

## **The School-Based Factors Contributing to Low Girls' Mean Score in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Exam**

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**Abstract:** The KCSE performance of girls in Kenya has been poor as compared to that of the boys for the last five years. The purpose of this study was to find out the causes of the poor performance of girls in KCSE exam. The study was guided by Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity, which states that each person is born with given amount of capacity and suggests that boys and girls have equal level of inbuilt potentials to perform. The study was guided by the book, "Research Methods, Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches", by Mugenda and Mugenda. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The study population comprised of 26 principals, 337 teachers and 1260 girls in mixed secondary schools. Simple random sampling was used to sample 6 principals, 68 teachers, 126 girls and 1 Education Officer. The research instruments were questionnaires and interview guide and the researcher collected both quantitative & qualitative data. The researcher conducted pilot study to test the validity and reliability of data collecting instruments and used descriptive techniques in data analysis with the help of SPSS version 20. The data was presented in form of tables. The study revealed the major causes of poor girls' performance to be absenteeism, lack of motivation and inadequate learning facilities. Recommendations were made to the Ministry of Education to provide enough bursaries for girls, parents to encourage girls in academics and principals to motivate both teachers and students. The findings of the study would help to improve the performance of girls in the study area and the country at large.

**Keywords:** School-Based Factors, Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The universal declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 states that everyone has a right to education. UNESCO [1] state that education is the foundation of nations' development and that is why Kenya as a nation sees it as a tool to achieve vision 2030. According to World Bank 1995, effective education forms the foundation of development. Improving girls' access to education with a goal of attaining equality is one of the very important components of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in sub-Saharan-Africa as well as in Kenya. According to Nderitu [2], Kenya is emphasizing on education as educated and skilled labour force is a necessary condition for sustained growth. Education has been seen as an instrument to achieve political, economic as well as social development. UNESCO [3] argues that girl child education in most parts of Kenya especially the marginalized region is affected by domestic chores like taking care of young

children, fetching water and working in the farm. Poor performance of girls in education has a negative impact on their economic life as it leads to poorly paid jobs, which discourages the parents to emphasize on girls' education.

An international report on Education for all by UNESCO [4] reveals that Kenya has attained parity in enrolment at both primary and secondary education. However, in some cases, gender disparities in enrolment exist in favour of the males with regard to access, retention, completion, performance and transition, according to Kashu [5] who noted that this gap widens as one advance in education. Thungu, Wandera, Gachie and Alumande [6] argue that the need to place emphasis on the education of girls is based on the feeling that the rate of return on women's education is generally higher than that of men. Based on the background set out above and considering that the academic performance of girls in the

national examinations in Kenya is worrying, questions are being asked as to why the girls are not performing as well as the boys. Is it due to socio-cultural factors? Is it because of school-based factors, home-based factors or economic factors? It is against this background that the

study was carried out to establish the causes of poor KCSE performance of girls in Kenya. Table 1 shows the performance of girls and boys between 2009 -2013, clear from Table 1 that girls' performance has been poor compared to that of boys for the last five years.

**Table 1: Sample Analysis of Performance of Schools in Kenya**

	Schools	GENDER	Mean Scores				
			2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1.	Ndururumo High School	Boys	8.76	9.04	9.52	9.24	9.25
		Girls	6.8	6.84	7.84	7.34	7.35
2.	Ndururi Sec School	Boys	5.65	5.58	5.45	6.07	5.76
		Girls	3.65	4.2	4.9	4.8	4.48
3.	Falling Waters Sec School.	Boys	4.2	4.96	5.74	4.92	4.98
		Girls	3.92	4.36	4.52	4.68	4.84
4.	Igwamiti Sec School	Boys	4.90	4.68	5.03	5.6	4.66
		Girls	4.7	4.6	4.93	5	4.62
5.	Munyaka Sec School	Boys	5.04	4.85	4.61	4.63	4.96
		Girls	3.96	4.11	4.31	4.59	4.06
6.	Bishop Louis Sec School	Boys		4.86	4.42	3.98	5.13
		Girls		4.22	4.18	3.59	3.85
7.	St Paul Sec School	Boys	3.89	4.53	3.8	3.84	5.13
		Girls	3.77	4.25	3.58	3.68	3.85
8.	Shamanei Sec School	Boys	4.25	4.81	3.24	3.95	3.5
		Girls	3.97	4.49	3.04	3.75	3.24
9.	Heros Sec School	Boys	3.91	4.2	3.89	4.37	3.36
		Girls	3.71	4.14	3.81	4.29	3.32
10.	St Benard Sec School	Boys	3.1	2.98	2.74	2.82	2.96
		Girls	2.84	2.94	2.5	2.76	2.9
11.	Laikipia High School	Boys	3.32	3.37	4.62	3.5	3.54
		Girls	3.24	3.31	4.5	3.44	3.4

