Education is an important tool for eradication of poverty; facilitation of economic development; and, development of human capital, the world over. Not surprisingly, the United Nations (UN) have developed strategies such as Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiatives with the hope of enhancing development and poverty eradication through education access and equity by 2015. However, recent worldwide trends show that majority of teenagers out of the school system in the world are in Sub-Saharan Africa and most of them are girls. Also, research from the developing world indicates that, disparities in the quality of education between genders still abound with a negative bias against girls. With three years remaining to reach the target date for the EFA initiative and the famous MDGs, the current scenario presents reason enough to decry the girl-child plight so much so as to concretely declare that it is NOT YET JUBILEE celebrations for Bungoma County; this is ironical. To scientifically better understand the situation, this study was conducted. A sample of 300 respondents from 8 girls’ secondary schools and 6 district education officers was surveyed for data, using self-administered questionnaires; interview, document analysis as well as observation check-list schedules. Data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The findings indicate that among the major challenges to excellence of the girl-child education include: culture and poverty. It is recommended that the government should increase student grants and guidance and counseling among others. For now, it is not yet jubilee; but it is hoped that this study will act as a benchmark for the management actions in promoting girls’ education and, that other unexploited areas related to this study will serve as a basis for further research in the education of girls not only in secondary schools but in all of the education system.

Key words: Jubilee, culture, millennium, development, poverty, gender

INTRODUCTION

According to a report by the World Bank (2000), African countries still face several hurdles in their quest to develop the education sector. Some of the hurdles include: expansion, gender disparities, poor quality, underfunding, new technology, governance and public interest. Yet, the United Nations (UN) and World Bank have emphasized education particularly that of girls as being a sure way of eliminating illiteracy, poverty and gender disparities (UNDP, 2005; World Bank, 2009). Given that African countries appreciate provision of basic education as a basic human right, they have since the 1960s been enticed to commit themselves to treaties such as Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The EFA and the MDGs initiatives target development and
poverty eradication through realization of access to quality education by 2015. However, a report by UNICEF (2010) reveals that these goals fall far short of fulfillment, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Furthermore, the World Bank (2009) argues that even though there has been a significant increase in girls' enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa, this has been mainly at the primary level. It is further reported that 30% out of the 71 million adolescents out of school in the world are in the Sub-Saharan Africa and most of them are girls (World Bank). No wonder, the period between 2010 and 2020 has tactfully been declared a decade of the African Woman (Achoka, 2010). This initiative is to further entice girls in Africa to access more education.

In Kenya, the government has committed itself to conform to educational sector development through several initiatives which include: constituting education commissions and task forces charged with curriculum restructure, (Achoka, 2003), provision of Free Primary Education (Republic of Kenya, 1998), provision of Free Secondary Education (Malenya, 2008), legislation through the Children's Act (Republic of Kenya, 2001) and the Constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Owing to the subsidized education initiative, there has been a steady increase in the number of girls attending secondary school with the total enrollment rising from 881,328 in 2003 to 1,180,267 in 2007 (Achoka and Ogenga, 2010). But, the total number of the 298,939 increase in student enrollment is accounted for by 181,266 male students compared to 117,673 females (ibid). This gradual increase does not match that of the boys given that females constitute 51% of Kenyan population compared with males (ibid, 2010). Thus, more effort is needed, especially in addressing gender parity (Jollie, 2005). For instance, in the 2011 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), there were 182,604 girls who sat for the examination against 229,171 boys. This disparity in numbers is reflected even in the results. For instance, in that year, there were only 3 girls among the top 10 students nationally. Notably, there was no single girl among the top 10 students in western province. Similarly, there was no single girl among the top 10 students in Bungoma County. Not surprisingly, only one of the top 10 schools in Bungoma County was a girls' school.

