

# Free Day Secondary Education Funding and Student Retention across Gender in Migori County, Kenya

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## Abstract

Considerable progress has been made worldwide in enrolment of boys and girls both at primary and secondary levels. However studies indicate that the actual completion rates at secondary school remain low especially for girls. While the Kenyan government has put in place impressive education policy that details how gender inequality should be addressed, the implementation of the same has remained elusive. This study was anchored on systems and retention theories and sought to add knowledge and literature related to free day secondary education and student retention. The study targeted 215 public day secondary schools. The actual sample was of 19 schools, 228 students, 76 class teachers, 19 principals, 31 parents and 1 Quality Assurance and Standards Officer. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed method design using cross sectional survey for the quantitative method and a case study design for the qualitative method. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, document analysis guide and focus group discussions. Descriptive statistics were generated through using MS Excel 2018 and SPSS version 21. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically. The report was given in narrative form and direct quotes. The findings revealed that boys are 2.84 times more likely to be followed-up in cases of absence compared to girls. Girls seem to face challenges such as early marriages and lack of sanitary towels among others, which keep them away from school. The study recommended that the government should set aside funds to support vulnerable boys and girls in public secondary schools as an intervention for promoting equity in secondary education

**Key words:** Free day secondary education, student retention, gender

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Studies done by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) (2017) indicated that the actual completion rates at secondary school level remain low especially for girls. Nzesei (2017) in his study on how effective education policy has addressed gender inequality in Kenya, established that while the Kenyan government had put in place impressive education policy that details how gender inequality should be addressed, the implementation of the same has been rhetoric. Gura (2015) also established that subsidized secondary education programme had not succeeded in ensuring gender equality in Nyakach Sub-County, Kisumu County, Kenya. Lichuma (2017) also pointed out that “many girls are still out of school due to among other factors, customary practices that expose them to early marriages and child pregnancies” (p. 5). It is against this backdrop that this study

sought to increase knowledge and add literature related to free day secondary education and student retention across gender in Migori County, Kenya.

### **1.2 Rationale for the Study**

The study sought to determine the influence of free day secondary education funding on student retention across gender in Migori County. Studies indicate that the actual completion rates at secondary school remain low especially for girls. For example Lichuma (2017) pointed out that “many girls are still out of school due to among other factors customary practices that exposes them to early marriages and child pregnancies” (p. 5). The purpose of this study was to increase knowledge and add literature related to free day secondary education funding and student retention across gender in Migori County, Kenya.

### **1.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The study was guided by both systems and retention theories. Systems theory is associated with the works of a German biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy who in 1936 proposed a general systems theory which was further developed by Ross Ashby to systems theory in 1955 (Bertalanffy, 1968). According to Adams (2012) “Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) was the originator of the general systems theory whose original work was in organismic system theory” (p. 210). Bertalanffy developed the general systems theory as a way of solving organisational problems, pointing out that the organisational managers must consider the whole system as well as the interaction between the parts when solving organisational problems (Bertalanffy, 1968). Bertalanffy was reacting against reductionists who believed that a complex system is nothing but its parts. Systems approach is therefore a management tool that allows individuals to examine all aspects of the organisation, to inter-relate the effects of one set of decisions to another and helps individuals optimally use all the resources at hand to solve an existing organisational problem. The researcher’s choice of systems theory as guide in the current study is supported by Lunenburg (2010) who describes schools as complex open systems.

The main concepts of systems theory according to Bertalanffy (1968) include, systems input, systems boundary, information, processes, and output. A brief discussion of the concepts or tenets of systems theory by the researcher is as follows: Inputs refer to all that goes into the system to produce outputs. Examples include, capital or any form of resource be it, human, financial, physical or information that goes through a process in an organisation to produce output. According to Lunenburg (2010) human resources would include the expertise of the staff; financial resources would include funds used in the operations of the organisation; physical resources would include the availability and quality of infrastructure while information resources would include any material that can be used by an organisation. Amanuel and Nam (2011) and Chikere and Nwoka (2015) asserted that inputs can also include organisations such as the state or local governments that facilitate or make possible certain outcomes. Systems boundary in systems theory is a concept that recognises the inner and outer environment that affect the running of an organisation or a school. This environment may consist of social, economic and political forces that are interdependent and continually interact with the institution or organisation. While it is true that organisations

such as schools have little or no power to change their external environment, they have no alternative but to respond to it.

### 1.3 Review of Literature

According to Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) (2017), considerable progress has been made worldwide in enrolment of boys and girls both at primary and secondary levels. However, SIDA (2017) noted that “actual completion rates at secondary school level remain low, especially for girls” (p. 1). To address this problem, the Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Review (2018) pointed out that “the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had opened a new chapter in the long struggle towards achieving gender equity” (p. 7). The report further stated that “the Education 2030 Framework for Action is a tool aimed at helping the international community achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education” (p. 7). The Framework “explicitly recognises gender equality as a guiding principle linked to the realisation of the right to education and states clearly that girls and boys, women and men, must be equally empowered in and through education” (p. 7). The SDGs 4 and 5 strongly encourage countries to focus on both achieving inclusive and quality education and gender equality.

