

Evaluating the Impact of the Implementation of the Sanitary Pads Policy by the Headteachers on Students' Retention in Masinga Sub County, Kenya.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the implementation of the sanitary pads policy by the headteachers on students' retention in Masinga sub- county, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview guides and document analysis. The study involved 5122 respondents from public secondary schools. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling were employed to sample 25 headteachers ,25 deputy headteachers and 370 students. Validity of the research instruments was ascertained through expert judgment and piloting. Reliability was achieved through test retest method where the instruments were piloted in a time interval of two weeks and the two results were correlated using Pearson's product moment correlation method. The findings showed that there is a strong correlation between effective implementation of the sanitary pads policy by the headteachers and students' retention ($r=0.76$, $p=0.00$), hence the hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis accepted. The study concluded that access to information on menstrual health and management is lacking in most schools. The study recommended that the government should enhance girls' retention in schools by scaling up the provision of sanitary pads.

Key words: Headteachers, implementation, policy, sanitary pads, students' retention.

1. Introduction

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and school attendance are closely interconnected issues that have gained significant attention in recent years. The lack of proper menstrual hygiene management can often lead to increased absenteeism among girls, impacting their education and overall well-being (Obafemi, 2015). While several programmes have previously been developed to address girls' menstrual health management (MHM) needs in Kenya as well as globally, few have been rigorously evaluated and where evidence does exist on the effect of such programmes on reproductive health and schooling outcomes, the results have been mixed (Majeed et al, 2022). A 2019 report by Dasra, a development organization, reveals that 23 million girls drop out of school every year due to lack of proper menstrual hygiene management facilities. Most of the schools do not even ensure the availability of sanitary pads for the students. A recent UNICEF study also pointed out that over 71% of adolescent girls remain unaware of their menstrual cycle until they get their first period. Many of them drop out of school after getting period (UNICEF, 2019)

1.2 Statement of the problem

Menstrual hygiene management practices and school attendance are interconnected. The lack of proper menstrual hygiene can lead to increased absenteeism among girls impacting negatively on their education. Understanding the best practices in menstrual hygiene management, challenges the adolescent girls face and information on menstruation are essential in developing strategies for preventing girls drop outs.

1.3 Research objective

To evaluate the impact of the implementation of the sanitary pads policy by the headteachers on students' retention in Masinga sub-county, Kenya.

1.4 Research hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between the implementation of the sanitary pads policy by the headteachers and students' retention

2. Literature review

In Bangladesh, the National hygiene survey 2018 found that about 30% of female students' miss school during menstruation for approximately 2.5 days per month. Research conducted in secondary school in Patuakhali, one of the southern districts also found a positive association between academic performance and the adoption of a good menstrual hygiene management practices among adolescent girls (NHS, 2018).

Data emerging from the African context suggest that girls may miss school due to their menses (Miiró et al 2018). However, there exist a number of reasons why a learner may miss school while menstruating, including physical symptoms, shame, secrecy and fear of leakage, access to products and or ability to manage menstruation at school (Sommer et al, 2016). In south Africa there has been a significant mobilization of the civil society sector around the lack of access to sanitary products and school absenteeism amongst female learners. There have also been efforts at national level with

the drafting of a sanitary dignity policy frame work in 2017 to help set out the norms and standards on how the nine provinces within south Africa should address sanitary dignity (Scorgie et al, 2016)

A study conducted by Mekuriaw and Belayneh (2019) in southern Ethiopia found out that from the 791 adolescent girls who participated in the study, 68.3% had poor knowledge of menstruation. About 48.1% of school girls used absorbent materials and 69.5% clean their external genitalia. Generally, 60.3% of girls had poor menstrual hygiene practice.

Hennegan et al. (2019) reported that many girls and young women in Zimbabwe lack access to menstrual health and management knowledge, products and support and experience anxiety, shame and stigma as they approach menarche and throughout their reproductive years. The girls are forced to either use inadequate alternatives such as tissue paper or old cloth to manage their menstruation and or to miss school or work entirely during this time (Kuhlmann et al.2017)

Pratima and Deepa (2024) highlighted the challenges faced by adolescent girls in managing menstruation in the school environment. The study emphasized the need for a menstrual friendly environment, access to affordable menstrual products and teacher support. Improving menstrual hygiene management can lead to increased school attendance, better health outcomes and reduced stigma associated with menstruation. The findings of the study underscored the urgent need for systemic improvement such as the provision of clean and accessible sanitation facilities, adequate menstrual products and supportive educational environment. Implementing community wide awareness campaigns and educational programmes can help break the stigma surrounding menstruation and promote healthier practices.

