

Influence of Home-Based Factors on Low Completion Rates in Secondary Schools in Kikuyu Sub-County

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to find out the influence of home-based factors on completion rates. Many previous ones have been conducted on the same and this one needed to ground-truth these findings in Kikuyu sub-county of Kiambu county, Kenya. This was achieved through a quantitative survey administered on 30 faculty and 140 students in 8 eight high-schools in the area. By and large, several of the home-based factors cited in other studies also applied to here, such as level of parental income, parental level of educational attainment, size of the household, gender roles and use of prohibited and unprohibited drugs at the household. Some factors carried more weight than others, especially parental income, which influences access to learning materials and nutritious food. A parent's level of education shapes their worldview and inspires them to motivate their children. Participants suggested a number of mitigation measures, some of which included broadening access to financial support to struggling parents.

INTRODUCTION

The role of education in the wider society cannot be gainsaid. Education plays an important role in human development by imparting valuable skills and knowledge that are critical for both individual and societal development. Prasad and Gupta 2020, listed a number of positive impacts that education has on society including creation of a democratic society, enhancing political stability, fostering economic prosperity, electing capable leaders and promoting tolerance in society. Education is especially vital at building social harmony and cohesion in pluralistic, heterogenous societies. Most importantly, in modern day, education is now considered an inalienable right that should be accessible for all.

According to the World Bank, secondary school completion rates in Kenya stood at 81.2% in 2016. There was no significant difference between the female and male gender (World Bank, 2024). Similarly, another study by the same institution for the entire continent found that the average rate of secondary school completion in African countries stood at 44.6% compared to the world average of 77.5% (World Bank, 2022). Latest figures show that the rate has risen gradually in the past decade in some counties but others especially those in the marginal areas, remains low. Thus, Kenya appears to be faring better than most other African countries. A number of factors have been cited as having a negative influence on completion rates including socio, economic and psychological factors (Ndivo, Mwanja, & Mumo, 2021). They range from economic ones like poverty and low-income to psycho-social ones like loneliness among students and bullying (Bru & Tvedt, 2023).

Statement of the problem

As noted earlier, education has a major role to play in societal development. There is a strong relationship observed between educational attainment and the level of a society's economic, cultural and political development. Its role is largely broad-based, such as in enabling economic development. However, it has been shown to perform more nuanced roles such as in helping societies become more reflective through learning from historical events of note, as well as drawing important life lessons from the said events. It is also important in building tolerance in multicultural and multilingual societies such as Kenya. Societies that do not learn from the past are bound to repeat it.

On the other hand, societies with low levels of completion rates and poor attendance are mired with various social challenges. Societal challenges that emanate from the home setting greatly affect the completion rates as well as students' performance and retention. Chief among these factors include parental income, parental level of education, parental use of prohibited and unprohibited drugs, gender of the head of the household and size of the household. Some factors such as parental level of income have an inordinate influence on completion rates since they influence parental involvement and provision such as educational materials. Familial and societal vices also have a negative bearing on completion rates. These include vices such as crime and drug use among parents, guardians and older siblings. It is conceivable that the influence of household factors may carry more weight than school-based influences such as peer pressure. Students from stable homes can readily overcome such social vices since they often have present and involved parents at home. Financial resources also shelter children from said social vices which greatly improves their likelihood of completing their school work. Beyond financial obligations, it has been shown that enrolling unschooled parents in educational programmes, creating community mentorship initiatives and school-family partnerships also contribute to better educational attainment outcomes for students.

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study:

This study sought to establish the possible impacts of persistently low rates of completion of secondary education in Kikuyu sub-county

Specific Objectives

1. What are the home-based factors influencing rate of completion in secondary schools?
2. What are the potential mitigation measures that can be applied to ameliorate the challenge?

