Cultural Beliefs that Influences the Poor Performance of KCSE Examinations among Candidates in Turkana County Secondary Schools, Kenya

Emily Keny Kirwok
P.O. Box, 914-30200, Moi’s Bridge, Kenya
emilykirwoks@yahoo.com

Benjamin Towett Koross
P.O. Box, 192-30200, Kitale, Kenya
benjaminkoross@gmail.com

Abstract
Poor performance among secondary school learners is attributed to different views portrayed by scholars. The effect of poor performance among learners has jeopardised the literacy level among the communities living in the Turkana County as revealed by results of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE.) Being an arid region, there are many factors that contribute to poor academic performance. However research on poor academic performance has not been conclusive as much has not been done to establish cultural beliefs that influence performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary education. The mean score for KCSE have been below average ranging from 6.61 to 3.60. The objective of the study was to establish Cultural Beliefs that Influences the Poor Performance of KCSE Examinations Among secondary school students. Descriptive survey research design was used. The target population was (170) teachers and (2,490) learners from the 8 public secondary schools having form one to form four. Instruments of data collection were questionnaires and interview schedules. Content validity was done through the contributions of experts in the Department of Educational Planning and Management of Baraton University in Kenya. Pilot study was carried out to establish the reliability of the instruments. Reliability co-efficient was calculated and found to be 0.67 for teachers and 0.65 for students. Data was analysed by use of SPSS and presented in frequency tables. Qualitative data was put into categorical themes as they emerged. The findings revealed that 6 (75%) principals said cultural practices affect performance and 2(25%) principal hold the view that cultural practices do not affect education. The school principals revealed that “edonga” dance, traditional weddings of early marriages and parental influence of choosing wives for their men after dropping out of school, influence students’ academic performance. The study thus recommends that the government should create awareness about the importance of education and empowerment for people living in arid areas through sensitization.

Key words: socio - cultural beliefs, performance

Introduction
For decades, ministries of education in different countries have routinely collected and published information on how education systems are working and changing. These education systems are generally quantitative; the number of schools and facilities, the enrolment rate, student - teacher ratio, dropouts and completions rate. However, this mass of information contains little data collected that provides substantial information on student’s performance in
arid areas especially Turkana county. This gap probably shows why it is difficult to access the quality of education provided by the government and therefore to achieve this, measures must be introduced to provide greater understanding about what teachers are doing and how they are performing. Therefore, ongoing assessment of students’ performance through examinations is a factor to improving quality (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2001).

Since the 1960’s in Kenya, education at all levels has been rapidly expanded, particularly in densely settled agricultural areas. On the other hand, African Pastoral societies in semi-arid and arid areas are left behind in their school participation and performance. Eshiwani (1993) note that pastoral societies of Northern Kenya and the Rift Valley were the most educationally disadvantaged in the country. The Borana, Rendile and Somali of North Eastern Province rank last in school participation (2%); followed by the Turkana, Samburu, Masai, and various Kalenjin groups (Pokot & Marakwet) residing in Rift Valley (39%); the school participation rates of both provinces were below the national average (58%) and much below that of educationally advantage central (94%) and western (71%) provinces.

The Kenya National examination Council give reports about results of public examinations, which are Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations are widely used by further and higher education and by the employers to select and guide applicants. In Kenya where secondary and higher education have been and are still restricted to a very small minority, examinations have played a critical role in selecting the minority who would be allowed to continue with their education therefore by improving their economic and social status in life. Contributing to the functions of examinations, Okechi and Asiachi (1992) affirms, “National examinations have been used for many years as a yardstick to measure achievements of curriculum objectives.” The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) awards certificate of public examinations for form four candidates who do the exam at the end of their education at secondary school level.

