THE GENDER SOCIALIZATION QUESTION IN EDUCATION: INFLUENCE ON BOYS' AND GIRLS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

The present study explored secondary school students' perception of gender identity (masculinity or femininity) and academic achievement. The relationship between these variables was measured. The study adopted descriptive survey design. Respondents included 500 students, 85 principals, 171 teachers, 92 parents and 8 education officers. The study shows that masculinity is generally perceived as lack of emotions and affections, while femininity as beauty conscious and marriage oriented. These perceptions shape attitudes and behaviour in schools, ultimately impacting negatively on academic achievement. The study made important findings that will inform interventions meant to equip boys and girls with skills to enable them balance gender traits in a manner that does not subjugate the innate biological sexual traits.

Keywords: Social Perceptions, Gender Construction, Femininity, Masculinity, Academic Achievement

Introduction

In general scholars concede that education is a major avenue by which a society's culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Bennaars, G. A., Otiende, J. E. and Boisvert, R. (1994) views education as a process by which one acquires attitudes and cognitive abilities which society considers desirable and satisfying. Education, thus, provides an important socializing context such that students' informal interactions in schools are an influential aspect of their socialization into restricted gender roles (EACEA, 2012). Stromquist (2007) presented gender as an important factor in

schooling and through interplay of several social and inherent biological traits male and female students are positioned in ways that can produce cumulative challenges to their schooling. Socialization at school level may be effected through various ways including classroom interaction, classroom activities, subject choices, and participation in physical education chores (Sifuna, D. N., Chege, F. N., and Oanda, I. O., 2006). Schools, thus, become one of the society's most powerful socializing forces that foster and support societal stereotypes for gender behaviour (Skelton, 2001). School as a social institution tends to repeat and instil the cultural labels and values into which individuals have been socialized at the family and community levels. By focusing on secondary schools, the research captured the dynamics of gender equality as they operate within the education system.

While net enrolment rates (NER) at all levels are generally low compared to national averages, data by the Ministry of Education present declining situations especially for boys' education in secondary school in Meru County. For instance, in 2009, the NER at pre-school level was at 33.5% for boys and 34.5 % for girls compared to national figures of 41.3% and 42.3% for boys and girls respectively. NER was higher than the national averages – 76.2 % and 78.3% for boys and girls respectively – at 84.1% for boys and 85.9% for girls. However, secondary education NER were 19.1% and 25.3%, compared to a national average of 22.2% and 25.9% for boys and girls respectively (Republic of Kenya, 2012). The data revealed low secondary education NER particularly for boys. This trend raises fundamental questions regarding the role of gender socialization on male and female students' academic achievement.

There is no doubt Kenya has made significant progress in reducing gender gaps in education. However, considerable gender differences in academic performance remain. While girls out number boys in attendance, they trail behind them when it comes to performance. For instance the 2011 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results show that out of the top 100 students nationally, only 34 were female. Similar results were mirrored at the county level where boys dominated the top 10 positions in 44 counties. The same trend is reflected at the overall performance ranking of schools with only three of the top 10 top schools being girls' schools. Wide gender gaps in performance are evident in public secondary schools in Meru County. For instance, in 2011, the only four schools that made it to the top 100 best performing schools in KCSE nationally were all boys' schools.

Socialization and Gender Identities

Crespi (2003) defines gender socialization as the learning of behaviour and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. The gender socialization process occurs in multiple social institutions including the

family, religious and educational institutions, mass media and peer networks (Sifuna et al, 2006; Stromquist, 2007). In order to conform to the socially-constructed gender labels, individuals are compelled to feel obliged to fit into a pre-determined stereotypical model of masculinity and femininity (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

Gender conditioning and sex stereotyping messages are reinforced through distinguishable allocation of roles at the family level (Wamahiu, 1992; Chege and Sifuna, 2006). Differentiated interactions with children at home along gender lines serve as primary gender models that socialize children as either masculine or feminine. These gendered interactions also communicate gender ideals and expectations for male and female children. These gender identities are identified by their oppositional character, based on the relation of the dominant other. Indeed gender identity definitions mirror typical binary conceptions of femininity and masculinity (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). The "neutral", "genderless" or "androgynous" position allows individuals to express both masculine and feminine traits that they adopt for various situations. However, most individuals strive to fit within the masculine-feminine divide, because non-conformity leads to being labelled as deviant, social misfit, or ostracized (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