Research design

The study deployed a descriptive survey which utilised the quantitative methods of data collection. The researcher sampled eight schools out of a total of twenty-five. The sample size comprised five principals/deputy principals, twenty-five teachers and one hundred and forty students. Data collection instruments used comprised questionnaires and structured interviews. The data collected was analysed using Microsoft Excel and then tabulated in form charts, tables and frequencies. In order to beef-up the results of the study, the researcher also added input from secondary sources from studies such as peer-reviewed journals. The study from which the results were drawn mainly focused on completion rates and captured the objective of this article as part of the probable mitigation measures.

Significance of the study

The researcher envisions that findings of the study may enrich the knowledge base on completion rates in Kenyan secondary schools, and that other scholars will identify possible other knowledge gaps worth exploring thanks to it. They are also hopeful that this new body of knowledge will contribute to the process of the formulation of policy and laws relating to the education sector. Potential beneficiaries of this piece of research include policy makers at the ministry of education, educational researchers and experts, parents and students. Most importantly, it is envisioned that recommendations that will be proposed in the study will guide interventions in the education sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakrashi and Frijters (2017) writing for the Asian Development Bank Institute highlight the importance of government investment in education to realize economic take-off. They noted that, on top of structural reforms and maintenance of law and order, investments in education, research and development were critical to the realization of economic take-off. There is a strong relationship between educational attainment and high rates of completion rates ergo economic prosperity. Poor, underdeveloped countries are often characterized by high

dropouts and retention rates. This disparity is also visible within countries with some richer regions showing positive metrics in comparison to poor ones. There is an observed positive feedback loop.

Beyond societal benefits, studies show a direct relationship between education and practical application in the outside world (Heri & Mkulu, 2022). In some instances, according to this study, high-school graduates were found to have used knowledge and skills gained in the school system in starting micro, small and medium enterprises. Whereas in rural Africa settings, high-school graduates might not set themselves apart from non-high-school ones, the same is not true in the western setting. Here, failure to complete high-school is often associated with high rates of unemployment and a high likelihood of being on welfare (Mitra, 2018).

Education has also been found to foster non-production benefits in society in areas such as health and promoting a proper citizenry. An earlier study found a negative correlation between crime, except white-collar, and education (Lochner, 2011). Education was found to decrease risk-taking in crime by raising the opportunity cost of such endeavours. It also helped individuals build networks that they could lean on to ascend in life.

Home-based factors affecting completion rates

To this end it behoves stakeholders to address issues that hinder students from realizing their full potential as far as educational attainment is concerned. In order to achieve this, it is important to address concerns that hinder completion rates as a crucial factor derailing full educational attainment in society. Factors influencing completion rates can be subdivided into school-based and home-based. This study shall focus on home-based factors.

Home-based factors have been shown to both negatively or positively affect completion rates. Some of the factors shown to negatively affect completion rates include a parent's income level, parents'/guardians' educational attainment, parents'/guardians' level of education, parents'/guardians' and community's attitudes towards education, among others. By and large, these factors tend to lean heavily on the level of income of the parent. Several studies have identified several barriers to education, such as direct costs, i.e., fees, clothing and books, as well as health and nutrition (Ayub, 2018) (Serem & Chebet, 2017).

Studies show that home-based factors inordinately affect students in developing countries. Poverty at home greatly impacts a student's ability to participate fully in the education process through complicating access to educational materials, uniform and even nutritious food for energy (Kirima, 2019). The study established that despite secondary education being offered free in day secondary schools by the government, students from poor families were unable to fully participate in it.

Also, in developing countries, girls are disproportionately more affected than boys and are at a greater risk of dropping out than boys.

In communities where use of prohibited and unprohibited drugs is normalised, the vice permeates right up to the family level. One study carried out in the central highlands of Kenya revealed that widespread abuse of drugs and alcohol had had a negative influence on the boy child (Macharia, 2011).

Alcohol abuse and other drug use in the homestead produces second order effects that negatively affects high school students. A study in the US found that parental substance abuse was associated with low children's educational attainment (Lowthian, 2022). They were characterised by truancy and poor performance. It doesn't help matters that drug and alcohol abuse have been normalised in society which has encouraged their extensive use. This has had a major negative effect on the male children especially in the absence of key role models such as fathers from their lives.