**Problem statement**

The UN argues that through education, girls can be key figures in development and poverty eradication (UNDP, 2005). Hence, the establishment of EFA and MDGs initiatives was to increase hope that by 2015, all children, particularly girls would have access to and complete basic education. It is worth noting that Kenya’s Children’s Act (Republic of Kenya, 2001), also advocates for education equity. Moreover, the new constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2010), envisages a nation that embraces gender equity in the totality of its institutions.

Ironically, girls' performance in KCSE lags behind that of their counterparts, boys. One wonders, what factors contribute towards the dismal academic performance of girls in KCSE in Bungoma County. For instance, there has not been a single girl student among the top 10 students in KCSE in Bungoma County in the period 2009-2011. Moreover, there has always been only one girl school among the top 10 schools in KCSE results in the county. This study was set to establish factors against the girl-child academic excellence in Bungoma County.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to establish factors against secondary school girl-child academic excellence in Bungoma County.

**Objectives of the study**

Objectives of this study were: to establish the home, psychological and school-based factors that act against the secondary school girl-child academic excellence in Bungoma County.

**Research questions**

Three research questions were addressed:

i. What home factors negatively affect the girl-child academic excellence?

ii. What psychological factors negatively affect the girl-child academic excellence?

iii. What school-based factors negatively affect the girl-child academic excellence?

**Literature review**

The harsh reality of our education systems the world over is that, they are the main determinant for admission into well-paying jobs (Meads, 2008). Hence, students who do not attain satisfactory level of academic excellence are largely doomed to be in the category of the unfortunate masses. In the developing nations such as Afghanistan, India, Ethiopia, Gambia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, the literature show that massive challenges persist and act against academic excellence of girls particularly at the secondary school level (World Bank, 2000). The developing world therefore has the challenge of overcoming these hurdles in order to effectively improve the girl-child education.

In Uganda the National Examination Board (2010), observes that the old time cultural belief that the woman’s rightful place is in the kitchen has denied girls quality study time. Chiuri and Kiumi (2005), note that retrogressive cultural practices such as early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) tend to impact negatively on academic achievement of girl students.
Other studies by Kwesiga (2000) in Uganda and Kiptui and Mbugua (2010) in Kenya found out that due to the fact that parents believe that their daughters will marry and go away, they are less interested in paying their school fees. This affects the girl-child’s performance due to disturbances associated with the practice.

In Kenya, it has been noted that due to poverty, parents’ capacity to buy basic needs for their daughters is low. Consequently, girls miss lessons due to lack of the basic requirements or become vulnerable to sexual abuse in order to fulfill their needs (Achoka, 2010).

Low self concept of girls also negatively impacts their academic excellence since it was established that there was a significant relationship between self-concept and academic performance suggesting that students with high self concept record high academic performance in school (Mwania et al, 2009). According to Mondoh (2001) girls learn best by personal involvement, listening and sharing ideas and are best taught using experimental methods. Therefore, girls are disadvantaged where lessons are teacher dominated, and lacking in instructional aids (Nwosu and Omeje, 2008). Similarly, Mondoh (2001) established that students who had negative attitude towards a given subject tend to perform poorly in it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. According to Kombo and Tromp, (2006) this design facilitates accurate measurements of characteristics of a large sample within a short period. Bungoma County comprises a total of 165(100%) secondary schools out of which 37(22.4%) are for girls only, (Bungoma South District Education Office, 2010). The study population consisted of form four students who were 1,980 in number. They were used because they had stayed in their respective schools longest and therefore were expected to have a wealth of information from their experiences. Eight schools and their head teachers as well as their heads of Guidance and Counseling departments were randomly sampled to participate in the study. In addition, six District Quality Assurance and Standards Officers were also randomly selected for the study. The randomly sampled students were 278 students ending up with a total sample of 300 respondents. The study data were collected through questionnaires, observation check-lists, interview schedules and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) while qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

One intention of the study was to establish the home factors that negatively affected secondary school girls’ academic excellence in Bungoma County. The results are presented in Table 1.