At school level, gender socialization take place through various aspects, for instance, through interaction with teachers, schoolmates, the curriculum and engagement in co-curricular activities. Subjects such as home-science, languages and nursing generally socialise female learners towards professions considered feminine because they have their roots in care-giving roles (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). On the other hand, because masculinity is associated with physical and mental toughness, subjects such as mathematics, sciences and technical subjects that demand either precision or 'application of mind', or physical strength and power, are associated with masculinity (Chege & Sifuna, 2006; Jha & Kelleher, 2006).

Teachers directly influence academic environment because they have the potential to modify student behaviour and produce stronger academic student-cultures (Legewie & DiPrete (2012). Stromquist (2007) suggests that teachers are influential role models because students spend most of their time with their instructors. Teachers may, however, socialise students along gender lines because they send multiple gendered messages through the curriculum as well as organizational decisions. Their attitudes may reflect biases toward girls or boys, fostering among the less favoured students, a sense of alienation. Any form of direct or indirect gender discrimination hinder personal, academic, and professional development for the estranged group. Education, thus, plays a significant role in the construction of learners' gender identity through transmitting society's dominant values.

Likewise, it is through education that desirable changes to stereotypical gender attitudes and resultant deviant behaviour can be addressed.

Gender Socialization and Schooling

A study by USAID (2008) in Jamaica revealed that traditional gender socialization processes and stereotypes are significant factors in the educational experiences, expectations, and outcomes for boys and girls. Gender socialization practices often result in highly-gendered school environments, and form a large chunk of the fundamental factors that constrain learning opportunities, especially for girls. These gendered experiences also encourage gender segregation and stereotypical gender behaviour in school. Further, the interaction of gendered school environments with other factors, such as the quality of leadership, class size and socio-economic status of students, have varying impacts on educational achievement (Dunne and Leach, 2005).

Perceptions towards gender roles emerge out of the various ways boys and girls become socialised into society. Attitudes and behaviours that emanate from these gendered perceptions and socialization processes influence the education of male and female students in diverse ways. In most African communities, the male child is traditionally perceived as the breadwinner and provider of his family. Subsequently, when money is scarce, parents prefer to invest in their sons' education because of the anticipated economic returns (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). Parents' reluctance to invest in girls' education is also drawn from the perception that labour from the girl child is critical for the survival of households. Thus, schooling the girl child represents a high opportunity cost. Similarly, the value for male-child labour is very common in Lesotho, where young boys in the rural areas are denied their right to education because they are often hired out as herd's boys. According to Jha and Kelleher (2006), this phenomenon is rooted in Lesotho's past, where boys above 18 years would go to the South African mines to work for their families' upkeep.

Consequently, parents felt that boys did not need any education to carry out such manual work. Perceptions towards masculinity and femininity, in that sense, play a crucial role in schooling and performance. For instance, girls perform better because they are conditioned to follow directions, sit nicely in their chairs, and listen to the teachers. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to misbehave, be subjects of constant reprimands and humiliation, skip school or drop out completely, and generally develop low self-esteem (Legewie and DiPrete, 2012). These perceptions are internalised to a level where boys construe masculinity to mean getting involved in deviant behaviour, which, ultimately, impacts negatively on schooling and performance.

