

Examine the Reasons Behind the Academic Low Performance of Female Pupils at Elengaz Mixed Primary School in Khartoum State, Sudan.

¹ Shadia Abdelrahim Mohamed Daoud, ² Rawia Alfadil Sharif Mahmoud

¹School of Rural Extension, Education and Development, Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan.

¹The Regional Institute of Gender, Diversity, Peace, and Rights, Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the elements influencing the academic performance of female students at Elengaz Mixed Primary School in Khartoum State, Sudan. To meet the study's objectives, both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized for data collection. Information was gathered from 24 female students and 5 teachers through group discussions. The findings revealed several factors impacting the academic performance of female pupils, including personal, socioeconomic, and school-related factors.

The majority of school pupils come from conflict-affected and underdeveloped regions, with their families displaced to the outskirts of Khartoum. Teachers and female students have identified girls' participation in domestic chores as a primary factor contributing to their low academic performance. The frequent absenteeism of female students is viewed as a significant challenge to their educational success, with involvement in household responsibilities and the school environment cited as major causes of this issue. During group discussions, girls expressed that gender discrimination leads to a preference for educating boys over girls. However, all female students expressed a desire to continue their education if provided with the necessary resources.

The research found that various complex factors contributed to the underperformance of girls. It suggests that efforts should be made to increase parental awareness, particularly among mothers, regarding the significance of education, as well as to create more supportive and accommodating school environments for girls.

BACKGROUND

Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often exhibit lower academic performance and higher rates of school absenteeism. These issues of poor performance and frequent absences are interconnected and possess unique gender-related dimensions. Inadequate academic results can lead to repetition, which may lead to feelings of frustration and subsequently increase the risk of students dropping out of school (Shadia Daoud 2021). Research indicates that female students face numerous obstacles, a lack of parental support, and gender discrimination, all of which can negatively influence their academic success (Ketema, S., Shukri, A., and Shimelis, B., 2022; Shadia Daoud, 2021).

Institutional factors, such as the availability of support services and the presence of gender biases within educational settings, also influence their academic performance. Additionally, various factors contribute to low achievement levels (Aemiro, 2018; Shadia Abdelrahim M. Daoud and Abdel Raouf Suleiman Bello, 2014).

Shadia Daoud 2021 and Enose M.W. Simatwa, T.M.O Ayodo (2011) emphasize that gender plays a significant role in the underachievement of female students. The issue of inadequate academic performance among girls is considerable and can lead to their withdrawal from school. It is essential to explore the underlying causes and

consequences of girls' dropout rates. Gender-related factors may also impact the attendance of female students. While numerous studies have investigated the reasons behind girls' dropout, a significant lack of research has focused on the elements that contribute to their poor performance, which may ultimately lead to their departure from the educational system. Various studies have identified multiple factors affecting the academic success and achievement levels of female students (Enose M.W. Simatwa, T.M.O. Ayodo, 2011).

This study, conducted at Elengaz Mixed Primary School, in a severely disadvantaged community of displaced individuals in the Umabada area of Khartoum State, aims to investigate the factors that contribute to, as well as the reasons for, poor academic performance among female primary school students.

Study Objectives:

- To identify female students who exhibit low academic performance within the school.
- To analyze the underlying reasons for the low performance of female pupils.
- To evaluate the factors related to absenteeism as perceived by both teachers and female students.
- To examine the perceptions of pupils with low performance on the importance of education
- To explore gender-related causes of low academic performance among female pupils.

METHODOLOGY:

The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data in order to fulfill the study's objectives. A sample comprising teachers from the school and 24 female students with low academic performance was selected. The selection of these 24 female pupils was facilitated by the headmaster and class tutors, using criteria based on absenteeism and academic performance. The head teacher, along with four class teachers (two male and two female), were chosen from Elengaz Mixed Primary School.

The research employed focused group discussions as a method for interviewing both teachers and students. The following topics were addressed during the teachers' group discussion:

- Student demographics by gender
- Geographic origins of the students
- Common challenges faced by girls that contribute to their underperformance in school
- Factors contributing to girls' absenteeism in relation to their academic performance

Additionally, the discussion with pupils who exhibited high absenteeism covered the following points:

- The significance of education
- The concept of gender
- Discrimination between boys and girls, both in school and at home
- Perspectives on early marriage
- The role of girls in household responsibilities
- Time allocated for completing homework. The school environment
- Cultural and traditional influences affecting them

RESULTS

Findings from the Teacher group discussion

Background of Students in a Mixed School

The headmaster of the school shared the following details:

Elengaz Primary Mixed School was founded in 1994 with the objective of supporting impoverished communities impacted by conflict and natural disasters. The institution employs five teachers, consisting of three permanent male staff members and two female part-time educators. Currently, the school has an enrollment of 701 students, comprising 382 males and 319 females (see Table 1).

