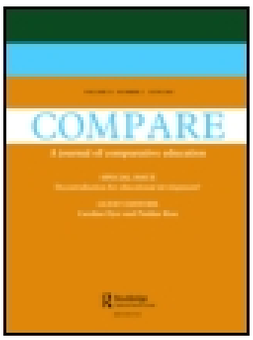

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccom20

Manifestations of boys' under participation in education in Kenya: the case of Busia and Kirinyaga counties

Jafred Muyaka, David Emoit Omuse & Francis Likoye Malenya

To cite this article: Jafred Muyaka, David Emoit Omuse & Francis Likoye Malenya (2021): Manifestations of boys' under participation in education in Kenya: the case of Busia and Kirinyaga counties, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2021.1877113

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2021.1877113

COMPARE, 2021
https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2021.1877113

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Manifestations of boys' under participation in education in Kenya: the case of Busia and Kirinyaga counties

Jafred Muyaka[a], David Emoit Omuse[b] and Francis Likoye Malenya[c]

[a]Department of Educational Foundations, University of Eldoret, Eldoret, Kenya; [b]Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Eldoret, Eldoret, Kenya; [c]Department of Educational Foundations, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

ABSTRACT

There has been a growing concern in Kenya that boys have gradually been left out of the gender equation with little research capturing their schooling experiences. When examined, boys' underachievement is treated with suspicion that has led to few studies demonstrating their marginalisation. This paper explored the manifestations of boys' underachievement in education in Busia and Kirinyaga counties in Kenya. The study was carried out in 12 primary schools targeted 12 headteachers, 24 teachers, 480 pupils, 8 education officials and 180 households. Enrolment, school attendance, and candidature for national examinations data showed boys were marginalised. In addition, they lacked adequate role models. However, on performance, boys still had better results than girls. The paper concludes that boys were beginning to under participate in education and recommends the need for gender interventions to target both boys and girls and tripartite efforts at communities, county governments and national government to re-enrol boys.

KEYWORDS

Boys; education; primary education; level; gender; child labour; under-participation

Introduction

The right to education is universally accepted and protected by both legal and policy frameworks. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one such policy framework that safeguards and promotes the rights of children. Enshrined in CRC is the right to an acceptable and adaptable non-discriminatory education (UNICEF 2006). Historically, girls have faced a lot of challenges in their quest to access some of these rights, including education (Zimba Undated, Chant and Guttmann 2000; Herz and Sperling 2004). This justifies efforts that aimed to promote girls' access and retention in schools. As the world continues to mobilise resources to support girls' education, there has been a widespread perception that boys have been left out of the gender discussion (Miller 2018, Chant and Guttmann 2000; Chang'ach 2012). In some countries such as United States of America, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Mongolia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, boys have been noted to underachieve in national examinations, have higher dropout rates and are exposed more to corporal punishment while at school as compared to girls (EAP UNGEI 2011). In one such

CONTACT Jafred Muyaka muyakamwira@gmail.com University of Eldoret, P.O. BOX 1125-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

study, Kuper and Jacobs (2018) reported that, on average, boys underperform girls at schools in developed countries and identified competencies in reading, enrolment in university education and boys' shrinking lead in numeracy as areas of concern.

The World Development Report 2012 gave a general global synopsis of gender trends in school enrolment from primary through tertiary institutions (World Bank 2011). According to the report, gender gaps, to the disadvantage of girls and women, have been reducing in the last 25 years. The report further noted that in some countries, once enrolled, girls tended to stay in school at rates equal to, or higher than, those of their male counterparts.

Evidence of boys' under participation in education has been reported in parts of Africa. For instance, in 2012, statistics from Namibia disaggregated by gender showed girls had recorded higher grades than boys across the then 13 education regions (Zimba Undated). In higher education, statistics from University of Namibia between 2002 and 2012 indicated that the institution consistently graduated more females (60%) than males (40%). The trend was replicated in the Polytechnic of Namibia for the period 2006–2011 (Polytechnic of Namibia Graduation Reports of 2006–2011). According to Zimba (Undated), statistics from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia revealed a higher proportion of females enrolling in schools than males.