Statement of the Problem

Although various resources on gender differences in educational achievement exist, literature delving into the role of gender socialization and educational achievement is limited. Many studies have also tended to cluster around the themes of socio-economic factors and the role of biological differences in education. Consequently, limited studies examine how academic achievement is mediated by gender socialization processes, specifically, with regard to perceptions towards femininity and masculinity. Accordingly, the role of femininity and masculinity in education is an area rarely analysed in the Kenyan context. The manifestation of differences in educational outcomes is a result of interactions with various social settings that often lead to conflict between societal and schooling expectations. Limited research emphasise the need to analyse how the different social circumstances and socialization processes influence schooling for male and female students.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design based on several considerations, with the main one being that, within the descriptive research design regime, the concern was to describe a population with respect to gender socialization processes and schooling. Data obtained from the eight district education offices in Meru County indicate that the total number of students enrolled in public secondary schools by the time of conducting this study in the year 2013 was 63,141, translating to 30,800 boys and 32, 341girls. In order to ensure equitable inclusion of schools from each constituency, the researchers used stratified sampling. This technique was used to determine the sample size of schools that would be included in the study out of the total 285 schools in Meru County. The process entailed stratifying the 285 schools into four classes: boys boarding, girls boarding, mixed boarding and mixed day schools. Consequently, 85 schools were included in the study. The sample comprised of 500 students, 85 principals, 171 teachers, 92 parents and 8 education officers. Quantitative data was collected using a student's questionnaire, while qualitative data was gathered using focus-group discussions and interviews. In addition, document analyses were used to generate information from sampled schools on students' attendance, completion, discipline and mean scores. Observation guides were used to observe school facilities' conditions, as well as interactions in the school. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS Version 20. Results for the univariate analysis were generated using frequency distribution tables. Bivariate analysis involved cross-tabulation and the conduction of inferential analysis to establish the extent to which

gender construction influences academic performance. Qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Results
Perceptions towards Femininity and Masculinity

The salient differences between male and female attributes are informed by three primary factors: influences of socialization, social-cultural conditioning, as well as biological traits (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). Majority of respondents (97%) agreed that boys exhibit competitiveness and aggression, while 90.2% agreed that boys are strong and violent. These findings correspond to a study by Kindlon and Thomson (2000), who argued that emotional literacy is a component that primarily lacks in most boys' upbringing, both at home and at school. As a result, violent behaviour is learned and used by some boys as an affirmation of conformity to male norms or masculinity. Similarly, 91.8% of respondents agreed that boys are not affectionate and emotional. Participants in focus group discussions noted that boys refrain from showing their emotions because doing so would affect their egos, and may portray them as wimps. This lack of emotional expression was attributed to the manner of boys' socialization in the Ameru culture, which teaches them to believe that it is unmanly to express one's emotions. For example, from very early ages, boys are often are reminded not to "cry like girls". Similar messages are repeated during circumcision where they are encouraged to always portray boldness and in-control attitudes. Boys are socialized to believe that they must possess the ability to suppress personal feelings to enable them maintain an objective view of the world, and to be able to make rational decisions, circumstance notwithstanding. Chang'ach (2012) argued that the socialization process may have negative impact on boys' education, and identified the cultural dynamic as the main factor that has contributed to the neglect of issues affecting boys among the Kalenjin.

Respondents who held the opinion that boys are unemotional claimed that the only emotion men are capable of displaying/ought to express is anger. As a result, boys' emotional health is damaged in a myriad of ways from very early in their lives. Constant societal pressure to uphold stereotyped notions of masculinity implies that men personas are unable to experience this aspect of their personas, which breeds psychological suffering. In the absence of emotional and psychological wellness, academic performance is significantly affected as well.

Field data also revealed that 82 % of the respondents generally agreed that boys are risk-takers. As such, boys are often vulnerable and are more likely to experiment with risky behaviour such as sexual activity and

alcohol and drug abuse. These findings were corroborated by data collected through focus group discussion observations:

> *"…Boys take risk to impress their peers. Another reason for their behaviour is that they are egocentric… the more girls they "conquer", the manlier and more macho they feel. Unfortunately, a large number of such boys end up impregnating school girls, while others get infections like HIV/AID...   these factors disrupt their schooling and performance…" (Female student, Buuri).*

According to the quoted respondent, boys are not only physically strong but also daring, characteristics that emanate from attributes perceived as male, such as bravery and courage. As a result, parents accord boys unlimited freedom, which they often abuse and land into trouble. Risky behaviour becomes heightened after circumcision. Attributing such traits as strength and courage to masculinity can be interpreted to mean that society framed and attributes appropriate masculine behaviour – dominance, intimidation and oppression – to the male gender. Internalizing some of these stereotypical attributes associated with being male lead to discipline problems for the boy-child, which ultimately impacts on schooling and academic achievement.