Source: DEO's office 2014

Education is seen as having a critical function of empowering individuals and transforming the economies of nations as it is strongly associated with good health, better nutrition, lower fertility rate and higher child survival. One of the eight Millennium Development goals (MDGs) is the promotion of gender equality and empowering of women. This can effectively be realized by ensuring improved performance of female students so that they can be able to compete with male counterpart in the job market. Information from the DEO's office clearly shows that the girls have been performing poorly compared to boys. For instance in 2011, 90% of the top ten students in KCSE were boys and only 10% were girls. The same performance was repeated in 2012 where 60%

of the top students were boys and 40% were girls. In 2013, 80% of the top ten students were boys and 20% were girls [7].

It is evident from this report that the KCSE performance of girls in Kenya has been poor as compared to that of the boys. This implies that most female students end up being disadvantaged in getting good paying jobs, which affects their families and society. If this problem is not arrested, Kenya is likely to lag behind in terms of development and the nation will not be able to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals. There was need to investigate the causes of poor performance of girls in KSCE that solutions could be sought. This would help to

improve the performance of female students, leading to women empowerment, which would in turn lead to economic development in Kenya.

### **School-based factors affecting performance**

Several school-based factors have been identified that contribute to poor performance in national examinations. The government has tried to deal with the problem of poor performance of female students through giving grants to some needy schools as well as awarding bursaries to individual girls. Despite all these effort by the government, girls level of performance remains significantly low, [8]. Njeru and Orodho [9] emphasizes on strong effects of school facilities on performance. They argue that instructional materials are crucial to students learning. This is an indication that physical facilities are key factors on performance. Kombo [10] strongly support the above sentiments that lack of school facilities is a major contributing factor towards poor performance. Kashu [11] also noted that lack of facilities like books affects performance. Schneider [12] also strongly supports the views that physical facilities like books, laboratory and library have a direct link with the performance. There was likelihood that the poor performance of girls in the country may have been contributed by lack of learning facilities due to the fact that majority of schools in this region may not have adequate facilities.

Girls are mostly affected by lack of materials as they feel more inadequate than boys, thus perform poorer. A report by the Ministry of education on ASAL districts noted that lack of housing for teachers among harsh conditions results to teacher's absenteeism, [13]. The report continues to reveal that most of the teachers skip classes to go home early as poverty among the communities made it impossible to provide extra facilities including teachers' houses. The report also observes that teachers want the government to help the disadvantaged communities as a way of motivating teachers and improving in national examination. Nderitu [14] supports

this argument saying that motivation of both teachers and students has been cited as a factor determining performance. He argues that students especially girls who are not motivated will not work hard and thus perform poorly. This suggests that motivation is very important for good performance to be realized in any school and if it lacks, then performance remains poor. This could have been happening in the country, where the teachers and the girl child lacked motivation thus lowering their morale to working hard.

Wairegi [15] affirms that constant lateness to school is bound to have some adverse effects on academic achievement. He continues to say that lateness to school makes students mostly girls miss lessons, which lead to poor performance. This might have been one of the causes of poor performance in country as some of the schools are day schools and lateness to school was a common feature to many girls due to house chores at home. Kibera and Kimokoti [16] explain that perceived attitude towards the students' academic ability determines the performance of students. Attitude may be learned simply by following the example of a teacher. In this respect, the learner draws from his or her teacher, dispositions to form his or her attitudes, which may likely affect his or her learning outcome, [17]. Generally, many people have attitude that boys perform better than girls do and this demoralize the girls leading to poor performance.