In the deeply patriarchal societies such as those in Africa, gender roles are cast in stone, especially in the rural settings. A parent, mostly the father, by decree, can allocate chores or any other domestic duty to their person of choice. Poverty, lack of proper infrastructure in these areas exacerbate the situation. While girls are disproportionately affected by this state of affairs, boys too are also affected. In the arid and semi-arid areas, boys are expected to look after cattle and goats, irrespective of the school calendar. While performing

household chores has been shown to be beneficial to a child's development, chores that take children away from school are detrimental to their school attendance, performance and probability of completion. On their part, girls are routinely married off for bride price and when married, cut off their education to become workers in these homes. In such settings, the pursuit of education is not prioritized since households commit most of their energy to economic activities or have failed to evolve to accommodate the pursuit of education. In extreme cases, children are also expected to contribute to the family income whereby they may be withdrawn from school to work in plantations, farms or in the fishing industry (Ayub, 2018). In many households in the rural areas, they are burdened by their contribution to the income generating activities of the family (Atambo, Mwebi, & Onderi, 2016). A father may also decide which child can attend school and which one cannot (Mwanza, 2019). Again, as in the case of house chores, there's a bias towards encouraging boys to attend school at the expense of the girls, despite the many years of affirmative action.

Studies have also shown that whether a household is female or male-headed also affects secondary school completion rates. Female headed households were found to be disproportionately affected in terms of income generation which affects student's performance and subsequent completion rates. A study conducted in Embu found that boys from female-headed households often failed to complete school, a factor that was blamed on the lack of a male figure in their lives. It was observed that they often became unruly, engaged in drug abuse and defied their mothers' wishes for their completing school (Ndegwa, 2019).

Potential mitigation measures to the factors affecting completion rates

As shown above, a number of factors were found to affect completion rates. Some of these include size of the household, parental income and level of education. Thus, by and large, mitigation measures need to address these factors from the onset. Chief among them is the need for parents to have a steady income that can cater to the needs of the parents. While education policy may not extend to income generating activities, actors can institute changes in the school system to accommodate needy students. For instance, boarding schools offer a safe environment for students from challenging backgrounds, where they are sheltered from problems experienced at home that distract them from school work.

Additionally, society should also try to make concerted efforts to institute changes in order to reduce vulnerabilities to students. In this regard, institutional and legal changes that make it tighten the noose on alcohol abuse, domestic violence and other vices should be enforced by relevant authorities. These efforts should also extend to child labour and excessive chores given at home. While it is prudent to expose teenagers to work at an early age, it should be controlled to avoid overburdening them with excess labour. Parents who abuse their children should be correct in such a manner that does not jeopardize their ability to provide for their children or destroy their relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was meant to investigate the influence of home-based factors on low completion rates in Kikuyu sub-county. It was the opinion of the respondents, both teachers and students, that home-based factors negatively affected completion rates in the area and led to socioeconomic challenges. There was a convergence of thoughts between the two groups on some factors such as parental income and divergence on others such as household chores, where students thought they had influence but teachers did not. There was no marked difference between boarding and day-school students on various issues.

Generally, they observed that low completion rates have society-wide negative impacts. Students who fail to complete high-school education are effectively locked out of the employment system. The global economy is undergoing a transformation christened the 'fourth industrial revolution' which necessitates the need to have at least a high-school education. Thus, in order for individuals to participate effectively and productively in this new reality, at least a high school education and some tertiary training is required.

The following section focuses on home-based factors affecting completion rates. Some of these factors include parental level of education, parental level of income, size of the household and gender of the head of the household.

Home-based Factors	Teachers (n=23)			Students (n=127)		
	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)	Undecided (%)	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)	Undecided (%)
Parental level of education	22	72	6	17	79	4
Parental/HOH level of income	52	35	13	60	26	12
Gender of household head	0	100	0	51	28	23
Size of household/number of children	0	100	0	15	71	14
Age of the head of household	12	81	7	25	53	18
Students' involvement in household economic activities	36	56	8	76	12	12
Influence of chores on studies/drop-out	22	78	0	47	35	18
Parents/guardians substance abuse	27	73	0	38	49	10

Table 2.0 Shows responses from both teachers and students on home-centric factors that influence completion rates; a few questions in the survey were for each group alone

In order to get more nuanced information on the phenomenon, the study further analysed the response on the basis of whether students in the survey attended a boarding school or a day school.