In analyzing perceptions towards femininity, study results indicated that 84.8% of the respondents agreed that girls are shy and timid. Responses from interview sessions and focus group discussions indicated that the advantage of the 'girlish' characteristics of shyness, timidity and submissiveness is that girls are easier to manage and control, and are thus unlikely to resist school rules or undermine authority. While feminine attributes were generally said to facilitate better responsibility and commitment to schoolwork compared to masculinity, the flip side was that such characteristics may position girls to vulnerability and make them easy targets for abuse and exploitation. Lack of confidence has a strong bearing to the sexual objectification of femininity, which may lead to harassment, rape and other forms of sexual impropriety.

In further discussing perceptions towards femininity, 87.2% of respondents agreed that girls are remarkably conscious about beauty and overall physical appearance. Girls were described as keen on beauty, and are always organized, clean, smart and neatly dressed. Although preoccupation with beauty was considered as second nature to girls, participants saw this as a factor that curtails competitiveness and commitment to school work. Accordingly, most girls are content with their physical beauty, which they consider an asset that can fetch them financially-stable husbands. Lack of robust competitiveness may lead to acceptance of mediocre grades and, ultimately, poor academic performance. Below are some views from focus group discussions:

> *"… girls are passionate about their beauty; they carry hair brushes, lotions, perfumes and other cosmetic products … in the absence of these beauty paraphernalia, they find it challenging to cope... concentration in class is thus affected…"(Female student, Tigania East)*
>
> *"….Girls spend too much time on grooming because it's natural for girls to maintain an attractive appearance..." (Female student, Igembe South)*
>
> *"Girls spend a lot of time on beauty to become marketable. As a result, they lack concentration – for example, they dress in short and tight skirts contrary to school dressing codes…" (Male student, Imenti Central)*

Girls' preoccupation with physical appearance affects their concentration in class, hence poor performance. The female body becomes central to discourses of femininity in secondary schools as most girls make effort to attain highly-feminine looks (Hoang, 2008). The major contradiction that schoolgirls are often confronted with is the expectation that they should be both 'feminine' and 'successful' at the same time. As long as being clever and intelligent is seen as a masculine trait, schoolgirls cannot escape the destructive effects of this paradoxical expectation. Confronted with this demand, most schoolgirls opt for the feminine attribute of grooming good looks (Ozkazanc and Sayılan, 2008).

Participants noted that some girls get disoriented by the anticipated marriage to financially-stable husbands. This was especially the case in Igembe area, the main miraa-growing region in Meru County. Most of these girls see no need to excel academically; for them, marriage is a "career path". Following are some opinions from some participants:

> *"….Some girls believe that they will be married by rich men irrespective of their performance. Such perceptions stifle girls' commitment to schooling…' (Female student, Imenti North)*
>
> *"…girls are socialized to undertake domestic chores to prepare their responsibility as future wives… eligible bachelors are attracted by 'wife-material' not beauty." (Female parent, Imenti Central)*

However, some respondents had opposing views, who argued that viewing femininity as being marriage oriented is an outdated notion that has no grounding in modern society. Besides, contemporary wealthy men prefer educated wives who can contribute intelligent ideas and supplement family income.

> *"…education has taken centre-stage and everyone, regardless of their gender, needs it to compete in the modern world… Today's society requires smart-brained individuals, and empowered women fare better than those who are not. Beauty is no longer the only*

requisite for femininity… we are working with various organizations to help us change such perceptions because they often work against girls' education …" (Female principal, Imenti North)

Hence, despite the misguided view that the sole destiny of the female child is to get married and bear children, some participants held the opinion that social perceptions have tremendously changed. Wamahiu and Umbima (1992) noted that the female-child's productiveness as a member of society and autonomy are often downplayed, and messages that subjugate femininity reinforced through differences in the allocation of roles at home. Such messages are those that prescribe married women's roles as being reproductive and domestic in nature. According to Chege and Sifuna (2006), these distinguishable allocations of roles tend to orientate girls towards failure to aspire for better educational achievement.