According to UNESCO (2011) “gender equality exists when women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realise their human rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results” (p. 5). UNESCO (2011) gender equality guidelines further stated that gender equality is “the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and the differences between women and men, and the different roles they play” (p. 5). UN (2020) supported UNESCO (2011) by asserting that “gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world” (p.1). Esteves (2018) in her study on gender equality in education in Portugal, contended that in terms of education, some important achievements have been made. According to Esteves (2018), “there has been an important progress towards gender parity in some levels of education” (p. 896). This is supported by UNESCO (2015) which confirmed that “between 2000 and 2015 the number of girls for every 100 boys had risen from 92 to 97 in primary education and from 91 to 97 in secondary education” (Esteves, 2018, p. 896). The study by Esteves (2018) recommended that there was need to build learning environments that promote equality between boys and girls: this may imply an important revision of curricula and textbooks. The study also recommended the need for creating teacher training programmes that are favourable to increased equality between boys and girls. These programmes should involve teachers from all subjects and all levels of schooling. Esteves (2018) further recommended that research should also be developed in terms of “assessing specific problems of boys and girls in the Portuguese educational system such as access, classifications, dropping out” (p. 903).

It is worth noting however that a report by World Bank (2018) did indicate that girls’ educational attainment still remain lower than boys and that adult women are less literate than men. SIDA (2017) had the same argument by stating that while considerable progress has been made in enrolment of both girls and boys in primary and secondary school worldwide, actual completion rates at the secondary school level remain low, especially for girls due to numerous factors (p. 1). SIDA (2017) further noted that “inadequate legislation and lack of policies supporting girls to remain in school is still a serious issue in many countries” (p. 1).

Smith (2019) has however contended that “recent decades have seen a shift in the policy discussion of gender and education away from a focus on female ‘disadvantage’ towards a concern with male ‘underachievement’” (p. 1).

Ostby, Urdal and Rudolfson (2016) argued that “vast education inequalities between women and men persist in many parts of the world” (p.1). The study by Ostby et al. (2016) addressed “the root causes of gender inequalities in secondary education by asking whether such disparities persist because of low state capacity or low willingness” (p. 2). The study was based on “gender and age specific educational attainment data for 57 developing countries from 1970 through 2010” (p. 1). This according to Ostby et al. (2016) was “the first cross-sectional study that systematically analysed a wide range of obstacles to and drivers of educational gender parity in secondary education over time” (p. 12). The analysis indicated that “willingness factors are central to understanding gender equality in education and that ethnically heterogeneous countries and countries where Islam is the primary religion experience lower levels of equality” (p. 1). The study pointed out that “gender inequality in education existed primarily due to state willingness and not to capacity factors” (p. 13). Ostby et al. (2016) contended that “while capacity factors may matter in some specific contexts, a country’s bureaucratic quality and average income level should not be associated with less gender inequality” (p. 13-14). They concluded that “willingness factors provide the greatest explanatory power in the gender inequality models” (p. 14).

A study by Shayan (2015) on “gender inequality in education in Afghanistan” established that “despite the efforts to improve the education sector, the situation of female education still remains deplorable” (p. 277). Shayan (2015) concluded that “there is lack of appropriate and efficient policies” to support female education in Afghanistan (p. 282). Females in remote areas “are less likely to have access to schools” and the study identified that “the most fundamental problem of women is the very patriarchal structure of the society” (p. 283). The study recommended that there was need to “develop local adoptable plans to explore educational opportunities for girls” (p. 283). Shayan (2015) also recommended the need to “increase qualified female teachers in remote areas through establishing local training teacher training and to raise women literacy levels through establishment of literacy courses both in the rural and urban areas” (p. 283). This according to Shayan (2015) “could be effective in terms of changing the attitudes towards females’ education” (p. 283). Shayan (2015) was in agreement with Ombati and Mokua (2012) who examined the issue of “gender inequality in education in sub-Saharan Africa”. Ombati and Mokua (2012) concluded that “gender equity and equality in education is but a pipe dream if barriers that keep girls from enrolment and having quality education are not addressed” (p. 133).

Kapur (2019) in his study on gender inequality in education in India concluded that “gender inequality in education is regarded as the major barrier within the course of progression of the system of education” (p. 15). According to Kapur (2019) the major factors that promote gender inequality in education are: “conditions of poverty, prevalence of traditional viewpoints, school infrastructure, discriminatory treatment among girls, occurrence of criminal and violent acts, child marriage, education of the parents, occupation of parents, management of household responsibilities and lack of interest in studies” (p. 15). Kapur (2019) concluded that it is “vital to formulate measures and programmes that are

focused upon making provision of equal rights and opportunities to girls, not only within the course of acquisition of education, but also in the implementation of other job duties” (p. 1).