This study established that lack of basic needs for girls such as sanitary towels and delayed and/or non-payment of fees were among the major home factors that eventually made girls to perform dismally in their academic endeavors. The lack of necessities such as sanitary towels is a critical factor to girls. Moreover, those who come from poor families, sanitary towels could be considered a luxury which cannot be purchased. Such girls could miss classes for about 5 days in a month and/or 3 months a year for fear of being embarrassed and ridiculed at school. As a result, useful learning time is wasted. On their resumption of classes, they automatically find themselves behind academic schedules and hence they perform poorly in their examinations. Achoka (2010) supports this finding by saying that poverty lowers parents’ capacity to buy basic needs for their daughters, consequently such girls become more vulnerable to sexual abuse in order to fend for themselves. But, sexually abused girls feel resentful and this can impact negatively on their academic achievement. Not surprisingly, 6(75%) DQASOs submitted that due to poverty, parents in Bungoma County engage their daughters in forced labour such as house-helps in order to lessen the financial burden on the family.

These findings resemble the research findings by Kiptui and Mbugua (2009), on factors that contribute to poor academic achievement in English language in Kerio-Valley schools of Rift valley province of Kenya. Furthermore, these findings reflect Kwesiga’s (2002) views in her book on, “Women’s Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda’s experience”. These scholars noted that parents who still fear that girls may drop out of school due to pregnancy or

Table 1. Home factors leading to girls’ dismal academic excellence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N=278 Students</th>
<th>N=8 HODs, G/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remaining at home to assist with chores</td>
<td>117(42%)</td>
<td>4(50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early marriage</td>
<td>121(43.5%)</td>
<td>2(25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)</td>
<td>80(28.8%)</td>
<td>2(25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed/Non-payment of school fees</td>
<td>156(56.1%)</td>
<td>6(75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of basic needs like sanitary towels</td>
<td>177(63.7%)</td>
<td>6(75%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data, (2011)
This study revealed that many factors negatively affect secondary school girls’ academic performance. Report the findings stating the percentages of girls who reported suffering from low self esteem, peer pressure and mental illness before embarking on the discussion. Up to 210 (75.5%) girls, reported that peer pressure strongly militated against their excellent academic performance in school. On the other hand, 190 (68.3%) girls, observed that mental illnesses/stress made them to perform poorly academically. Whereas 165 (59.2%) girls, submitted that mathematics/science subjects discouraged them from excellent performance, another 163 (58.6%) girls, reported that low self-esteem was responsible for their poor academic performance at school.

No doubt, peer pressure was established as one of the most critical factor that made secondary school girls in Bungoma County to perform poorly in academics. Seemingly, some secondary school girls crave for acceptance by their peers. Rejection by peers may be feared by many girls who do not want to be exceptions. Acceptance into a negative influence group normally leads to, for example, unwanted behaviour which in turn undermines the victim(s) and leads to poor academic performance.

Furthermore, mental illness/stress was noted as a major factor that leads to poor academic performance. Some communities that press learners to acquire quality grades unknowingly breed ground for students’ mental instability and/or stress. Such students suffer withdrawn syndrome and have a reduced concentration level in class Achoka, (1990). In addition, this study found out that, low self esteem was among the major causes of poor academic performance in girls’ secondary schools. Maybe, secondary school girls in Bungoma County still hold the myth and gender stereo typing that females are supposed to be seen and not heard. Not surprisingly, they perform academically inferior particularly in science subjects and mathematics. This finding is supported by Mondoh (2001) finding that a student who has a negative attitude towards a given subject tends to perform poorly in it. No wonder, all the 6 (100%) DQASOs submitted that the girls had a negative attitude towards science and mathematics subjects and believed that they were “tough”. The situation in Bungoma County was made worse by the way teachers taught the learners. This study found that teachers largely “lectured” to students during classroom teaching and learning.