Gender Socialization and Education
Socialization at Home

Girls are generally socialized into domestic roles such as care giving, and manual work. The influence of these roles on girls' academic performance is that time to accomplish roles compete with time for studying. Some participants in day schools claimed that they often sleep late and wake up very early to get time to perform chores before they leave for school. As a result, they are perennially fatigued and lack concentration. Wamahiu and Umbima (1992) explain that owing to domestic chores, girls get little time to do supplementary studying or rest. Below is a quote from a participant:

"…because of the household chores assigned to girls, some are perpetually late for school because they have to complete morning tasks before they can leave for school…similar duties await them in the evening…" (Male teacher, Igembe South)

On the other hand, boys are taught and moulded into future breadwinners – they are socialised to provide security and offer leadership. Male children are considered apprentice fathers because they model and imitate their fathers' roles. Sometimes, boys may be involved in similar chores but to a lesser extent, and especially when time-saving technology is available (Wamahiu and Umbima, 1992). Findings demonstrate that parents assign their daughters household chores like cooking, cleaning and caring for other siblings. Boys, on the other hand, are assigned duties such as outside maintenance, farm-related duties, heavy lifting or assisting in family business. The messages communicated here are clear, and they set the stage for sex differences in family, education, and work roles later in life. These different role allocations along gender lines may also foster the development of different cognitive abilities and social skills in girls and boys. Gender role allocations also influence girls' subject preference and career paths. For

instance, Home Science is considered as a female domain because it is linked to the domestic chores that girls perform – cooking, sewing, and cleaning and so on. In contrast, boys are assigned roles that require muscle, brains and/or courage. For instance, they are usually sent at night to run errands, or asked to climb the delicate "miraa" stems to harvest leaves. In the process, they are socialized to be tough and independent. These perceptions are, however, changing, and society is slowly accepting that different roles hitherto demarcated along gender lines, can be performed by any gender. Views from study participants portray similar opinion:

> *"… Parents should ensure that, right from childhood, boys and girls are treated equally… they need to teach their children that all chores can be done by anyone irrespective of gender…." (Parent, Imenti North)*

> *"….Both boys and girls should be treated equally, through equitable allocation of chores. This will help alleviate girls' workload and accord them adequate time for study…" (Parent, Imenti Central)*

Participants, however, noted that despite increased awareness on the need to distribute roles equitably, getting men to accept to undertake roles traditionally viewed as feminine has been remarkably slow. Moreover, changes of attitude differ in different socio-economic settings. For instance, men who live in urban areas accept such dynamism more readily than do those who live in rural settings.

Likewise, the study sought to establish the role social inheritance practices in the gender socialization process. It was revealed that society generally perceives boys to be the rightful inheritors of family property. Respondents indicated that sons are regarded highly as they are seen as inheritors, those given the responsibility of continuing family lineages. Majority of respondents (72.6%) agreed that the inheritance mentality affects boys' retention in school and academic performance, which, in turn, contributes to underachievement. Participants explained that the implication of this on education is that boys develop what respondents termed as "the inheritance mentality". Some of the natural assets that constitute family properties within the Meru context are land and cash crops such as miraa, as well as coffee and tea. Participants in focus group discussions argued that some boys in the predominately miraa-growing area see no need for academic excellence because they anticipate inheriting the miraa trade from their parents. However, with the advancement of gender equitable laws and policies as provided for in the constitution, boys can no longer count on inheriting family property at the expense of schooling. In addition, land, the major asset in rural areas is fast diminishing due to increasing population rates, and is thus hardly reliable.

Socialization through Socio-Cultural Practices

A major element in the rites of passage of adolescents in Meru is circumcision – a rite often administered to boys when they attain pubescent age. Parent participants perceived circumcision of boys as a major inhibitor to boys' schooling and academic performance. Once circumcised, they are discouraged from associating with their mothers, and the kitchen declared a no-go zone. The resultant social and emotional distance created between boys and their mothers disconnects them from the familial primary source of parental guidance and monitoring.

> *"….after circumcision, boys are regarded as mature … in the permissive Ameru culture, they leave home and loiter aimlessly in nearby markets… they return at night and are not questioned…..in the end, they get caught up in bad company and eventually drop out of school…." (Female Education Officer, Igembe North)*

The study sought to understand the specific dimensions of circumcision as a negative influence on their schooling. A male respondent argued that during the period of seclusion, boys are taught to exhibit 'masculine' behaviours such as strength and courage, as well as fearlessness – characteristics meant to distinguish them from the uncircumcised. These behaviours and attitudes are manifested in the school context through the undermining of female teachers.