A study by Jama (2015) on socio-cultural factors that influencing retention of female students in secondary schools in Qardho District, Somalia is in agreement with Kapur (2019), the reports by World Bank (2018) and SIDA (2017). Jama (2015) found that “early marriages and domestic labour were the most significant factors that affected the retention rates of female students” (p. 11). The participants targeted by the researcher for the study were 463; 445 students, 13 teachers, and 5 head teachers. Jama (2015) used systematic random sampling technique to get the schools and purposive sampling for head teachers and teachers because of the low numbers. He recommended that the government should make interventions to improve the retention of female students in Qardho District, Somalia.

There are studies that point to the fact that cultural factors seem to have impeded women’s progress even at higher levels of education. Yeba (2015) in her study on “socio-cultural factors affecting gender equality in higher education in some universities in Cameroon” established that “there was a relationship between socio-cultural factors and gender inequality at the doctorate level” (p. 178). The study targeted 77 female doctorate students from three universities in Cameroon and 63 female students were randomly chosen. Questionnaires and focus group discussions were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The study recommended that “women should be sensitised on the importance of mobile learning” and that “the government should fight against all forms of socio-cultural practices that impede women’s progress in education for the realisation of an inclusive and gender sensitive education” (p. 178).

The participation of girls in education seems to be more constrained in developing countries. A study by Mohamed, Mberia and Muturi (2017) noted that in spite of commitments by governments to provide education to all school age children, low female participation in education remains a drawback. Mohamed et al. (2017) did a study on “influence of socio-cultural practices on girl child participation in secondary schools in Garowe District”, Somali. They examined parental attitude on girl child education, religious beliefs, gender preferences and female role model effects in Somali. Mohamed et al. (2017) “adopted a descriptive survey research design for the study and the target population included girl students, parents, teachers, principals, the District Education Officer and religious leaders” (p. 78). The study used questionnaires and observation checklist as research tools. Just like Jama (2015), Mohamed et al. (2017) concluded that some of the local communities contribute to girls not being in school because girls are booked for early marriage. Some communities underestimated the result of the girl education and some parents used their daughters as sources of wealth by getting dowry. The study also established that girls look after young siblings at home and do domestic chores while boys go to school. Fellow pupils especially girls themselves felt culturally out of place, as they do not compete with boys particularly in mixed gender schools. Since the study was done in Somali, it creates a geographical gap that the current study intends to fill. It is quite clear from the aforementioned studies that the girl child still has serious challenges compared to the boy child that affect her retention in public primary and day secondary schools though most governments have made both primary and secondary education free and affordable. The

aforementioned studies also created theoretical, contextual and methodological gaps that the current study intended to fill.

## **2.1 Methodology**

The study adopted a Convergent Parallel Mixed Method Research Design. The purpose of the convergent design according to Creswell and Clark (2011, p. 77) is to “obtain different but complementary data on the same topic”. The intent in using this design was to bring together the differing strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of the quantitative method such as large sample size, with those of the qualitative method such as small sample, and in-depth information. Creswell (2014) explains that “the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and the compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, differences or some combination” (p. 213). Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) were in agreement by stating that in convergent parallel mixed method design “the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research are performed independently and their results are brought together in the overall interpretation” (p. 117). The quantitative design in this study was cross-sectional survey while the qualitative design was a case study.

## **2.2 Sampling procedures and Sample Size**

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to draw the samples since this is a mixed method research design. The researcher drew probability samples to select 19 schools, 76 class teachers and 228 students and non-probability samples to include 1 Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO), 19 school principals and 31 parents.

## **2.3 Data Collection Procedures**

Creswell and Clark (2011) contended that “in mixed methods research, the data collection procedures consists of several key components” (p.171). The components include “sampling, gaining permissions, collecting data, recording the data and administering the data collection” (p. 171). Data collection in this study proceeded along two strands: quantitative and qualitative. The “intent of probabilistic sampling in the quantitative strand was to select a large number of individuals who are representative of the population” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 174). In the qualitative strand, “inquirer purposefully selected individuals who could provide the necessary information” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 173). She sought permission to collect data from participants. In order to collect the required data, four research assistants had an orientation with the researcher. The orientation involved briefing of research assistants on key terms used in the tools and the main information targeted from the tools. All items in the questionnaires were discussed with the research assistants.

While in the field, the researcher introduced the research assistants to the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government officials, the Ministry of Education, State Department of Early Learning and Basic Education officials, the Quality Assurance and Standards Officer and schools principals. The research permit given by NACOSTI was used to access the County Commissioner, County Director of Education and the school principals. Finally the school principals gave permission to the researcher to have access to teachers, parents and students. Once permission was granted, the researcher booked appointments and organised with the teachers and students when to distribute the questionnaires. The researcher also organised with class teachers how to get parents for the focus group discussions. She made appointments with the school principals and arranged for appropriate times for the

interviews. “Collection of quantitative and qualitative data in this convergent parallel mixed method design was done concurrently” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 180). Each set of data were given equal weight.