Okwemba [18] indicated that studying among girls builds their confidence and self-esteem. Findings from the study by Yungunyu showed that one of the reasons for poor performance of girls was low esteem especially in mixed schools. As quality education for girls is as vital as that of boys, the government needs to create an environment that facilitates high achievement for both. Wairegi (2009) found out that the qualifications of teachers dictates much on performance. Andalo [19] found out that the number of years of schooling of teachers was the most constantly positive and significant contributor to pupils achievement. He added that a school

is as good as the quality of its teachers. Wairegi [20] says that many of the schools find it impossible to obtain qualified staff. This has led to recruitment of untrained teachers who are not very competent in teaching, contributing to poor performance. Although the situation had changed a bit, there was still a problem of enough trained teachers in many parts of the country, For instance, Nyahururu sub-county was one of them and this could cause poor performance in national examinations in the area.

Asuga [21] argues that teaching methods to some extent affects performance. Nderitu [22] noted that good impartation of knowledge on the part of the teacher coupled with students interest in the subject and the display of positive attitude are good motivating factors which when combined, results to better achievement. Adu and Olaluduh [23] who argues that effective teaching is a significant predictor of student's academic performance support these sentiments. Thus, poor academic performance is linked with poor teachers' performance in terms of accomplishing teaching tasks, negative attitude to work and poor teaching habits. This may affect girls more than it may affect boys. Some teachers are more interested in boys than girls because boys perform better. Gichuki [24] affirms that teachers have been seen to have an important influence on student academic achievement and they play crucial role in educational attainment because the teacher is ultimately responsible for translating policies into actions and principles based on practice during interaction with students. Chege [25] argues that teachers experience echoes these words and commitment to students learning emerges as key characteristic to successful learning and achievement. Chege continued to argue that no education curriculum is greater than its teachers and that teachers' qualification, appropriate training and experience is one of the highest asset a school can have.

Stronge [26] argues that effective teachers are knowledgeable in their subjects and caring towards their

students. Diane [27] argues that other factors contributing to high academic performance includes good seating arrangement and good building. Healthy School Network [28] supports the above sentiment by arguing that teachers have tremendous impact on students' academic achievement and they vary greatly in their effectiveness. This implies that teachers in class do not motivate some of the girls and this affects their performance adversely. Godia [29] affirms that high academic performance in every school begins with as school manager's ability to manage personal performance. Andalo [30] has the same sentiment, argues that a school is as good as the quality of its teachers, and has to do the ability of the head teacher. This means that if the head teacher has a low opinion on girls, they will be demoralized and perform poorly.

Student's discipline has been noted to influence performance. Ma and Willms [31] argue that students' discipline is vital for their academic and social success. Mwangi [32] states that school's climate that is characterized by social reward for academic excellence and where teachers and students, there value discipline is good performance. Discipline affects girls more than the boys as they are easily influence to be indiscipline more than boys are. What happens within the classroom has been found to have influence on performance. According to Asuga [33], the size of the school has some effect on the performance. Kashu [34] found out that the size of a class has a significant impact on the performance of the school. He argues that a teacher in overcrowded classroom with more than 40 students can hardly achieve effective and efficient teaching and learning. He recommends that the principals should maintain manageable classes. He also found out that over 50% of the schools had formal preps that were not supervised by the teachers. Unsupervised preps may have been a common feature in many schools in Kenya and could have been one of the many reasons contributing to poor performance especially for the girls as they use preps time too groom themselves.

Leadership in the school is also a determining factor of performance. Asuga [35] says that the quality of the head teacher in a school matters in students' performance. Jones [36] supports this by stating that leadership is a crucial factor in the success of a school. He continues to identify the activities that contribute to effective leadership by school principals, which includes setting an atmosphere of order, creating a climate of high expectation for staff and students, encouraging collaborative relationships as well as building commitment among students and staff to meet the school goals. If the head teacher does not have high expectations on girls, then they may end up performing poorly.

Wairegi [37] says that lack of water and sanitary towels affects the girls' education. Kashu [38] support this by arguing that lack of water and sanitary towels affect the girls education as they miss school during their menstruation to avoid embarrassment in case of messing themselves up. This implies that the girls are disadvantaged unlike the boys and so for them to perform well, the problem needs to be addressed. The gender insensitive school environment has discouraged girls leading to poor performance. Thungu and colleagues [39], argues that these insensitive practices include insensitive

teachers' comments, materials, and sexual harassment by teachers and administrators who portrays girls in a given light. This makes the girls feel inferior and are affected emotionally leading to poor performance.