Home-based Factors	Day-scholars (n=94)			Boarders (n=33)		
	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)	Undecided (%)	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (%)	Undecided (%)
Parental level of education	12	87	1	33	54	12
Parental/HOH level of income	60	28	12	63	21	15
Gender of household head	45	29	24	57	24	18
Size of household/number of children	13	70	16	15	78	9
Age of household head	46	29	24	27	60	12
Students' involvement in household economic activities	48	35	16	48	39	9
Influence of chores on studies/drop-out	41	47	11	27	63	9
Parents/guardians' substance abuse	50	32	18	24	48	27

As showed by our results, both students and teachers agreed or disagreed on some causal factors while they also had divergent views on others. As an example, a large number of students (72%) and teachers (79%) largely disagreed on the effect of head of household's/parent's educational attainment on a student's probability of completing high school. On the other hand, a paltry fifth of both students (17%) and teachers (22%) surveyed agreed that it had an influence on the same.

When we examine students on their own, we found that an overwhelming number of day-scholars (87%) disagreed that it had an influence, while slightly more than half (54%) of boarders disagreed. On the other hand, a small minority of day-scholars (12%) were in agreement, as well as about a third (33%) of boarders. A study in Dadaab sub-county disapproved the views of both students and teachers in this paper, since it established that students whose parents had attained at least post-primary to higher education were more likely complete school (Kobane, Mutegi, Mbeche, & Chepkonga, 2025). This was due to strong parental involvement, academic support and positive attitudes toward education. Since studies also show that good performing students are more likely to complete their studies, then we can infer that a parent's educational attainment is a critical impact on a student's completion rate.

On the matter on the influence of parental/head of household level of income on completion rates, both teachers and students there was convergence on thought as both students and teachers agreed that a relationship could be found between income and completion rates. Roughly half of teachers (52%) and two thirds of students (60%) agreed with the statement. On the contrary, a third of teachers (35%) and a fifth of students (26%) disagreed. Further, a small minority of both teachers (13%) and students (12%), were undecided. A more granular analysis of responses from students found that both boarders (63%) and day-scholars (60%) also agreed with the statement, while 21% and 28% of each disagreed. A plethora of studies reviewed by this paper appeared to support the views of the respondents. Parental income was found to be highly instrumental on both a student's performance and by extension, completion rates. A study published by the LSE that examined both the impact of parental income and level of education established that the former had little impact compared to the latter, especially if the parent had a steady income (Chevalier, Harmon, O'Sullivan, & Walker, 2005). In African countries such as Kenya, a parent's income is a great predictor of a student's academic outcome especially for girls (Aregae & Kikechi, 2023). This phenomenon is supported by a study in Rwanda that found that beside completion rates, parental income also influenced performance by ensuring that students were well resourced with materials such as books which greatly influenced their performance and subsequent completion rates (Ntahemuka, 2025).

On the matter of household size, all teachers (100%) of teacher and two thirds of students (71%) disagreed that it had any influence on completion rates. Contrary to that, only a paltry (14%) of students interviewed agreed.

When it came status of boarders or day-school, there was a massive similarity to the overall number of students. Boarders supported those of the entire group with 78% of the former and 70% in disagreement. On the other hand, 15% of boarders and 13% of day-scholars were in agreement. However, one study in Cameroon showed that big households were associated with lower educational attainment and completion rates, especially for secondary and higher education in comparison to small families (Tambi & Ewane, 2019). A similar study in Uganda showed that children from big households were likely to never enrol in school in the first place (Kuno, Hein, Frankel, & Kim, 2021). Bigger families also struggle to provide enough academic materials as well as provide supervision for the students, which further complicates the children's ability to complete their studies (Olagundoye & Adebile, 2019).