According to Christabel et al (2020) a key challenge for menstruating girls and women in low recourse countries is the inadequate and unreliable supply of menstrual products. Other challenges include affordability, poor disposal methods, lack of attention on sanitation facilities and the lack of standard protocols to regulate the quality of menstrual products. Another challenge is the access to appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, for women and girls to manage their menstruation hygienically which has also been associated with different reproductive tract infections (Torondel et al, 2018).

The biggest barrier to girls using safe, comfortable and effective sanitary products is affordability at the house hold and school levels. Most studies showed how girls resorted to using cloth when they could not afford pads. This constraint was cited by (Lahme et al, 2018, Unicef 2017 and Chiyama et al, 2019). Nanda et al, (2016) established that most schools seemed to supply emergency pads to girls while another study by Chiyama et al, (2019) found out that schools did not have pads or even cotton wool for girls to use in an emergency.

A study by Faunzia et al, (2022) found out that the education given to girls during the distribution of free sanitary pads led to improved menstrual hygiene management practices. The study recommended that government should make it a priority to provide every school with some sanitary products and drugs to cater for female students taken by surprise with her monthly flow or the pain associated with menstruation not interfering with her academic work.

Andrew et al, (2024) reported that school absenteeism among adolescent girls during menstruation is significantly associated with a headache and abdominal, waist pain, lack of changing rooms in

school. In addition, the high cost of sanitary pads was mentioned as one of the main reasons for students not using sanitary pads. Menstrual hygiene related problems have negative impacts on girls' life style, health and developmental opportunities including absence from their school. Girls may also be worried due to consequences or poor menstrual hygiene management including offensive smell, symptoms of reproductive tract infections such as itching of the vulva, pain during urination and vaginal discharge (Shibeshi et al, 2021).

Beatrice and Kibera (2019) in their study concluded that girls who benefit from the sanitary towels provision perform better academically compared to their colleagues who are not provided with the same. This is due to the fact that girls would not miss school due to menstruation and that they would concentrate better in class without fear of soiling their cloths and being mocked by fellow pupils. The study recommended that school managements should enlighten the parents on the significance of provision of sanitary towels to girl-children in order to retain them in schools.

According to Chepkoech et al, (2022) study on Governments Sanitary Towels Initiative (GSTI), the lack of sanitary towels has been a major issue affecting girls access and participation in education. The GSTI has impacted the girls educational access and participation through enabling them to be always present in class, freely stand and answer questions, mingle freely even among boys, concentrate in study activities, volunteer to dust the board and feel comfortable in class during their menstruation period. The findings also indicated that through GSTI the girls have comfort, confidence, motivation and dignity leading to increased participation.

Andiema, (2023) established that menstrual hygiene and sanitation negatively affected girl child participation in primary education because incidents of absenteeism were high, truancy cases and retention was low. The study recommended that the government should provide capitation funds vote for schools to purchase sanitary towels, partner with other organization to set up hygiene and sanitation facilities and educate the community on the need for supporting girl child menstrual hygiene and management.

Austrain et al, (2021) reported that addressing girls' menstrual health are important but are better positioned as part of comprehensive sexuality education programmes addressing stigma and shame associated with menstruation, access to menstrual products, inequitable gender norms and sexual and reproductive health knowledge gaps as opposed to a girls' education intervention.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The target population included 50 headteachers, 50 deputy headteachers and 5022 form three and four students. The total study population was 5122 participants. Purposive sampling was used to select 25 headteachers, 25 deputy headteachers. The students sample was computed using a formula by Yamane, (1973) where $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ to derive at a sample size of 370 students. The researcher administered questionnaires to the headteachers and students while deputy headteachers participated in the study through interview guides. Validity was ensured through pretesting the instruments and expert judgement. Reliability was determined through test retest method and was calculated using Pearson's correlation coefficient resulting in a coefficient of 0.7 for the students and headteachers questionnaires. This was considered acceptable (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2013). Quantitative data were analyzed to

generate percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations. Findings were presented using tables and graphs. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and findings were presented using text.

The researcher ensured voluntary participation of the respondents. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher did not collect names or personal identifiers that could compromise privacy. The researcher obtained permission from the University of Nairobi, department of educational management, policy and curriculum studies and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) where the researcher was issued with a research permit. In addition, the researcher sought permission from the County Commissioner Machakos and also from the Sub-County Director of Education Masinga Sub-county.

