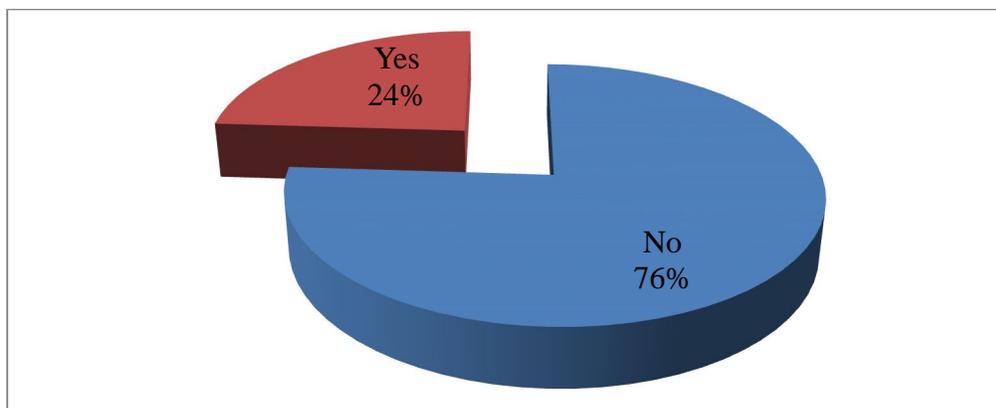


Figure 4: Percentage of students who studied when at home

The reasons for not studying when at home included lack of source of light, un-conducive learning environment and child labor. This further confirms that majority of families in the pastoralist communities are faced by challenges in providing learning friendly environment for their children. Hazans et al., (2005) confirms that majority of parents in pastoralist society are faced by challenges in providing learning friendly environment for their children. Ayodo and Jagero, (2009) indicates that education cost poses a large burden to poor families who must contribute greater share of their household income after paying for food and other basic needs.

Conclusions

Access to secondary education in Kenya is still very low. The transition rate from primary to secondary school grew slightly from 41.7% in 2002 to about 52% in 2005 (ROK, 2006). There is low enrolment rate at secondary level especially in marginal areas. The study established socio-cultural factors that influence access to secondary school education in Tharaka South Sub-County, Kenya.

It is also palpable that the most families in the Sub-county are large and thus they experience difficulties in providing primary needs and hence preference is given to boys as regards to secondary school enrolment. Students from these families were sent home many times as compared to those from small families due to collect fees. It is also clear that parents played a minimal role in encouraging their children to work hard in their studies and /or enroll in secondary school. Most of the students in the District also did not study when they are at home due to lack of light, un-conducive learning environment and child labor.

It emerged from the study that cultural factors influence access to secondary education as well. These cultural factors included gender preference, early marriages, unplanned pregnancies, child labor and FGM. Majority of the parents of students in secondary schools had attained primary school education and some had not gone to school at all. This shows that the level of illiteracy in the District was very high and could be attributed to lack of access of students to secondary school education. Most of the children could not access secondary education because their parent had not attained the secondary education themselves and therefore, did not see the value of enrolling their children for it

Many parents in the Sub-county were peasant farmers and this clearly shows that their social class was very low. As a result they couldn't be able to cater for the fees of secondary education for their children in addition to providing them with basic needs. There was also a high rate of dropout of students in secondary school level of education in the Sub-county due to lack of school fees, early marriages, family conflicts, pregnancies, child labor and drug abuse.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

- i. The government should provide public awareness on the importance of family planning in Tharaka South Sub-County.
- ii. The government should initiate more programmes to discourage early marriages, FGM and child labour among girls in Tharaka South Sub-County.
- iii. More schools with boarding facilities should be built in rural areas of Tharaka South Sub-County.

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