Teachers should be gender sensitive so as not to injure girls' self-esteem. Fatuma and Sifuna [40] states that the school culture whose hidden curriculum serves to alienate girls, disempower them and eventually push them out of the system. They continue to argue that even the school formal curriculum perpetuate traditional gender boundaries and employment opportunities that do not favour female labour. These have demotivated the girls leading to poor performance. Nderitu [41] found out that most girls perform poorly due to absenteeism, indiscipline and lack of female teachers to motivate them in their academics.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adapted the descriptive survey method of research. The target population was 26 principals, 337 teachers, 1260 form three girls in mixed secondary schools and one country educational officer to have 1624. The sample was selected randomly from all over the nation. The table below shows the target population.

**Table 2: target population**

Item	Population
Sub-county Education Officer	1
Principals	26
Students	1260
Teachers	337
Total	1624

The researcher used a variety of research instruments for data collection. Questionnaires were used for the students, teachers and the principals. The researcher constructed these. Questionnaires were preferred because they saved time as well as ensuring confidentiality. Mugenda and Mugenda [42] who argue that questionnaires are suitable for obtaining information about a population who were able to read and write

supported them. The researcher also used interview guides for the education officer. The interview guide was used as it would provide insightful information that might not have been achieved through the questionnaire. The researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The data analysis procedures were descriptive data analysis techniques. This involved analyzing the data in terms of tables, percentages, and frequencies. The

researcher used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for easy and accurate analysis of data. In the data analysis, 0%-50% would show low indication 56%-75% would show moderate indication while 76%-100% would show high indication of the item being analyzed. The data was interpreted and conclusions and recommendations were made to Ministry of Education, principals, teachers and parents who were major stakeholders in education.

### Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

The study was to determine the school based factors that influence girls' performance and the research

question stated, "What are the school-based factor contributing low mean score of girls in secondary schools in Kenya?" The items addressing this question include school facilities, motivation, learning resources and absenteeism. A series of statements were issued to the respondents and their responses summarized under different sub-headings.

### School Facilities and Girls' Performance

The teachers and students were required to indicate the physical facilities available in the school

**Table 3: School Facilities and Girls' Performance**

School Facilities Availability	Principals	Teachers
Electricity	100%	100%
Science laboratory	100%	98.50%
Piped water	83.30%	95.40%
Adequate classrooms	83.30%	78.50%
Enough desks and chairs	81.50%	81.50%
Library	7.70%	38.50%

The table above shows that 100% of the principals and teachers indicated that there is electricity in their schools. Likewise 100% of the principals indicated that their schools have science laboratory whereas 98.5% of the teachers indicated presence of school laboratory. On the issue of piped water, 95.4% of teachers and 83.3% indicated that their schools have reliable piped water. The findings showed high indication that schools have piped water and therefore serve their students with a better learning environment and avoid wasting time fetching water or carrying water from the neighborhood. The table also shows a small number of teachers (38.5%) and principals (7.7%) indicated that their schools have libraries, which highly affect girls' performance. The findings agree with the views of Njeru and Orodho [43] who emphasizes on strong effects of school facilities on performance. They argue that

instructional materials are crucial to students learning. Kashu [44] also noted that lack of facilities like seating facilities, libraries and other essential facilities could affect academic performance of learners. Kombo [45] states that lack of school facilities is a major contributing factor towards poor performance. The study revealed that lack of school facilities like libraries is a cause of poor performance in the area of study. The Education Officer had also mentioned that some schools lack adequate facilities like laboratories.

### Academic Staff Motivation

The study sought to determine if the motivation of academic staff affected academic performance among girls. The respondents were asked if the staff were rewarded against performance and the responses are summarized in Table below

**Table 4:Academic Staff Motivation**

	Head Teachers		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	100.0%	47	72.3%
No	0	.0%	18	27.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

As shown in Table above, all of the principals (100%) and majority of teachers (72.3%) indicated that the academic staff is rewarded while a small number of teachers (27.3%) indicated they are not rewarded. This means that most secondary schools highly reward the academic staff, as a way of motivating them to impart knowledge to the girls in their schools although some staff is not motivated which have low effects on the girls' performance. These views to some extent concur with those of Nderitu [46] who noted that motivation of both teachers and students has been cited as a factor

determining performance. Reising [47] also noted that motivating the teachers; the overall effect is that they get psyched up to even have extra hours to tutor the students and this lifts the academic performance of learners particularly among girls.

