

**Factors influencing the choice of Christian Religious Education by Secondary School students in Makueni Sub-county, Makueni County-Kenya.**

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this research was to investigate the factors that influence the choice of Christian Religious Education by secondary school students in Makueni Sub-County, Makueni County. The research was guided by four objectives that focused on whether the students' interest in other subjects influence their choice of Christian Religious Education in Makueni Sub County, if future career prospects influence students' choice of Christian Religious Education, whether there are gender differences in the choice of Christian Religious Education among KCSE students and to investigate whether teachers' guidance on subject selection influence students' choice of Christian Religious Education. The theoretical underpinnings of this research are based on transformational character model and structural – functional approach to religion which has its roots in Emile Durkheim works on religion. Durkheim argued that religion is, in a sense, the celebration and even (self-) worship of human society. Given this approach, Durkheim proposed that religion has three major functions in society: it provides social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs, social control to enforce religious-based morals and norms to help maintain conformity and control in society, and it offers meaning and purpose to answer any existential questions. In these models, principals and career guidance teachers set directions, guide the students and redesign their schools to promote the selection of subjects by students for their career prospects. This research was conducted in Makueni Sub-county. The final study sample included 10 principals and 10 career guidance teachers randomly selected from ten secondary schools from Makueni Sub- County. The sample also included 12 subject teachers and 100 form three students who were purposefully sampled and included in the study sample. The study utilized a mixed method research approach specifically the converged parallel design. The design provides for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in the same phase and then merging the two sets of the results into an overall interpretation. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in Tables. Qualitative data was coded according to content, analyzed based on emerging themes and presented in narrative form.*

**Key words: Factors, influence, choice, Christian Religious Education, Secondary school.**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of secondary school education in Kenya is to prepare students towards higher training and specialization in different career fields. This education is termed as the foundation for economic and social development for an individual person. It improves the productive capacity of the societies and their political, economic and scientific institutions. It helps to reduce poverty by mitigating its effect on population, health and nutrition (Agwata, 2006).

Secondary school students in Kenya are supposed to choose subjects while in form two based on what they would like to pursue after their secondary school education. It is stipulated that a student cannot sit for all subjects offered at the end of secondary school course hence the need to make a better choice (Alika, & Egbochuku, 2009).

The decision on the choice of optional subjects are often made with little information and awareness from the experts. This study therefore seeks to find out the factors that influence students to choose the best subjects for their future career (Elsworth, Harvey-Beavis, Ainley, & Fabris, 2009). Christian Religious Education being the most affected. The factors to be considered will include; the students' attitude towards C.R.E, future career influence, gender differences and guidance on subject selection.

The system of education in Kenya comprises of twenty subjects at secondary school level. The current Kenya National Examination Council's guidelines have categorized the subjects into five major groups. Subjects from the first group are compulsory to all candidates. They include; English, Kiswahili and Mathematics. Group 2 cluster comprises of Biology, Physics and Chemistry, the candidates are supposed to choose at least two. History and Government, Geography, Christian Religious Education and other religious education form the third group of subjects from which the candidates are supposed to choose one. Group four clusters of subjects is made up of Home science, Art and design, Agriculture, Aviation technology and Computer science. The candidates are required to choose one subject from these. The last groups of subjects from which the students are supposed to choose one subject include foreign languages like French, Germany, Arabic, Music and Business studies.

The C.R.E secondary school curriculum in Kenya stipulates that learners who interact with the C.R.E content are expected to gain insight into the unfolding of God's self-revelation to human kind through their personal experience in the African religious heritage, the Biblical revelation as a whole and, specifically, in Jesus Christ and the Christian community. They should use the acquired social, spiritual and moral insights to think critically and make appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society, appreciate and respect their own and other people's cultural and Christian beliefs and practices, acquire the basic principles of Christian living and develop a sense of self-respect and respect for others, promote international consciousness through the understanding of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, contribute positively to the transformation of self and the society as a whole and lastly acquire knowledge for further studies in various career fields (Mohd Salleh, Mustaphar, 2010). Unfortunately, it has been noted that C.R.E has not been given the consideration it deserves in Kenya. This is why very few students choose it as a K.C.S.E subject.

Sifuna, (1990) argues that, although indigenous education in Kenya varied from one community to another, the goals are almost the same. Indigenous African Education was for the living. It was concerned with the systematic socialization of the young generation into norms, beliefs, collective opinions of the wider society, practical skills and the acquisition of knowledge which was useful to the individual and the society as a whole. The description of the role of Indigenous African Education has a lot of religious connotation and that is why religion and education could not be separated (Mbiti, 2006).