> *"…circumcision affects boys negatively because they are made to believe they have become adults, capable of making their own decisions... teaching done during the seclusion period instils a feeling of superiority… they feel above the law … they acquire the "DC" (District Commissioner) mentality... they undermine women indiscriminately, including their female teachers…." (Male parent, Imenti North)*

Although the traditional method of circumcision is gradually being phased out, some parts of Tigania and Igembe still practise this form of initiation. The concern here is not with the "cut" but with the knowledge imparted during the period of seclusion. Quite often, the process ends up moulding individuals who undermine authority due to acquired attitudes that participants generally referred to as "the DC mentality". Some boys transfer the same attitude and behaviour to school, leading to indiscipline and under-performance . Another source of attitude that participants associated with circumcision was the excessive freedom accorded to boys after circumcision. The unlimited freedom translates to limited time for studies. It also exposes boys to drug abuse and leads them to engage in other risky activities that may jeopardize not only their schooling but also pose security and health threats. Participants also noted that some parts of Igembe and Tigania still encourage and allow female genital mutilation (FGM), albeit secretly.

Mass Media and Technology

Mass media and technology is one of the most active agents of socializing male and female students regarding masculinity and femininity. In particular, technology was seen to adversely influence how students manage their time for study and leisure. Rather than use their time productively, a majority use their time on Facebook, texting on cell phones or watching videos during and after school hours. Results obtained indicated that the cell phone had the highest impact on student's education (52.8 %). Overall, it was clear that the time spent on mass media potentially influences students' behaviour and jeopardizes academic performance. Participants noted that students in day schools use cell phones to listen to music, especially during evening classes, or send text messages discretely during class hours.

Mass media has been proven to be a powerful agent for conveying messages to viewers. For instance, adverts that glorify cigarette smoking, alcohol and violence, tend to steer students towards imitating values that promote deviance. Celebrities portrayed in mass media, such as musicians, athletes, artists and designers 'infect' students with the "celebrity lifestyle". Celebrity culture was reported to have a marked detrimental effect on socialization. Many perceive the wealth, allure and glamour of celebrities as something to crave for. The fixation with the celebrity culture becomes a yardstick on how most students behave, which is often to the detriment of the more serious school work. Furthermore, besides being informative and entraining, some TV channels may portray unfiltered programs such as those with extreme violence or/and sexual connotations that border on pornography, which infuse students with alien attitudes.

A majority of participants submitted that boys are influenced more by technology than girls because they are accorded much more freedom. Boys are also outgoing and aggressive, venturing to learn and adopt more from the outside their own culture. According to participants, some listen to music during class and prep time. Some of the most favourite television programmes for boys include soccer and action-packed movies, which they sneak out of school to watch.

> *"My role model is Lionel Messi, (an Argentinian footballer who plays for FC Barcelona) … He has achieved fame, money and greatness..." (Male student , Imenti North)*

Some participants, however, lauded mass media as it provides powerful role models for both genders. Respondents indicated that journalists are their role models because they are eloquent, smartly dressed, confident and composed. These qualities depict mass media as a decent and professional industry, and are the reason most respondents expressed

aspirations to be journalists after school, while yet others proposed the establishment of journalism clubs in their schools.

Role Models

This study defined a role model as a person who inspires others with his/her thoughts, persona, values or goals that observers can emulate. Respondents indicated mothers have greatest influence on students' education (62.2 %), followed by teachers (54.6 %) and fathers (49.25). From these findings, parents act as the primary conveyors of beliefs and behaviour reinforcement to their children. Father, it was indicated, have less influence compared to mothers, with most indicating that most fathers are absentee parents, while others play double standards, which often influence behaviour negatively, especially for boys. These results match with previous findings that identified the absence of male role models as a factor that contributes to boys' underachievement. In the Caribbean context, where the number of women-dominated and single-parent households has been on the rise, strong concerns have been raised about the lack of male presence within the home as well as the school (Jha and Kelleher, 2006). The influence of parents on their children cannot be underestimated.