4. Results

A total of 370 questionnaires were administered to students while 25 questionnaires were administered to headteachers. Only 350 questionnaires were returned for analysis by students which formed 95% return rate. Similarly, 25 out of 25 headteachers and deputy headteachers responded hence a return rate of 100%. A majority of the headteachers 9(37.5%) were aged between 40 and 44years while 8(29.2%) were aged between 45 and 49 years. 3(12.5%) of headteachers were aged between 50 and 55 years. Ritcher, (2011) asserted that teachers between the ages 30 to 49 years are keen on trying new ideas, have hope in the system and aggressively seek to produce results and are likely to be appointed for leadership. The implication here is that the headteachers in this study were of the right age to implement the sanitary pad policy. The study findings indicate that majority 19(76%) of the headteachers were degree holders while 6(24%) had master's degree. In addition, 20(80%) of the deputy headteachers were degree holders while 5(20%) were masters' holders. Consequently, the respondents had attained the necessary qualification of a degree in education for effective implementation of the sanitary pads policy.

4.1. Headteachers responses on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with given statements regarding government policy on sanitary pads.

Headteachers responses are presented in Table 4.1. They were to use: SD-strongly disagree, D-disagree, N-neutral, A-agree and SA- strongly agree.

Table 4.1: Headteachers responses on sanitary towels and students' retention.

STATEMENT	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Sanitary towels enable girls to concentrate in their study activities	2	8	3	12	1	4	5	20	14	56
Sanitary towels enable girls to feel more comfortable in class.	3	12	3	12	2	8	5	20	12	48
Sanitary towels enable girls to volunteer to dust the chalkboard.	1	4	3	12	3	12	6	24	12	48
Sanitary towels enable girls to be always in class.	2	8	1	4	2	8	6	24	14	56
Sanitary towels enable girls to move freely in class.	2	8	2	8	1	4	4	6	13	52

Findings in Table 4.1 show that majority 19(76%) either strongly agreed or agreed that sanitary pads enable girls to concentrate in their study activities. 5(20%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with 1(4%) being neutral. Further findings showed that 17 (68%) either strongly agreed or agreed that sanitary pads enable girls to feel more comfortable in class. 6 (24%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed while 2 (8%) of the headteachers remained neutral.

The findings show that 18(72%) either strongly agreed or agreed that sanitary pads enable girls to volunteer and dust the chalk board. 4(16%) of the headteachers strongly disagreed or disagreed while 3(12%) remained neutral. Further findings show that 20(80%) either strongly agreed or agreed that sanitary pads enable girls to always be in class 3(12%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed while 2(8%) were neutral. These findings are in agreement with the study by Chepkoech et al (2022) who found out that government sanitary towels initiative has impacted the girls educational access and participation through enabling them to be always in class, freely stand and answer questions, mingle freely even among boys, concentrate in study activities, volunteer to dust the chalk board and to feel comfortable in class.

4.2 Extent to which sanitary pads help to increase students' retention in secondary education

Headteachers were required to state the extent to which sanitary pads helped in students' retention. Their responses are shown in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Headteachers responses on sanitary pads and students' retention

category	frequency	Percent
Great extent	16	64
Less extent	5	20
rarely	3	12
Not at all	1	4
Total	25	100

Findings in Table 4.2 indicate that majority 16(64%) felt that sanitary pads influence students' retention to a great extent. In addition, 5(20%) of the headteachers opined that sanitary pads influence students' retention to a less extent. Further, 3(12%) felt that sanitary pads influence students' retention rarely and 1(4%) believed that sanitary towels did not influence students' retention at all. These findings are in agreement with Njue (2015) who reported that availability of sanitary towels influences students' attendance by girls.

4.3 Correlation between effective implementation of sanitary pads policy by the headteachers and students' retention

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between effective implementation of the sanitary pads policy by the headteachers and students' retention. The hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson's correlation and the results were given in table 4.3

Table 4.3: correlation between effective implementation of the sanitary pads policy and students' retention.

	Effective implementation of sanitary pads policy	Students' retention rate
Effective implementation of sanitary pads policy	Pearson correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	1 0.761 0.000
Students retention rate	N Pearson correlation Sig.(2-tailed) 0.761	25 25 1
	N	25

Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Results in table 4.3 show that there is a strong correlation between effective implementation of the sanitary pads policy and students' retention ($r(23) = 0.761$, $p = 0.00$). The null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis adopted. The implication here is that increase in effective implementation of the sanitary pads policy by the headteachers will lead to increase in students' retention rates.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that access to information on menstrual health and management is lacking in most of the schools. The study also concluded that the government sanitary towels initiative has impacted the girls educational access and participation through enabling them to be always in class, freely stand up and answer questions, mingled freely even among boys, concentrate in study activities, volunteer to dust the chalk-board and feel comfortable in class.

6. Recommendations

The study recommended that the government should enhance girls' retention in schools by scaling up the provision of sanitary pads. The headteachers should enlighten the parents and guardians on the significance of the provision of sanitary pads to girl children in order to retain them in schools.

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