In Kenya, the Report on Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training chaired by Koech devotes a whole chapter to discuss the secular, religious and ethical concerns of the society. The commission agrees with Mbiti (2006) by referring to religion as a way of life. It recommends that RE and SEE continue to be taught and emphasized as part of the Basic Education Cycle and Teacher Training Curricula. It has been noted with a lot of concern C.R.E is not liked by many students in Makueni Sub-county secondary schools. Many students especially boys prefer to choose other subjects instead of the C.R.E, (Malusu, 2010).

## Methodology

The target population for this study constituted 400 students from the 34 public secondary schools in Makueni sub-county which present candidates for K.C.S.E, 34 C.R.E subject teachers, 34 principals in Makueni Sub County. The study utilized a mixed method research approach specifically the converged parallel design. The design provides for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in the same phase and then merging the two sets of the results into an overall interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in Tables. Qualitative data was coded according to content, analyzed based on emerging themes and presented in narrative form.

The research used questionnaire instruments which were used to collect the necessary data. These were designed to solicit information from the Christian Religious Education students. The questionnaire contained item statements, for each of the variables under consideration (students' attitude, career guidance, future career and impression about Christian Religious Education). Their responses in section two were pre-structured along a modified skewed-scale as follows: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree) and SD (Strongly Disagree). They are graded 4 –1 in that order. This was explained to the students' respondents.

## Distribution of Respondents by Category

The information on respondents distribution helped the researcher to ascertain the real representation in the study in terms of category. The results from form three students, CRE subject teachers and Principals are as shown in the table below.

**Table 4.1: Respondents Gender**

Students			Teachers	
Gender	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percentage
Female	60	50.0	6	60.0
Male	60	50.0	4	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The results in Table 4.1 show that there were more female C.R.E teachers (60%) than male C.R.E teachers (40.0%). However the gender for the students was balanced (50%) for each gender since they were selected before the study. The gender representation was however balanced in all categories and therefore the results given represent the views of both genders.

### 4.3 Students' interest towards C.R.E Choice

The first objective for this study was to find out whether the students' attitudes in other subjects influence their choice of Christian Religious Education. To achieve this objective the students were requested to indicate the humanity subjects they had chosen. The humanity subjects included; History, Geography and C.R.E. The responses were presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Humanity Subjects Chosen by Students**

Subject	Frequency	Percent
History	33	27.5
Geography	22	18.3
C.R.E	65	64.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.4 reveal that majority (64.3%) of the students interviewed had chosen C.R.E as their humanity subject. This might be because C.R.E was reported to be a compulsory subject in some secondary schools. However in other schools students freely chose the subject because they liked the subject as they considered it to be easy compared to the other subjects. Most of the students referred C.R.E as a "booster" subject for their grades. This shows that the students had a positive attitude towards C.R.E.

The researcher further sought to establish whether there was association between students attitude towards humanities an choice of C.R.E. This was done Chi-square test for association at 95% confidence level. These results were presented in Table 4.5.

### 4.6 Teachers' Guidance and Students' Choice of Christian Religious Education.

The last objective for this study was to investigate whether teachers' guidance on subject selection influences students' choice of Christian Religious Education. To achieve this objective the

researcher requested the students to indicate whether the teachers explained them the importance of C.R.E. The responses were presented in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10: Teachers Encouragement to Students to Take Other Subjects**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	65	54.2
No	55	45.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.10 shows that, majority (54.2%) of respondents indicated that C.R.E teachers explained to them the importance of C.R.E. Some of the importance mentioned were; helps in acquiring good morals, prepares them for future career and spiritual growth among others.

Further the researcher requested the respondents to indicate whether teachers encouraged the students to opt for their subject in their choices in form two. The responses were presented in Table 4.11.

### **The findings of the study**

This study investigated the factors influencing students' choice of the Christian Religious Education as a subject in secondary schools in Makueni Sub-County. A total of 120 students (60 girls and 60 boys) and 10 C.R.E teachers were used in the study. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

The first research question for this study was; "do the students' interest in other subjects influence their choice of Christian Religious Education as a subject"? It was established that majority (64.3%) of the students interviewed had a positive attitude towards C.R.E and chose it as humanity subject. It was also revealed that there was a significant association  $\chi^2(1, 4) = 28.173, p < 0.05$  between students attitude towards other humanity subjects and choice of C.R.E subject.

The second research question was; "Is future career knowledge a factor that influences the students' choice of Christian Religious Education?" The study established that majority (85%) of respondents agreed that C.R.E prepared them for the career they were aspiring to pursue. It was also established

that there is a weak positive correlation  $r(120) = 0.12$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between students choice of C.R.E and the future career. This shows that the future career was weakly determined choice of C.R.E subject.