Table (1) Number of students According to gender

Class	Male	Female	Total
First	35	50	85
Second	56	40	96
Third	56	54	110
Fourth	57	49	106
Fifth	57	55	112
Sixth	37	29	66
Seventh	49	18	67
Eighth	35	24	59
Total	382	319	701

Source field work 2021

The majority of students come from conflict-affected and underdeveloped regions (refer to Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of students based on their place of origin:

State	Number of students	Percentage %
Southern Kordfan	205	28
Darfur	210	29
Southern Sudan	150	21
Blue Nile	40	5
Other states	127	17
Total	732	100

Academic Performance of Female Students:

All teachers involved in the group discussion concurred that female student's exhibit lower academic performance. The engagement of girls in household responsibilities was identified as a primary factor contributing to this issue. One teacher remarked, "In general, girls dedicate significantly more time to household tasks compared to boys." Another teacher added, "These chores are frequently undertaken by girls, either early in the morning before school or in the evenings after school."

Absenteeism among Female Students:

The frequent absence of female students is regarded as a significant obstacle to the continuation of girls' education, as noted by the teachers. They elaborated on the factors contributing to girls' absenteeism, stating:

"The school facilities, particularly the latrines, are inadequate, with only three latrines available for both boys and girls, and lacking doors. This situation makes girls uncomfortable using them, leading them to return home for this purpose." Another teacher remarked, "Many mothers of these girls work long hours outside the area, necessitating that their daughters stay home to care for younger siblings."

Results of group discussion with girls with low performance

Characteristics of the female pupils participated on group discussions

A total of 24 pupils from grades five to eight participated in the study, with ages ranging from 10 to 19 years. Among them, 10 pupils were aged between 10 and 13 years, while 8 pupils fell within the 13 to 19 age range. All participants came from economically disadvantaged families, predominantly headed by females (mothers), and their parents were largely illiterate, lacking the ability to assist them with their studies.

Gender-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance:

When asked about their feelings regarding their gender, all the girls conveyed a positive sentiment, stating, "We feel good about being female." However, they also noted that being female poses challenges to continuing their education. Some expressed the belief that "education is only for boys, as girls must marry at an early age."

The Significance of Education

Out of 18 respondents, 8 acknowledged the overall importance of education, while 10 specifically highlighted its critical role in the following areas:

- Promoting gender equality between boys and girls
- Enhancing per capita income
- Fostering human, personal, and future development

The impact of education on women's empowerment

Among the surveyed girls, 4 out of 18 believed that education does not contribute to women's empowerment, although they were unable to articulate their reasoning. In contrast, 7 students expressed a positive view regarding the influence of education on women's empowerment, providing **the following justifications:**

- It enhances employment opportunities and income.
- It broadens knowledge.
- It fosters a better understanding of life.
- It encourages participation in decision-making processes.

Discrimination Faced by Girls

Most of the students surveyed indicated that girls face discrimination within their households, especially when compared to their male siblings. They highlighted several manifestations of this discrimination, such as:

- Girls are often expected to comply with their brothers' demands.
- Educational opportunities are more often granted to boys than to girls.
- Girls are frequently required to stay at home.
- Financial resources and clothing are more commonly provided to boys.
- Girls tend to take on a greater share of household responsibilities, leaving boys with more time to concentrate on their studies.

Girls and Household Responsibilities:

The girls interviewed indicated that they were tasked with various homemaking duties, including food preparation, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for younger siblings. It is crucial to recognize that as a girl matures, she is frequently expected to assume greater responsibilities in managing the household. This increased burden can consume significant time during a phase when her educational demands are likely to be more rigorous and require heightened concentration. Such pressures may adversely impact her academic performance, potentially diminishing her motivation. Subpar performance can result in the need for grade repetition, and the ensuing frustration may ultimately lead to school dropout.

Contribution to Family Income

Some girls supported their family finances by selling ice cream or working as domestic servants.

Time for Homework

Thirteen out of eighteen girls reported that they do not have sufficient time to complete their homework due to household responsibilities.

Impact of School Environment on Girls' Education

All participants indicated that the absence of latrines is a primary reason for dropping out of school.

The lack of access to water is also seen as a significant barrier that contributes to school dropout rates.

The high cost of breakfast forces many girls to travel long distances to find food, resulting in some not eating before returning to school.

Inspiration for Continuing Education

All students expressed a desire to pursue further education if adequate facilities were available.