#### **2.4 Data Analysis/Interpretive Procedures**

Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011) contended that “mixed analysis is a term used for analysing data in mixed research” (p. 2). According to Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011), mixed analysis “involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques within the same framework” (p. 3). In this study, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data occurred concurrently. Burke and Larry (2014) called this class of analysis “multidata-multianalysis because both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques are used” (p. 795). Quantitative data was edited, cleaned for completeness, accuracy and consistency. Coding was done using MS Excel 2018 software and analysis followed using SPSS software. Qualitative data analysis involved preparing and organising data, reducing data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and finally representing data in narrative form as recommended by Creswell, (2013, p. 180) and Boeije (2013, p. 76). The “process of coding involved aggregating the texts into small categories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). These categories eventually formed themes. The researcher then interpreted the themes and finally represented data in narrative form and direct quotes.

#### **3.1 Findings, Interpretations and Discussions**

The study revealed that not all schools had clear policy guidelines on educating the boy and the girl child even with the FDSE funds although according to Nzesei (2017) “the government developed the Gender Policy in Education in 2007” (p. 314). A number of participants in the study were not familiar with the policy issues in education and this may explain why gender disparity rate in Migori County is still at 0.69% above the National level that is at 0.55%.

##### **3.1.2 Policy Framework for enhancing the Boy Child Education**

When asked about policy framework that the schools in Migori County had on educating the boy child, the QASO indicated that schools were working towards making school environment friendly, secure, free from drugs for the boy child. The QASO however pointed out that there was need to mobilise resources in order to build more boarding sections for boys to enable them have more time to study in school. Most schools had inadequate resources that affected active participation of the boy child. School principals, class teachers, students and parents made similar observations on school’s policy framework regarding the boy child and this is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*School's Policy Framework regarding the Boy Child*

Views	Principals	Class Teachers	Students	Parents
1. Peer to Peer Engagement	2	13	60	4
2. Creating Conducive Gender Friendly Environment	5	13	47	5
3. Parental Engagement	2	9	28	4
4. Mobilise Resources to improve Facilities	2	11	17	5
5. Stop Child Labour	6	28	43	9
6. Others (Punishment)	1	1	12	1
7. Not Sure	1	1	21	3
Totals	19	76	228	31

Table 1 shows that the 19 school principals acknowledged that their schools had some policies on educating the boy child. There were 2 principals who pointed out that one of the policies regarding the boy child was peer education or peer to peer engagement as a way of supporting the boy child to stay in school. Peer counselling encouraged interaction and socialization among boys. About 5 principals talked of creating conducive and gender-friendly learning environment in their schools. The male teachers in these schools were also invited to act as role models to the boys. There were 2 principals who pointed out that parental engagement in schools was a helpful policy because this is where they sought support from parents to help the boy child stay in school. Some 2 principals talked of efforts their schools were making to mobilise resources to provide boarding facilities so that the boys especially those from challenged backgrounds could stay in school. About 6 principals talked of stopping child labour as another helpful policy. This was practiced in schools in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and National Coordination.

Responses from class teachers also confirmed that schools had some policies in place to support the boy child. Table 1 indicates that there were 13 teachers who stated that peer engagement in their schools was a good practice in supporting the boy child. Peer engagement gives the boys opportunities to address the challenges they face daily as they go through the learning process. Thirteen class teachers indicated that their schools had tried to create conducive gender friendly environment where the boy child is supported. There were 9 class teachers who talked of parental engagement that their schools encourage in order to get



support from parents. About 11 class teachers talked of the efforts by schools to mobilise resources to improve infrastructure and learning resources to keep the boys in school. There were 28 class teachers who indicated that discouraging child labour was part of the school policy since most of the boys dropped from school to work in the sugar plantations and gold mines for money. The schools were working closely with the Ministry of Interior and National Coordination to protect the boy child. There was a class teacher who stated that the punishment given to the absent students was a deterrent measure to keep the boy child in school. Table 1 indicates that 1 class teacher was not quite sure of the policy framework regarding the boy child.

The students who participated in the study also gave their views about their school's belief on educating the boy child as presented in Table 1. Majority of the students, about 60 of them indicated that peer engagement and peer counselling programmes in the school was helpful to the boy child. There were about 47 students who talked of the schools being conducive, safe and learner friendly and so favoured the boy child. About 28 students stated that their schools valued parental engagement for follow up of absent students. There were 17 students who appreciated the fact that their schools try to mobilise resources to improve and build infrastructure such as boarding facilities for boys from poor backgrounds. Since child labour is a major problem in Migori County, there were about 43 students who mentioned that their schools discouraged child labour in favour of the boy child. About 12 students indicated that their schools gave boys some form of punishment to discourage absenteeism. However there were 21 students who were not sure of their schools' belief on educating the boy child.