In this study the researcher found out the cultural beliefs influencing the academic performance in Turkana District. In conjunction to that, Abdi (2002) has blamed poverty and lack of incentives for the region’s poor performance in national examinations as reported in the Daily Nation News paper (February, 28 2002 pg.8). He asked the government to equip schools for the nomadic community, give students more bursaries and ensure that pastoralists’ children are not sent away from school for failing to pay fees. Considering this problem Garand (Member of Parliament) challenged leaders and educationists to set up an independent committee to look into the woes affecting education. The interest to investigate Cultural Beliefs that Influences the Performance of KCSE Examinations arose from the concern of the researcher over the general poor results in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in the secondary schools in Turkana County as indicated by the KCSE results shown in table 1 below. Table 1 show the KCSE results for the years 2000, 2001, 2002 consecutively. The names on the table shown are fictitious for the purpose of confidentiality otherwise these are the true records from the District Education Officer’s office.
Table 1 KCSE Results by schools and years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL/YEAR</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LORUM</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIELO</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUPAE</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOKIRA</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDIRIO</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LETIAN</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LELIAN</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERULO</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement of the Problem

Turkana County is one of the poorest regions in Kenya. It is mainly inhabited by the nomadic pastoralists. Their lifestyle is characterised by movement of people with animals from place to place, in search of water and grazing land. This nomadic lifestyle is believed to be influencing poor performance on examinations and little has been done establish the cultural beliefs affecting students’ performance in examinations. Hence there was need to identify the cultural beliefs that have contributed to the declining academic performance in secondary schools in Turkana county.

Objective of the Study

Identify cultural beliefs that influences the poor performance of KCSE Examinations

Literature Review

Numerous researches have been carried out to identify the factors contributing to academic performance. Some of the researchers cited inadequate facilities, poor economic background and school discipline. However, it is important to establish whether the same factors applied to the area stated. Report by the teachers from the district complained about the boarding facilities, the issue is boarding facilities meant for the locals are provided to other students from other districts.

Research has been done by different scholars concerning children in arid region and their education. Eshiwani (1988) quoted Kinyanjui as saying;

“The movement of children from more developed districts to those educationally backward districts is a phenomenon, so that public funds expended on education in a particular district may not just benefit the children of that district. Theoretically there may be nothing wrong with school children moving from one district to another, especially since national integration is one of the educational goals, but problems occur when it tends to deprive communities of educational opportunities within their own districts (pg7).”

The above observation reveal that communities with their cultural practices tendencies impact the way children participate in education, therefore educators need to understand individual histories and ideologies regarding education and learning as well as the cultural patterns and beliefs of groups (Rosenberg, Westling & McLeskey, 2010. From the observation made far as education is concerned, teachers need to ensure that they incorporate methods of teaching in their classrooms that accommodate various beliefs and cultural
notions students bring to school. This requires each teacher to develop an understanding of their student's culture, but also to know who their students are as individuals. It is also important for teachers to ensure that they treat all students the same and to have high expectations for each one, so that they will all strive to reach their full potential and achieve their goals in life.

Further studies have revealed that cultural tendencies impact the way children participate in education. Thus, educators need to understand individual histories and ideologies regarding education and learning as well as the cultural patterns and beliefs of groups. However the influence of culture on beliefs about education, the value of education, and participation styles cannot be overestimated, many Asian students, for example, tend to be quiet in class, and making eye contact with teachers is considered inappropriate for many of these children (Bennett & Taylor, 2003) In contrast, most European American children are taught to value active classroom discussion and to look teachers directly in the eye to show respect, while their teachers view students' participation as a sign of engagement and competence.

Methodology
Research Design
The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Kombo and Tromp (2006) observe that descriptive survey research is the most suitable design while collecting data about people’s attitude and opinions on education or social issues. This research design is the most appropriate and flexible enough to permit the considerations of many different aspects such as enrolment, dropouts and retention of pupils (Best & Kahn, 2003).

Description of the Research Area
The study area was Turkana County in the Rift Valley Province, in the Northern part of Kenya. It is about 700kms from Nairobi, the capital city to Lodwar town, which is Turkana’s County Headquarter and main urban centre. Internationally it borders Sudan to the North, Ethiopia to the Northeast, and Uganda to the West. It is surrounded by the following Counties within Kenya; West Pokot, Baringo, Samburu, and Marsabit. It is divided into 16 administrative divisions as follows, Central, Kalokol, Lokitang, Lapur, Kipiash, Lokichogio, Oropoi, Kakuma Loima Turkwel, Lokichar, Katilu, Kainuk, Lokori, Lomolo and Kerio.

The County has a population of 497,779 most of the population is nomadic pastoralists who constantly move from place to place looking for pasture and water for their animals and people. Land is communally owned resulting into overgrazing in well-watered areas while other areas are prone to serious incidents of soil erosion. High population concentration is found in urban areas and around shores of Lake Turkana.