This is to say teachers in this county stack with the old pedagogy which presumes that only the teacher knows all the knowledge. Or, this approach is commonly used in respect to the current education system which ties teachers to a specific content, time table, and face to face interaction which may limit the teacher to such poor classroom practices in order to cover syllabus. In such undertakings, the learners are least encouraged to be active participants in the teaching-learning exercise (Achoka, 2003). Instead, they are psychologically withdrawn; this is sad.

### Table 2. Psychological factors leading to girls’ Dismal academic excellence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N=278 Students</th>
<th>N=8 HODs, G/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics/Sciences being tough subjects</td>
<td>165 (59.2%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self esteem</td>
<td>163 (58.6%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>210 (75.5%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness/stress</td>
<td>190 (68.3%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data (2011)

Psychological factors that negatively affected secondary school girls' academic excellence in Bungoma County

The second objective of the study was to establish the psychological factors that negatively affected secondary school girls’ academic excellence in Bungoma County. Findings are presented in Table 2.

Psychological factors that negatively affected secondary school girls’ academic excellence in Bungoma County

will transfer wealth to their marital homes pay less attention to their education and/or reluctantly pay their school fees.

Also, this study established that marriage at an early age was practiced in Bungoma County, see Table 1. Such happenings can make some girls to feel insecure and therefore not encouraged to work hard academically. During the interviews, 6 (100%) DQASOs confirmed this finding. Even FGM is still being practiced by some parents in Bungoma County. Chiuri and Kiumi (2005), in their book of Planning and Economics of Education note that, students who come from insecure environments caused by social-cultural practices such as FGM show emotional problems at school. For instance, they lack concentration in class and confidence in whatever task they are given to perform. As such, they lag behind in academic achievement. In this regard, 3 (50%) DQASOs cited FGM as a contributory factor against the girls’ academic excellence in Bungoma County. Moreover, 4 (50%) G/C HODs, noted that girls remain at home to assist accomplish home chores. Based on these findings, it is evident that many parents in Bungoma County are yet to appreciate the significance of the girl-child education. These parents either have ignored or do not practice Kenya’s affirmative action or children’s and women’s rights.
Table 3. School-based factors leading to girls’ dismal academic excellence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N=278 Students</th>
<th>N=8 HODs, G/C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse by male teachers</td>
<td>153 (55%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporal punishment</td>
<td>160 (57.6%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>119 (42.8%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor and inadequate facilities</td>
<td>168 (60.4%)</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of/insensitivity to special progs</td>
<td>155 (55.8%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data (2011)

Table 4. School facilities and their statuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Schools with</th>
<th>well equipped</th>
<th>poorly equipped</th>
<th>Schools without</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H/Science room</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play ground</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilets</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>b8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Data (2011)

Consequently, they perform dismally (Nwosu and Omeje, 2008; Mondoh, 2001).

School-based factors that negatively affect secondary school girls’ academic excellence in Bungoma county

The third objective of this study was to investigate School-Based Factors That Negatively Affect Secondary School Girls’ Academic Excellence in Bungoma County. State the results first before discussing them. Findings indicated involvement of several factors. The most inhibiting factor was poor and inadequate facilities as indicated by 168 (60.4%) girls. Another 160 (57.6%) girls, noted that corporal punishment at school made them to perform dismally academically. Up to 155 (155%) girls and 153 (55%) girls reported that lack of/insensitivity to special programmes and sexual abuse respectively contributed to their poor academic performance. See Findings were presented in Table 3.

Thus, poor and inadequate facilities as well as corporal punishment were noted among other factors that negatively influenced secondary school girls in their academic excellence. It should be noted that, corporal punishment is a physical abuse which was outlawed by Kenya’s Children’s Act of 2001.

Such behaviours are likely to make students less interested in learning and instead lead to truancy making it impossible to perform well academically. In addition, sexual abuse of girls by male teachers was noted as one of the major causes of dismal academic excellence by girls in Bungoma County. Also, it was reported that sexual abuse was still rampant in some Kenyan girls’ secondary schools; this is unfortunate. Students who have been sexually violated suffer embarrassment and psychological torture. This experience threatens their survival, development and participation in learning and contributes to underperformance (Panchard, 2007).