Table 1 also captured the views of the parents from the focus group discussions. There were 4 parents who said that peer engagement and programmes were so helpful to their children. A concerned parent from the focus group had this to say:

“By bringing the boys together and giving advice on drug and substance abuse and their effects, discussing health issues has improved retention of boys in our schools” (FGD, Concerned Parent, 2019).

There were 5 parents who noted that the schools were safe and secure and so offered gender friendly environment that supported the boy child. About 4 parents appreciated parental engagement programmes in schools that focused on the progress of the boy child. Some 5 parents talked of the efforts the school was making to mobilise resources to improve and build learning facilities. They emphasised that boarding facilities would rescue boys who have to walk long distances to school. There were 9 parents who said that the campaign to stop child labour was working well and this discouraged boys who would otherwise be in the sugar plantation farms or gold mines. One parent appreciated the fact the schools instilled some form of punishment as a way of deterring absenteeism. However there were 3 parents who were not sure of the ways the school promoted the education of the boy child.

According to the QASO some of the measures that the schools had taken to follow up on boys who were absent from school included among others: peer education. The boys are encouraged to share with one another the challenges they face. Inter-school debates are organised to enable interaction and socialisation on critical topics such as drugs and substance abuse, child labour and early sexual relationships among others that seriously affected student retention. Schools also collaborate with the Ministry of Interior and National

Coordination to discourage child labour. Other than the QASO, school principals, class teachers, students and parents gave their views as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Measures to keep the Boy Child in School*

Views	Principals	Class Teachers	Students	Parents
1.Encouraging Follow Ups	10.5%	17.1%	37.3%	12.9%
2.Enforcing 100% Retention	31.6%	36.8%	16.0%	29.0%
3.Sensitise Parents	26.3%	17.1%	17.5%	16.1%
4.Guidance and Counselling	10.5%	11.8%	10.4%	12.9%
5.Giving Bursaries	10.5%	14.5%	6.3%	16.1%
6.Engaging PA/BOM	5.3%	1.3%	7.8%	9.7%
7.Other Reasons (Punishing Offenders)	5.3%	1.3%	4.5%	3.2%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2 indicates that 10.5 % of the school principals said that they were encouraging follow ups from parents, class teachers and local government leaders as a good strategy to keep the boy child in school. About 31.6% of the school principals pointed out that enforcing 100% retention through increased FDSE capitation grant would keep the boys in school. There were 26.3% of the school principals who said that they sensitise parents and that this was important if the boys have to be kept in school. Incidences where boys leave school to work in the sugarcane plantation for money are common so schools need support from parents. About 10.5% of the principals pointed out that schools had guidance and counselling programmes to help the boy child address issues like drug abuse and irresponsible sexual behaviour. There were 10.5% of the school principals who said that bursaries the school received from the Ministry of Education for needy but bright students helped the boy child stay in school. Some principals about 5.3% said that they engaged the PA and BOM on discipline matters and this has increased ownership and enhanced retention. Lastly some 5.3% of the school principals talked of punishing perpetrators of child labour through the office of the Ministry of Interior and National Coordination.

The responses from class teachers were a confirmation of what the school principals said. There were 17.1% of the class teachers who indicated that the follow ups they make with the boys who are absent was helpful and enhanced retention of the boy child. A number of class teachers about 36.8% said that enforcing 100% retention through increased FDSE capitation grant would keep the boy child especially those who are economically challenged in school. About 17.1% of the class teachers confirmed that they sensitise parents on the

importance of keeping the boys in school. This is important in rural day schools where motivation to stay in school is relatively low. There were 11.8% of the class teachers who were in agreement that the guidance and counselling programmes in schools helped the boys especially those with challenges to stay in school. About 14.5% of the class teachers said the bursaries the needy students get contribute to their being in school. Without these bursaries a number of students would be out of school. Some 1.3% of the class teachers acknowledged that engaging the PA and BOM in resolving discipline issues helped the boys to remain in school since it creates a sense of ownership and accountability. There were about 1.3% of the class teachers who saw punishment as measure that deter boys from staying away from school.

Responses from the students on what their schools did to follow up on the boys who were absent from school also supported the measures given by the QASO, the school principals and the class teachers. There were 37.3% of the students who said that follow ups made by teachers and parents had helped the boys to stay in school. About 16.0% of the students mentioned enforcing 100% retention of students as a measure to support students who would otherwise be out of school. For some students, about 17.5% sensitisation given to their parents on importance of education had helped them stay in school. About 10.4% of the students said that guidance and counselling programmes available in schools had helped a number of student to stay in school. There were 6.3% of the students who pointed out that bursaries given to needy students was a measure that helped a number of the students to stay in school. About 7.8% of the students saw engagement with PA and BOM members as a measure towards keeping them in school. Some 4.5% of the students mentioned punishment as a measure to deter absenteeism among them.