The paper also looked into the influence of gender of the head of the household on completion rates. All teachers (100%) surveyed together with 28% of students disagreed while 51% agreed. The rest of the students (23%) disagreed. Slightly more students in boarding schools (57%) tended to agree with the statement in comparison to day-scholars (45%). On the other hand, a fifth of boarders (24%) and a third of day-scholars (29%), disagreed.

Studies do not support the statement in its entirety i.e. determining completion rates, but one study in Nigeria showed that female-headed households experienced more constraint in terms of resources in handling their children's education (Bammeke, 2010). However, there were no studies showing gender of the household-head having influence on the completion rates but on student's performance owing largely to disparities in earning the potential of both genders.

The study also examined the influence of student's involvement in a household's economic activity. A little more than half of the teachers surveyed (56%) and a paltry number (12%) of students disagreed that student's involvement led to lower completion rates. On the other hand, 78% of students and a third of teachers (36%)

agreed with the statement while 12% of students and 8% of teachers survey were undecided. It is instructive that research conducted on the subject shows that involvement in household economic activities exert negative influences on students in their studies. Our survey mirrored these findings with students showing greater agreement than their teachers who thought that it had no influence. This phenomenon had especially been observed in informal settlements and in rural areas with lucrative cash crops such as miraa and among pastoralist communities.

This study also focused on the probable influence of household chores on completion rates among high school students. It established that two thirds (78%) of teachers and a third (35%) of students disagreed with the statement, while a fifth (22%) of teachers and slightly below half (47%) of students agreed that chores might lead to lower completion rates. It also found that slightly less than a fifth of students (18%) were undecided. Rural-based students were seen as the most affected, especially girls who deputise their mothers in the kitchen and helping child rearing whenever there were younger siblings. A study conducted in Ewaso Kedong in Kajiado county, Kenya reinforced this point of view, establishing that girls were often burdened with domestic chores which limited their study time and subsequent school attendance and eventual completion (Karisa & Mwikamba, 2024). On the contrary, boys were less affected by the same.

Finally, on the influence of substance abuse among parents and guardians on completion rates, 27% of teachers surveyed and 38% of students were in agreement while 73% of teachers and 49% of students disagreed. A further 13% of students were undecided. On this issue, day-scholars differed with their boarding counterparts with half of them (50%) agreeing with the statement while 24% of boarders disagreed. On the other hand, a third of day-scholars (38%) and nearly half of boarders (48%) disagreed with the statement. Our findings are contrary to studies available that show the adverse effects of substance abuse on a student's educational experience. One study that reviewed literature on the subject found that such students were more likely to experience behavioural challenges such as truancy, suspensions, absenteeism and early school departure (Lowthian, 2022). Another study in Denmark showed that students from households where there was substance abuse were more likely not to continue with their education (Frederiksen, Hesse, Brummer, & Pedersen, 2022).

Thus, the study established that home-based factors stand in the way of achieving universal completion rates in Kikuyu sub-county. Parental income levels especially were found to carry a lot of weight in determining a student's success. As shown by studies carried out elsewhere in Kenya, even the presence of free secondary education was not enough for some households that still lacked access to studying materials and nutritious food.

CONCLUSION

In light of the issues raised in this article, the researcher advocates for a sustained high level of completion rate to ensure as many people attain a high-school education. It is clear that low completion rates have negative impacts on society through the entrenchment of poverty by reducing opportunities available for such students. Kikuyu sub-county bears the brunt of this phenomenon owing to its unique challenges such as diminishing arable land sizes and rapid urbanisation. Persistently low completion rates in the area mean that students from Kikuyu sub-county might not be in a position to secure employment that would facilitate their movement up the economic ladder. In addressing low completion rates, society attempts to ameliorate the situation by equipping students with the right knowledge and skills in readiness for a dynamic and intensely competitive labour market. In a globalized economy, competition for the few lucrative opportunities is stiff and only the best trained can take advantage of these new job openings. The participants stressed the need for secondary education especially for boys in order to equip them with the right tools to cope with this dynamism.

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