> *"...A majority of parents are not educated, so they do not take education seriously... some children, especially boys, are brought up by irresponsible fathers who are often absent, drunk and/or abusive. In such situations, boys do not also see the value for school, and opt to drop out at the earliest opportunity..." (Parent, Igembe North)*

> *"...my role model is my mother because she provides me with material and moral support... she gives me advice and encouragement, and is compassionate..." (Female student, Imenti central)*

Increased economic emancipation of women has led to the growing incapacity of fathers, many who are no longer regarded as heads of their families. Consequently, this has put the central role of men as the family patriarchs in jeopardy. As a result, most men have turned to idlers who indulge in alcohol and petty crime. Ultimately, boys lack strong men in their lives to look up to. Respondents further indicated that students' from disadvantaged families have limited role models to emulate. For some students, their parents may never have been to school, and so fail to guide or encourage their children through school. This may explain why majority (56.6%) of respondents indicated that teachers are among the most highly-ranked role models who, in that sense, become surrogate parents.

> *"... in the very remote areas in particular, teachers are the only professionals available, hence the only role models ... they act as guardians as they often interact and spend most of their time with*

> *students… for students whose parents are not educated, teachers provide psychological and moral support, as well as academic and career guidance…..” (Female education officer, Buuri)*

The findings suggest that parents and teachers are both important role models, with great influence on students' academic performance. It is also clear that mothers exert greater influence on children than fathers, which calls for interventions targeted at enhancing academic achievement, for rural learners especially, to inspire and motivate better academic performance.

Peer Influence

Interactions among peers in schools were regarded as a major catalyst of the socialization process. Findings indicated that a majority (83.6%) of respondents agreed that peers negatively influence performance. Peers take up a lot of study time. The most influential peers are those who drop outs to engage in casual jobs and petty businesses such as trading in miraa (khat), or operating as *boda boda* (motor cycles) and *matatu* (public transport vehicles) attendants.

> *"… Peer groups are a bad influence because they are time-consuming. They are the sources of misleading advice as well... For example, in day schools, boys engage in truancy and waste a lot of time in that manner... it is such undesirable behaviour that affects their studies in the long run (Female student, Imenti Central)*

Similarly, Legewie and DiPrete (2012) observed that boys are more likely than girls to succumb to peer-pressure, because the policing process offers great persuasion for adolescent boys (Plummer, et al, 2008). Accordingly, boys are more likely than girls to be ridiculed by their peers for 'being too serious with schoolwork' (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

Conclusion

In order to address the negative influence of masculinity and femininity on education, life skills programmes ought to be expanded, and effective gender-sensitive guidance and counselling programmes instituted in schools. In order to address the negative effects of suppressed emotions by the male child, there is need for programs that address boys' immediate needs, as well as help them respect and care for themselves and their female counterparts. Such interventions would put in place process that would allow boys to express emotions to avoid the devastating effects of bottled-up stress.

Programs to empower and teach boys moral responsibility in society should focus on mentorship and role modelling. School administrators need to invite resource speakers to discuss contemporary and relevant "male-centred" topics. To ensure gender-balanced interventions, the study recommended that gender empowerment and community awareness

programmes be organized for male and female students. These interventions also ought to target various stakeholders to efforts directed at addressing gender issues in education succeed. Moreover, gender-targeted initiatives should aim at illuminating the unique gender needs of boys and girls in order to enhance academic performance equitably for both genders. To this end, the Ministry of Education ought to partner with institutions of higher learning and research bodies to initiate teacher training to enhance deeper understanding of the ever-evolving gender dynamics in education.

As well, the government needs to institute affirmative action campaigns for the boy-child. Child labour practices, such involvement of boys in petty trade like miraa picking, packaging and trade needs to be eradicated through effective policy and legal provisions. The retrogressive cultural practices currently entrenched among the Ameru need to be reconsidered. For example, male candidates can be initiated through focused seminars organized by churches or non-governmental organizations. Similarly, in order to eliminate female genital mutilations (FGM), there is need to expand interventions that embrace "alternative rites of passage", colloquially referred to as "*circumcision by word*".

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