The third research question was; “are there gender differences in the students’ choice of Christian Religious Education?” It was revealed that, majority (81.7%) of respondents agreed that gender differences influenced the choice of C.R.E with most girls choosing the subject as opposed to boys. It was also established that there is a significant association  $\chi^2(1, 4) = 32.21$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between gender and choice of C.R.E subject. This means that gender differences significantly influenced the choice of Christian Religious Education.

The last research question for this study was; “Do career guidance teachers influence the students’ choice of Christian Religious Education?” It was establish that majority (54.2%) of respondents indicated that C.R.E teachers explained to them the importance of C.R.E. It was also established that there is a strong positive correlation  $r(120) = 0.63$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between teachers encouragement students choice of C.R.E. This shows that the teachers’ encouragement significantly was weakly determined choice of C.R.E subject.

#### 4.1 Future career Prospects and Choice of Christian Religious Education

The second objective for this study was to investigate whether future career prospects influence students’ choice of Christian Religious Education. To achieve this objective the researcher required the respondents to indicate whether C.R.E prepared them for future careers. The responses were presented in Table 4.1

**Table 4.1: C.R.E and Career Chosen by Students**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	102	85.0
No	18	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.1 show that, majority (85%) of respondents agreed that C.R.E prepared them for the career they were aspiring to pursue. This is because majority of the students reported that they were doing better in C.R.E and this helped them to acquire the minimum grades for joining the university.

**Table 4.2: Chi-square Tests for Association between Students' Interests and Choice of C.R.E**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.173 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	9.112	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.243	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	120		

a. 8 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .05.

Table 4.2 show that, there is a significant association  $\chi^2(1, 4) = 28.173, p < 0.05$ ) between students attitude towards other subjects and choice of C.R.E subject. This means that the choice for C.R.E was not independent but it was influenced by the other subjects which seemed abit harder than C.R.E.

These results agree with a study by (Ijeoma, 2001) which established that most C.R.E students, generally, have a positive attitude towards C.R.E though it is not reflected in practice. Though majority of the respondents strongly agreed that C.R.E is a very important subject, they indicated that they would not continue learning C.R.E in case they qualified for university. Only (26.5%) would continue learning C.R.E if they qualified for university. Majority of them would not continue learning C.R.E because it does not guarantee employment.

**Table 4.3: Correlation between Students' Choice of C.R.E and the Future Career.**

		Choice of C.R.E	Future Career
Choice of C.R.E	Pearson Correlation	1	0.12
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	120	120
Future career	Pearson Correlation	0.12	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	120	120

Table 4.3 shows that, there is a weak positive correlation  $r(120) = 0.12$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between students choice of C.R.E and the future career. This shows that the future career is weakly determined the choice of C.R.E subject. From the open question responses it was observed that most students chose C.R.E to enable them boost their mean score so as to do the careers they were interested in. Most of these careers were not related to C.R.E.

These results resonate with those of Wagner (2010) who argues that Christian Religious Education is said to be less prominent than it used to be. This was brought about by the drastic changes of 8.4 .4 systems of education, which made the subject an elective in Form Three.

**Table 4.4: Chi-square Tests for Association between Gender and Choice of C.R.E**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.21 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	8.222	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	20.111	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	120		

a. 8 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .05.

Table 4.4 shows that there is a significant association  $\chi^2(1, 4) = 32.21$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between gender and choice of C.R.E subject. This means that gender differences significantly influenced the choice of Christian Religious Education. It was observed that more girls had chosen C.R.E as a subject than

boys. From the open questions it is notable that most boys tended to lean to mathematics and sciences.

These results echo with Whitelaw, Milosevic and Daniels (2000), who argues that girls prefer studying subjects that they perceive as having value, being connected to people or other living things and having relevance in their lives. Often science is taught without an emphasis on how the subject connects to the “real” world. Boys are viewed as less able than girls in reading and the language arts, subjects that are stereotyped as feminine. Gender was probably the most important variable related to pupils’ attitudes to science and technology subjects.

#### **4.5 Teachers’ Guidance and Students’ Choice of Christian Religious Education.**

The last objective for this study was to investigate whether teachers’ guidance on subject selection influences students’ choice of Christian Religious Education. To achieve this objective the researcher requested the students to indicate whether the teachers explained them the importance of C.R.E. The responses were presented in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Teachers Encouragement to Students to Take Other Subjects**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	65	54.2
No	55	45.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.5 shows that, majority (54.2%) of respondents indicated that C.R.E teachers explained to them the importance of C.R.E. Some of the importance mentioned were; helps in acquiring good morals, prepares them for future career and spiritual growth among others.