Climatically, the district is classified as 100% arid and semi arid land with dry weather and high temperatures ranging from 24-40 degrees centigrade. This is a region with low and seasonally distributed rainfall. There are intermittent streams called laghas. These streams become very active and filled with fast moving water during rainy seasons and sometimes they cause havoc during heavy down pours, this carries away the dwellings hut known as manyattas which are built in groups to form villages. The study covered all the secondary schools in the County, which transverse across the whole area. There are altogether eight secondary schools in the whole district. The people in this region depend mainly on relief food. Many children die of hunger and malnutrition. Marketing systems are inefficient; they believe that animals are sources of pride not a source of income. Both man and animals are
exposed to tropical diseases, which claim lives of most of the children (Ministry of National Planning and Development report, 2012).

**Target Population**
The eight secondary schools have staffing level of one hundred and seventy (170) teachers and students’ population of two thousand four hundred and ninety nine (2,490). The schools have formed one to from four. The targeted population of study comprised eight secondary schools in Turkana District. All the teachers, students and the education officer were the main subjects of the study.

**Sample Size and Sampling Technique**
The researcher used the recommendation by Bryman (2004) who observed that, the cases where the entire population numbers six or seven, a 100% sample size is desirable .So all the eight (8) schools were selected for the study comprising of all the eight head teachers, one hundred and sixty two teachers and all the form four students were selected using stratified and purposive sampling technique. The form fours were chosen because they have been in school for a longer period, furthermore form four students understand and respond to the questions appropriately.

**Data Collection Instrument**
In the questionnaire, the respondent was expected to use the Five -Point Likert scale where the highest score meant strongly agree and the lowest score meant no idea.

**The interview schedule**
It was administered to the District Education Officer. It contained seven objective questions. The purpose was to find out the government’s future plans for education in Turkana District. The questions were mainly on the role of the government in improving education in the district. All interviews were informally conducted, after the researcher was through with the students. The researcher began the interviews by having an informal talk with the teachers. In the process, the interview was incorporated in the talk. Because of the cordial relations created a teacher was willing and free to give responses to the items contained in the interview schedule. This was also meant to get information that may not have been included in the questionnaire.

**Validity of the Instruments**
Validity was assured through the contributions of experts in the Department of Educational Planning and Management of University of Eastern Africa (Baraton).

**Reliability of the Instruments**
Pilot study was carried out to establish the reliability of the instruments. Test –retest method was employed to obtain the reliability of the instruments at 0.05 level of confidence. The reliability coefficient ‘r’ was 0.67 and above which shows that the instruments were reliable.

**The Pilot Study**
A pilot study was organized to take place at Marich Secondary School in West Pokot bordering Turkana County. The school bears the same conditions as the other schools in Turkana County; this school was not included in the study. Twenty students and fourteen teachers participated in the pilot study. The fourteen teachers answered the teacher’s questionnaire while the twenty students answered the student’s questionnaire. The
questionnaires so answered were analysed and the result kept for purpose of comparing the results with second questionnaire, which was given to the participants in the pilot after two weeks. The results were analysed the second time. The two results were compared. Reliability co-efficient was calculated and found to be 0.67 for teachers and 0.65 for students. The questionnaire was therefore considered reliable enough to trigger constant responses every time it is used.

Analysis of Data

Data on the collected questionnaires were extracted and fed into the computer. The researcher used the SPSS package to run the analysis, which was used for interpretation. Descriptive statistics were used in the data analysis, by use of frequencies tables and percentages.

Results and Discussion

According to the teachers’ observation, it revealed that most of students who enrolled in form one had very low marks, these are the students drawn from the primary schools in the county and a number of them hardly work harder to improve on their academic performance. Another finding from the teachers indicates that the top students in class often transfer to other schools outside the county. It has also been noted that negative attitudes from parents have been cited as a major cause of low enrolment and high dropout rates for girls. Because traditional beliefs segregate roles along gender lines, most parents have not accepted the need to equip girls with skills and knowledge through education to enable them function effectively in the modern world. Hence, the girls generally perform poorly in school. The table below shows the response concerning their view whether or not culture influence learning in schools. The respondents who are the school principals were asked whether cultural activities influenced performance and the findings are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Number and percentage of principals indicating cultural activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid percent</th>
<th>Cumulative percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drawing from the table cultural practices contribute to the poor performance in the school as indicated 6(75%) principals said yes and 2(25%) principals said no. In the questionnaire there was additional information on this section that is; to what extent culture has contributed to the poor performance. The findings from interview schedule for principals revealed that “edonga” dance, traditional wedding and parental care influence performance in school and National examinations. It was further revealed that students do not give much attention to school work and therefore leave school to attend the “edonga” dances. In this dance that is where the men choose their wives to be and even others drop out of school and get married. It was also noted that students marry and go to school. Once the student has a family it is difficult to concentrate in class work hence poor performance.