Parents who participated in the study gave their views as is shown in Table 2. There were 12.9% of the parents who said that follow ups made by the class teachers and parents has helped in keeping the boy child in school. For some parents, about 29.0%, enforcing 100% retention would be the best policy to keep the boy child in school. Some of the parents, about 16.1% confirmed that the schools did sensitise them on the importance of taking interest in their children's education and this has gone a long way in helping the boy child to stay in school. Availability of guidance and counselling programmes in the schools was seen by about 12.9% of the parents as one of the important measures schools have taken to support the boy child to stay in school. There were 16.1% of the parents who said that the government bursaries helped the boys who would otherwise be at home to continue with their studies. About 9.7% of the parents appreciated the involvement of PA and BOM in handling discipline cases and this has promoted ownership and accountability among the students. Some 3.2% of the parents took punishment of offenders engaged as child labour as a helpful measure to help the boy child remain in school. The study findings are not so much in agreement with the views of Mwango (2013) who asserted that no much attention goes to the boy child. However the findings are supported by Cherotich, Simatwa and Ayodo (2014) who

in their study on “impact of free secondary education policy on gender equality in secondary school education in Kenya” recommended that “the government should increase the FDSE fund to cater for at least three quarters of the cost of educating students in secondary schools” (p. 94). This according to Cherotich et al. (2014) “would enhance equity in education to a reasonable level” (p. 94). Cherotich et al. (2014) also recommended that school principals “should facilitate guidance and counselling services in secondary schools to deal efficiently and effectively with factors that militate against gender equality in secondary education” (p. 94). The factors according to Cherotich et al. (2014) include “drug abuse, indiscipline, fornication, early marriages, pregnancies and negative attitude towards schooling” (p. 94).

### **3.1.3 Policy Framework for enhancing the Girl Child Education**

According to the QASO, schools in Migori County have put in place some policies to promote the education of the girl child. Schools have “school re-entry policy for teenage mothers” after delivery although not all principals talk about it because they feel that if they talk about it openly then they would be encouraging and condoning premature sexual activity. Adolescent mothers are therefore given admission in most schools. The QASO also pointed out that schools try to save girls from “retrogressive cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early/teenage marriages” (Nzesei, p. 318). There are also “girl-child focused interventions such as distribution of sanitary facilities”. The schools have “mentorship programmes to encourage girls to take up Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects”. Schools have also tried to create “conducive and gender-friendly learning environment”. Guidance and Counselling programmes in schools are also available to help the girl child. The findings from the QASO on how schools are encouraging girl child education are in agreement with Nzesei (2017). Nzesei (2017) highlighted some of the key frameworks such as “school re-entry for teenage mothers and gender friendly learning environment” among others (p. 315). However Nzesei (2017) concluded that “although the Kenyan government has made remarkable efforts in promoting girls’ access and participation in education thus meeting their immediate needs”, other factors such as “high levels of poverty, culture and gender stereotyping and teenage pregnancies have greatly affected girls’ long-term socio-economic prospects” (p. 319).

The views of school principals, class teachers, students and parents on the policies schools have on educating the girl child are presented in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Policies on Girl-Child Education*

Views	Principals	Class Teachers	Students	Parents
1.Re-entry of Teenage Mothers	4	15	47	6
2. Saving/Rescuing the Girl Child from Retrogressive Culture	3	10	51	3
3.Girl-Child Focused Interventions	2	10	30	5
4.Enforcing Free and Compulsory Education	2	5	15	4
5.Continuous Parental Engagement on Gender Education	2	10	20	5
6.Sensitisation on Government Policy	1	9	20	2
7.Conducive and Gender-Friendly Learning Environment	1	3	11	2
8.Follow ups on Class Attendance	2	10	22	2
9.Others	1	2	4	1
10.Not Sure	1	2	8	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>31</b>

Table 3 shows that there were 4 principals who said that their schools had re-entry of teenage mothers’ policy that encouraged the education of the girl-child in school even after delivery. Three principals talked of schools saving or rescuing the girl child from “retrogressive cultural practices such as FGM and early marriages” as pointed out by Nzesei (2017, p. 315). This is done through counselling programmes within and outside school. A school principal had this to say:

The biggest problem is early marriages and early pregnancies. This community is tolerant to youth getting married or marrying off young girls from the age of 11, 13 onwards which is very unfortunate. In fact, 3 weeks ago there was a young girl of 12 years in Form 1 who dropped classes to get married. (School Principal)

**3.1.4 Ways to ensure that parents send both Gender to School**

When asked how schools ensured that parents send students of both gender to school, the QASO pointed out that there was a lot of sensitisation in the County on free and compulsory basic education policy and that his office worked closely with the schools to encourage and support the parents. The QASO also pointed out that there were follow ups on bursaries from sponsors, well-wishers and the government at the County level to enhance retention of both gender in secondary schools. The other measure that the QASO talked about was efforts by the County Director of Education to streamline “adult and continuing education to reduce levels of illiteracy” in the County as pointed out by Nzesei, (2017, p. 315). This is aimed at empowering parents to send their children to school.