Further the researcher requested the respondents to indicate whether teachers encouraged the students to opt for their subject in their choices in form two. The responses were presented in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5.1: Teachers Encouragement to Students to Take C.R.E**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	102	85.0
No	18	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.5.1 shows that, majority (85%) of respondents agreed that teachers encouraged the students to opt for their subject in their choices in form two. This was after the teachers had explained to them the importance of C.R.E. The researcher further used the Spearman's product Moment correlation coefficient to determine the strength of relationship between as presented in Table 4.5.1

**Table 4.6: Correlation Between Teachers Encouragement and Students Choice of C.R.E**

		Choice of C.R.E	Future Career
Choice of C.R.E	Pearson Correlation	1	0.63
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	120	120
Future career	Pearson Correlation	0.63	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	120	120

Table 4.6 shows that, there is a strong positive correlation  $r(120) = 0.63$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between teachers encouragement students choice of C.R.E. This shows that the teachers' encouragement significantly was weakly determined choice of C.R.E subject.

These results agree with Mohd, Salleh and Mustaphar (2010). who argues that teachers play significant role in the overall students' subject selection in secondary schools. Their morale and motivation is crucial when students are selecting their subjects for K.C.S.E. The success of the subject they select will depend on the motivation they get from their teachers. They asserts that

teachers need to sit with each individual student so as to guide him or her on the importance of the subjects they choose in line with career opportunities available in the job market. This influences many students to make the best subjects for their future career development. They further state that principals can involve the students and parents for a further subject selection guidance.

## **Discussion**

This study investigated the factors influencing students' choice of the Christian Religious Education as a subject in secondary schools in Makueni Sub-County. A total of 120 students (60 girls and 60 boys) and 10 C.R.E teachers were used in the study. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

The first research question for this study was; "do the students' interest in other subjects influence their choice of Christian Religious Education as a subject"? It was established that majority (64.3%) of the students interviewed had a positive attitude towards C.R.E and chose it as humanity subject. It was also revealed that there was a significant association  $\chi^2(1, 4) = 28.173, p < 0.05$  between students attitude towards other humanity subjects and choice of C.R.E subject.

The second research question was; "Is future career knowledge a factor that influences the students' choice of Christian Religious Education?" The study established that majority (85%) of respondents agreed that C.R.E prepared them for the career they were aspiring to pursue. It was also established that there is a weak positive correlation  $r(120) = 0.12, (p < 0.05)$  between students choice of C.R.E and the future career. This shows that the future career was weakly determined choice of C.R.E subject.

The third research question was; "are there gender differences in the students' choice of Christian Religious Education?" It was revealed that, majority (81.7%) of respondents agreed that gender differences influenced the choice of C.R.E with most girls choosing the subject as opposed to boys. It was also established that there is a significant association  $\chi^2(1, 4) = 32.21, p < 0.05$  between gender and choice of C.R.E subject. This means that gender differences significantly influenced the choice of Christian Religious Education.

The last research question for this study was; "Do career guidance teachers influence the students' choice of Christian Religious Education?" It was establish that majority (54.2%) of respondents indicated that C.R.E teachers explained to them the importance of C.R.E. It was also established

that there is a strong positive correlation  $r(120) = 0.63$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) between teachers encouragement students choice of C.R.E. This shows that the teachers' encouragement significantly was weakly determined choice of C.R.E subject.

### **Conclusions of the Study**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following conclusions:-Students' attitude towards other humanity subjects influenced choice of C.R.E subject. This is because most students thought C.R.E was a simple subject compared to other humanities. Most students choose C.R.E not necessarily for career but to boost their grades which would help them fit in the career they are interested in. Gender influenced choice of C.R.E as a humanity with most girls choosing C.R.E as opposed to boys. Teachers' guidance and encouragement to do C.R.E influenced the choice of C.R.E by students. This means that many students choose it because of their teachers' encouragement.

### **Recommendation**

There is need for bold and urgent measures to restructure the system of education so as to make Religious Education a compulsory subject for all students. Religion is real, it is not imaginary. It is an expression of society itself. Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness which is the fusion of all our individual consciousness which then creates a reality of its own. Further, Religious Education provides social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs, social control to enforce religious based morals and norms to help maintain conformity and control in the society. Based on this, the ministry of Education should make C.R.E a compulsory subject in all non-Muslim schools so that all students can benefit from the subject. The schools should encourage more boys to choose C.R.E as a subject because the findings in this study show that more girls were doing.

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