The role models

Respondents who were students were asked to indicate whether they have role models in their societies. The findings revealed that many boys looked into the people working in the defence army forces, while girls looked into their mothers at home as their major role models. The implication of this response indicates that most boys are not highly motivated to work
hard to join institutions of higher learning. Most army people in their region are not highly educated. After their form four National examination they join the armed forces immediately and get satisfied with the job despite straining during training period which is less than one year. The highest level of education is Certificate of Secondary Education with a C+ or below. They aim at attaining this grade and drop out to join the army.

Similarly, girls play the role of mothers and yet they are currently being attracted to join the army. The few who have joined are perceived as doing well. Thus most girls are anxious to reach an educational level that would allow them to join the army. In an interview with the researcher, most girls indicated the desire to join the army on completion of their secondary education same as the views of boys.

The findings further revealed that Socio-culturally, the attitude of parents seems to favour boys while the girls are discriminated. Boys are allowed to go to school and girls are refused in favour of the boys. The findings from schools indicates that there are only nine women teachers from the locality in the secondary schools while there are twenty two male teachers from the locality in those schools. This is yet another example in which girls have no role models to imitate. Even the few girls who go to school are not motivated to work hard and join university because only few have been able to proceed with education at higher level for better jobs. The few ladies who get educated get married to other communities and when they get married to other communities their dowry is not paid, therefore the parents do not see the need of educating the girls as revealed from the interview schedules.

**Gender sensitivity for the students**
The findings for gender sensitivity for the students are presented in table 3 below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid percent</th>
<th>Cumulative percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1764</td>
<td>70.84</td>
<td>70.84</td>
<td>70.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>29.16</td>
<td>29.16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2490</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that there are more boys than girls. A report from the principals indicates that more girls than boys drop out of school due to fees problems; pregnancy and even others leave school to get married.

The findings from the interview schedule further reveal that parents do not see the need of educating the girls; they even pay less attention in buying the necessary requirements in school. Worse still the parents believe that when a girl is taken to school she is exposed to prostitution, and that she will never get married, therefore affects the performance of the girls.

Traditional beliefs segregate roles along gender lines whereby most parents have not accepted the need to equip the girls with skills and knowledge through education to enable the girls function in the modern world and play significant role in developing the society. From an interview most girls in the community are valued in terms of animals because dowry payment is in terms of herd of cattle, goats and camels. The girls who are in traditional regalia are valued to be more expensive than those educated when it comes to payment of dowry because the society view girls with traditional attire as virgins and deserve better respect than
any other girl who is not a virgin. From the above observation, it is the reason why parents cannot allow girls to go to school consistently resulting to dismal performance among the girls.

**Conclusion**

A person's culture and upbringing has a profound effect on how they see the world and how they process information. In Turkana, cultural activities affect the performance of the students. The findings show that some students marry too early to have families hence it is difficult for them to go to school and concentrate in their studies. Also Cultural activities such as *edonga* dances affect performance. Cultural practices affected the performance in some schools because the findings in the study have shown that some students leave school to attend the *edonga* dances. Also lack of the role models from the local community to motivate the students jeopardizes formal education systems whereby the clients are very few.

**Recommendations.**

I. There is need for campaign by all the education stakeholders to educate the parents on the need for educating their children especially girls. The community should be educated on the importance of education sensitization.

II. The study recommends further that current policies on the education of the nomadic and pastoralists communities should be enhanced to favour the position of children in terms of education.

III. The study also recommends that subjects such as history literature and Christian Religious Education should be taught extensively in school for learners to be informed about strengths and weaknesses of cultural beliefs and how it can affect whole life of a human being.

**Further research**

I. The study suggested that a study on assessment of the implications of current policies on the education of the nomadic and pastoralists.

II. A further research should be carried out on parents’ attitude and perception towards education of their children, especially girls in Nomadic and pastoralist.

**References**