School principals, class teachers’ students and parents also gave their views on ways to ensure that parents send students of both gender to school and this is presented in Table 4. Table 4.

*Collaborative Approaches in Educating both Gender*

Collaborative Approaches	Principals Views	Class Teachers Views	Students Views	Parents Views
1.Enhance Follow Ups by all Stakeholders	17.0%	19.0%	14.6%	14.0%
2.Enhance 100% retention through FDSE	15.8%	10.0%	21.0%	10.3%
3.Sensitise Parents on Retrogressive Cultural Practices	10.1%	11.1%	13.0%	9.8%
4.Guidance and Counselling	10.3%	18.1%	11.2%	12.9%
5.Giving Bursaries and Scholarships	10.5%	13.1%	9.7%	16.1%
6.Continuous Parental Engagement	12.0%	12.3%	8.8%	8.0%
7.Enforce Compulsory Basic Education Policy	18.0%	14.0%	10.0%	14.6%
8.Other Reasons	5.3%	1.1%	5.5%	7.8%
9.Not Sure	1.0%	1.3%	6.2%	6.5%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4 gives the views of principals, class teachers, students and parents on collaborative approaches that schools use to ensure that parents send students of both gender to school. There were 17.0% of the school principals who said that they try to involve all stakeholders in making follow ups in the education of boys and girls. About 15.8% of the school principals said that they try to enhance 100% retention through the FDSE funding although it is still a challenge since the finances are not adequate. There were 10.1% of the school principals who said that the schools have tried to sensitise parents on the dangers of retrogressive cultural practices such as FGM and early marriages. The schools have done this in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and National Coordination. About 10.3% of the school principals said that the schools offer guidance and counselling services to both parents and students within and outside the school with the aim of addressing both social and economic issues that affect the education of the boy-girl child.

### 3.1.5 Boy-Girl Educational Challenges

Principals, class teachers, parents and students in the study identified educational challenges that the boy-girl faces as they go through free day secondary education. Their views are illustrated in Figure 1.

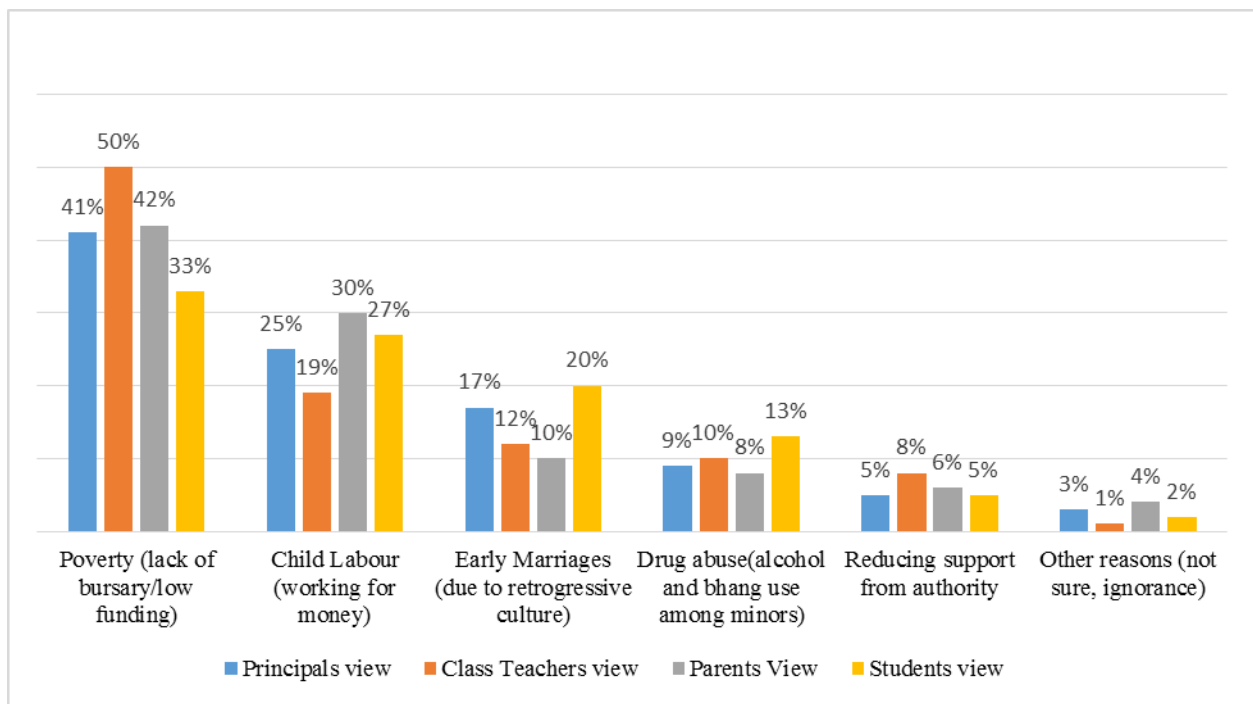


Figure 1. Boy-Girl Educational Challenges.