Regarding School Facilities and Equipment, this study found out that 1 (12.5%) school did not have a single laboratory; 4 (50%) schools had poorly equipped laboratories in terms of apparatus, chemical and teaching learning aids; they also lacked enough tables, stools and drainage systems; while only 3 (37.5%) schools had well equipped laboratories for teaching and learning, see Table 4. It may be said that in schools that did not have well equipped laboratories, teachers could be tempted NOT to practice learner-centered approaches. Yet, during observation of schools time tables, it was established that all the 8 (100%) schools offered technical subjects such as: Agriculture, Business studies and Home Science. However, only 5 (62.5%) schools had home Science rooms 1 (12.5%) had a workshop while 5 (62.5%) had gardens/farms, see Table 4. Overall, it was found out that facilities in the sample schools were inadequate and that students learned largely theoretically with hardly any practical.

It should be noted that scientifically, it is established that girls learn better with personal involvement and sharing ideas through experiments (Bamao, 2006 and Mondoh, 2001). Thus, in learning environments such as those in Bungoma County, girls are less stimulated to be creative and this impact negatively on their academic performance. Most head teachers 6 (75%) reported that poor facilities and/ or a lack of them was a big impediment to the girls’ academic performance. Moreover, through observation it
was established that only 5 (62.5%) schools had libraries. But, a quick perusal through the text books on the shelves revealed that the books were very old, outdated, and some were half torn. How, therefore can the learners excel in their academic performance? Moreover, when the head teachers were asked to comment on the text book-student ratio in various subjects, 5 (62.5%) of them submitted that it was 1:4. This high ratio can only lead to competition for text books. To say the least, in such circumstances, students can only perform dismally in their academic endeavours.

Furthermore, 5 (62.5%) head teachers submitted that their schools had a large enrollment of a minimum 45 students per stream. Coupled with a high text book-student ratio individual attention could only be but a nightmare. Such a learning environment is not conducive to good teaching-learning practices (Achoka, 2003).

Conclusions

From the findings presented above, this study concluded that: a host of challenges still erect roadblocks to girls' academic excellence in Bungoma County girls' secondary schools. These challenges include: Retrogressive (indicate exactly what the findings say e.g. early marriages, FGM etc.) practices such as early marriages, sexual abuse and female genital mutilation (FGM); psychological activities such as low self – esteem, peer pressure and mental illnesses/stress; school – based factors like poor and inadequate facilities and corporal punishment; as well as, inadequate number of girls’ secondary schools. psychological misconceptions, harsh school environment and lack of enough girls’ schools. Moreover, in spite of the highly subsidized Education cost in Kenya today, still the poor parents are incapable of fulfilling their daughter’s financial needs. Consequently, the girls are kept out of school. No wonder, there are few girls’ secondary schools in Bungoma County. Consequently, learners cover long distances to and from school; this is discouraging. There is need to overcome the varied challenges in order to enhance secondary school girls’ academic excellence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. The government should increase the secondary school per capita grant of Ksh.10, 625 per student, to a higher amount in order to boost the kitty for schools to purchase latest text books relevant to the curricular and other learning materials besides repair of dilapidated infrastructure in schools.

ii. To help the poor parents to meet the costs of secondary school education, the government should update the national Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) to address allocation of resources to Bungoma County given its high poverty index level of 56% (Republic of Kenya, 2001).

iii. DQASOs, should mount regular school inspections and encourage head teachers to develop strategic plans and use them to improve monitoring and evaluation.

iv. Government should enhance guiding and counseling services in girls’ secondary schools. These can encourage the girls to increase their efforts in learning instead of adopting a withdrawn attitude which leads to failure.

REFERENCES