**Learning Resources**

The study sought to underscore the adequacy of learning resources in the school. The respondents were asked to indicate how adequate the learning resources were and the responses are summarized in Table below

**Table 5:Teaching and Learning Resources**

	Head teachers		Teachers		Students	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very Adequate			9	13.8%	10	10.0%
Adequate	4	66.7%	47	72.3%	59	59.0%
Inadequate	2	33.3%	9	13.8%	31	31.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table above shows that majority of the teachers (72.3%), principals (66.7%) and students (59%) indicated that teaching and learning resources are adequate. Of the respondents who participated in the study, 33.3% of the principals, 31% of the students and 13.8% of teachers indicated that teaching and learning resources are inadequate. This could mean that the teaching and learning resources are moderately adequate in some

subjects while other subjects they are not and thus contributed poor performance. The study revealed that availability of learning resources moderately affects girls' performance in the study area. The respondents were asked if teaching and learning materials affect the academic performance of girls and the responses are summarized in Table below

**Table 6:Teaching and Learning Materials and Academic Performance Table**

	Head teachers		Teachers		Students	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	6	100.0%	33	50.8%	55	55.0%
Agree	0	0.0%	25	38.5%	35	35.0%
disagree	0	0.0%	7	10.8%	10	10.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The table above shows that all the principals (100%) and majority of students (55%) and teachers (50%) strongly agreed that teaching and learning resources affect the academic performance of girl. On the other hand, 38.5% of teachers and 35% of the students agreed with the statement whereas 10.8% of teachers and 10% of the learners disagreed with the statement. The findings indicate that teaching and learning resources moderately affect the academic performance of girls. This is in agreement with the views of Wairegi [48] who noted

that teaching and learning materials plays a vital role in determining the academic success of learners. He argued that inadequate resources meant that the schools would record poor performance in national examinations.

#### Girls Absenteeism and Academic Performance

The study sought to determine the rate of girls' absenteeism due to lack of sanitary towels and academic performance. The responses are summarized in Table below

**Table 7: Girls Absenteeism during Menstrual Cycle**

	Head Teachers		Teachers		Students	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	66.7%	40	61.5%	65	65.0%
No	2	33.3%	25	38.5%	35	35.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The table above shows that majority of principals (66.7%), students (65%) and teachers (61.5%) indicated girls do shy away from school during their menstrual cycle .On the other hand few teachers (38.5%), students (35%) and principals (33.3%) admitted that girls do not avoid school during their menstrual cycle. From the interview of the Education Officer, it came out clearly that girls are not provided with sanitary towels in school in the study area. These findings indicate that girls in this area lack sanitary towels and that schools do not provide them to girl students this moderately affect their performance. The study findings agree with the sentiments of Wairegi who says that lack of water and sanitary towels affects the girls' education. Kashu [49] also support this by arguing that lack of sanitary towels affect the girls education as they miss school during their menstruation to avoid embarrassment in case of messing themselves up.

#### CONCLUSION

The study revealed that most of the schools in the study area have piped water and therefore served their students with a better learning environment since they can

access clean water and avoid wasting time fetching water or carrying water from the neighborhood. The study showed high indication that the schools have electricity, laboratories and adequate classrooms, which create a good atmosphere for learning. The study showed low availability libraries in many schools and this has highly affected the performance of girls. The study revealed that girls in the study area lack sanitary towels making many of them to be away from school, thus highly affecting their performance negatively. The D.E.O. indicated that girls in the study area were not provided with sanitary towels, which affect their performance. The study also showed that teachers and students are highly motivated while on the other hand there is low indication of motivation of teachers and students. The study also revealed that the schools in the region have adequate learning resources in some cases whereas in others, they are not adequate. School in liaison with stakeholders should provide sanitary towels to girls in secondary school to reduce the rate of absenteeism in Kenya.

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