Figure 1 shows that some of the challenges the boy-girl faces as they go through free day secondary education in Migori County include among others: poverty, child labour, early marriages, drug and substance abuse and reduced support from relevant authorities. There were 41% of the school principals who talked of poverty as a big challenge to the education of boys and girls. Most of the students need bursaries and delays in FDSE funds keep a number of students away from school. About 50% of the class teachers’ talked of poverty as a major problem that affect the education of the boy-girl child. There were 42% of the parents who said that poverty is a big problem to their children. About 33% of the students acknowledged that poverty was a major problem they face. These challenges supported by

Odumbe, Simatwa and Ayodo (2015) who established that “low family income” affected student performance in Migori Sub-County (p. 78).

### 3.1.6 Gender Retention Analysis using Odd Ratio Approach

The researcher used the Odd Ratio Index to determine the likelihood of one gender being retained in school as compared to the other when follow-up of students was done by class teachers and parents. The odd ratio was computed as follows:

$$\text{Odd ration follow up} = \text{boys' odd} / \text{girls' odd} = 9.3333 / 3.2857 = 2.84$$

This implied that boys were 2.84 times more likely to be followed up in cases of absence compared to girls. The girl child is more affected and this could be because of fewer female teachers who act as role models as noted by Wango et al. (2012). Even though the study showed that FDSE funds had influenced student retention to some extent, class teachers emphasised the importance of making follow-ups for the absent students with the help of parents and chiefs. Qualitative data from the QASO, school principals and parents and quantitative data from class teachers and students confirmed that the girl-child faced serious challenges of early marriage and lack of sanitary towels among other factors and this kept them away from school.

### 3.1.7 Relevance of Systems and Retention Theories

The study established that despite the FDSE funding programme, wastage of students is still a major challenge in Migori County. This is attributed to poverty, “retrogressive cultural practices such as FGM, early marriages” and child labour as pointed out by (Nzesei, 2017, p. 315). There is also drug and substance abuse, lack of discipline among students, lack of interest in education among the boys and girls, parental negligence among other factors. The findings are supported by systems theory since a systems approach allows schools to analyse their complexity, describe it, recognise dysfunctions when they occur and allow for various levels of social or institutional realities” (UNESCO, 1981, p. 10). School principals should therefore be able to address other factors that affect student retention other than the availability of the FDSE funds. The systems approach also helps managers/principals to optimally use all the resources such as financial, human and physical to solve existing organisational problems.

## 4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that most schools are working towards making the school environment learner friendly and secure since the government has made basic education compulsory. Schools have policies like peer engagement to help the boy-girl face challenges they encounter such as issues with drugs and substance abuse, retrogressive cultural practices like FGM and child labour among other practices that affect their retention in public day secondary schools. Schools are working closely with the Ministry of Interior and National Co-ordination to protect the boy-girl child. Parents and chiefs need to help schools make follow-ups for absent students. It is quite clear from the Odd Ratio computation that boys are 2.84 times more likely to be followed-up in cases of absence compared to girls.

The study recommends that the government should set aside funds to support vulnerable boys and girls in public secondary schools as an intervention for promoting equity in secondary education. The study recommends expansion of infrastructure in day schools by the government to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning. The



government should enforce the children's act that outlaws early forced marriages and punish parents who do not take children of school going age to schools.

The MoES&T should consider increasing the capitation given to students who are economically challenged instead of giving uniform flat grant to all students since this fails to address variations in different Counties. The QASO's should constantly monitor how FDSE funds are utilised by school principals. There is need to address the gender imbalance among teachers and principals and so the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should look into this. Gender balance among teachers and principals may be a motivating factor to both female and male students in Migori County. The study postulates that all stakeholders should provide essentials such as sanitary towels and basic needs especially food and address issues of teenage pregnancies, child labour and FGM that is affecting the girl-child.

School Principals need to work closely with the local community and the Ministry of Interior and National Coordination so as to prevent child labour and early marriages that are a major challenge to student retention in Migori County. School principals need to come up with effective ways of addressing absenteeism among female students in public day schools.

Class teachers need to encourage discussions with the principals, BOM and PA members so that the challenges they face as teachers can be jointly addressed. They need to be keen on the girls just as they are on boys since the study findings confirm that there is less follow up made on girls than boys.

Parents and guardians need to take keen interest in their children's education. They need to work closely with the schools and support all programmes. They should promote progressive cultural practices by challenging practices like child labour and early marriages.

Students need to tap into the benefits of FDSE. It is important that they realise the need to attend and complete secondary education since this prepares them for high-level education, labour force and creates room for innovation and progress. School principals, class teachers and parents have therefore the responsibility to create and develop awareness among students on the importance of secondary education.

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