Views on Early Marriage

The majority of girls hold views on early marriage that differ from those of their parents, while a small number support the idea of early marriage.

Future Aspirations

Their aspirations include obtaining an education, securing employment, and for some, attending university.

Understanding of Gender

Only the girls interviewed were aware of the concept of gender, while most had never encountered the term before.

Traditional Practices

Twelve out of eighteen girls identified early marriage as a significant traditional practice that jeopardizes their educational pursuits.

The Home as a Space for Women:

The girls who were interviewed expressed the belief that the home should not solely be regarded as a space for women; they should also be afforded the opportunity to engage in public decision-making and community activities.

Other Challenges:

All participants reported encountering various challenges, including school fees and inadequate qualifications of teachers.

Recommendations for Enhancing School Petition:

The girls collectively proposed several suggestions to make schools more appealing:

- Implementing gender-segregated classrooms,
- Enhancing classroom decor, and
- Establishing separate restrooms for girls.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Girls are often assigned household chores, a responsibility that is not typically expected of boys. This expectation can detract from the time available for academic pursuits, ultimately impacting the educational performance of girls. Research indicates that the significant burden of domestic work on girls correlates with lower school attendance rates (Hucks, V. 2011).

Engaging in household tasks consumes both time and energy, which are essential for students. Prolonged periods spent on chores can lead to exhaustion, reduce the time allocated for studying, limit sleep, and impair cognitive abilities necessary for effective learning. Children who are tasked with a greater share of household responsibilities may exhibit lower academic performance (Pokou Edouard Abou, 2016).

The connection between school attendance, academic achievement, and work is generally viewed as detrimental. Work obligations can interfere with education by consuming a significant portion of children's time (Heady, 2003).

Household chores require considerable physical effort, leaving girls with insufficient energy for attending school or engaging in effective study. Consequently, fatigue and a lack of recreational activities that promote physical, social, and emotional growth can lead to minimal mental stimulation, resulting in neglect of academic responsibilities (Binder & Scrogin, 1999).

A girl may inevitably feel inferior when societal norms and familial expectations suggest that she is of lesser value than a boy. Her sense of identity is shaped when her opportunities are restricted, and she is labeled as second-rate. This aligns with findings from Shadia Daoud's 2017 study on girls' education in Sudan, which revealed similar outcomes.

The frequent absenteeism of female students is recognized by educators as a significant factor contributing to poor academic performance and poses a challenge to the continuation of girls' education, as noted by Murat AKKUŞ (2022) and supported by UNICEF (2013). Absenteeism ranks as one of the two primary reasons for class repetition, alongside academic failure. Various studies have identified multiple factors contributing to student absenteeism (Ozbas, 2010). Among these, adverse socio-economic conditions within families are particularly influential, with financial difficulties playing a critical role. Additionally, parents' negative attitudes towards education and their failure to prioritize it, as highlighted by Gomleksiz & Ozdas (2013) and Kearney (2008), often correlate with lower levels of parental education.

The research explored female students' perceptions regarding the significance of education, which may contribute to their absenteeism and underperformance. They emphasized the importance of education in achieving gender balance between boys and girls (Tabreek Somani, 2017; UNICEF, 2012). Gender discrimination also affects girls' academic performance, as they often bear a heavier burden of household responsibilities, leaving boys with more time for homework, a finding supported by Shadia Daoud.

Furthermore, during group discussions, students identified aspects of the school environment that contribute to female absenteeism, such as inadequate sanitation facilities and a lack of water (Keerti J, Pravin Y, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

The research indicated that various complex factors contributed to the underperformance of girls. A significant factor is absenteeism, which is influenced by gender-related issues such as parental perceptions of girls' education and discrimination, ultimately leading to poor academic outcomes and potential dropouts. Additionally, the involvement of girls in household chores consumes their time and energy, detracting from their ability to complete homework. The school environment also plays a role in absenteeism and low performance. In summary, while female students are eager to pursue their education, gender-related factors both within and outside the school setting hinder their academic success. All female students are motivated to continue their education and can achieve better academic performance if provided with the necessary resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is essential to raise parental awareness regarding the significance of girls' education. Additionally, alleviating the burden of household chores on girls by educating mothers about the negative impact of these responsibilities on their daughters' academic performance is crucial.

Creating a more "girl-friendly" school environment is a vital first step toward increasing girls' enrollment. However, retaining girls in school requires a multifaceted approach. This includes enhancing physical infrastructure, such as providing separate toilets; ensuring the privacy and safety of girls in line with cultural norms; employing teaching methods that challenge gender stereotypes and promote learning among girls; offering trained female teachers as role models, particularly for older students; and involving the community in school management.

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