The underlying statistics bring to the fore a fundamental question on whether boys have been sufficiently supported to participate in education. If yes, then what explains the emerging under participation? Some studies have examined this and linked it to the existing stereotypes in communities (Edwards, Knoche, and Kumru 2003; Marie-Pierre 2011; Fatuma et al. 2013). Other studies conducted in Kenya have considered boys to be more independent, less interested in learning, and to have the potential to earn money while working (Chege and Likoye 2015; National Gender and Equality Commission 2015). The opportunity cost, with the perception that boys are unresponsive to learning and with more diverse work opportunities with economic gains, means poor families tend to withdraw boys from schools to supplement family income (Torres 2011a).

The nature of school environments has also been documented as affecting boys' schooling experiences (Davis and Hay 2018; Chege and Likoye 2015). Generally, the school environment is not gender-neutral (Nethanomsak, Ngang, and Raksasataya 2019). There is the growing perception that schools have become 'feminised', and the feminisation of school values cited as a factor that has led to under participation of boys in education (Davis and Hay 2018; Carrington and McPhee 2008). The assumption remains that boys suffer from feminised school environments.

In this article, we explore the gender concerns that boys in Kenya are under participating in education. Specifically, we seek the evidence to explain this narrative of under participation. Under participation is used in this article to mean boys' low achievement levels in education measured by their enrolment, school attendance and performance in national examinations. This helped to respond to the extent to which boys' under participation manifests in Kenya's primary education. Manifestations, therefore, referred to the emerging evidence that the primary education system in Kenya has contributed to boys' marginalisation in education.

In the last two decades, Kenya has recorded a remarkable progress in increasing access to education for both girls and boys. The adoption of Free Primary Education and subsidised Secondary Education in 2003 and 2008, respectively, are two of the

contributing factors. In the period between 2012 and 2016, enrolment ratio of boys to girls in primary schools was 0.51:0.49 (Republic of Kenya 2016). The government made a commitment to eliminate gender and regional disparities in basic education by 2017 (Republic of Kenya 2012b). Whereas national indicators have been impressive, disparities still exist among counties and regions.

One of the challenges facing Kenya's primary education is the slow growth in the number of public schools compared to the demand. For instance, in the period 2014–2018, the number of primary schools grew by 7% to 37,910 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2019). Yet the government, since 2018, has been pursuing an ambitious plan to have a 100% transition rate from primary to secondary schools. This has exerted pressure to an already overstretched system that lacks enough resources and facilities to meet the growing demand. This 100% transition has not been achieved with the latest statistics by KNBS (2019) showing that the pupil transition rate for 2018 was 83.3% up from 76.1% in 2014. The primary school level still experiences wastages with pupil completion rate estimated at 84.2% in 2018 up from 79.3% in 2014. These figures show an upward trend but still low for a country offering a compulsory and free basic education.

The enrolment in primary schools in Kenya in 2018 was 10.5 million, with an average school size of 277. The survival rate at Standard 8 stood at 76.9% in 2018. The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for primary schools was 108.0% while the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) was 92.4%. The number of candidates sitting for KCPE rose by 6.7% from 2014 to stand at 1,060,710 in 2018. There were slightly more girls (50.1%) sitting for KCPE in 2018. The total number of primary school teachers in Kenya in 2018 was 215,363 with more female teachers (51.8%) than male teachers (48.2%).

Boys have traditionally been depicted as being at a vantage position as far as access to education opportunities are concerned, while girls are at the periphery. Although this may be true in many contexts, it represents a stereotype that has led to a skewed focus and exclusive attention to girls justified by their presumed vulnerability. This gender struggle in Kenya should, however, be understood within the historical, political and social-cultural context of the Kenyan society. The shifts in the economic and social order partly explain the emergence of the reverse gender discussion witnessed in the country today. The existing gender relations and their related struggles were shaped by the colonial administration particularly their gender beliefs about men's and women's social positions. Through western education, men were socialised as family breadwinners. This explains the struggle most African traditional families continue to go through to support boys' education in order to live up to this expectation. Consequently, girls faced marginalisation because the traditional social systems favoured boys' education.

Pike (2020) argues that the economic strife with the decline in the agricultural sector and the dwindling and precarious jobs orchestrated by a static economy means men are no longer capable of living up to this expectation of being the 'breadwinners'. More women are therefore taking up the providence role and expanding their influence in the society. On the political and social front, Kenya has for the past few decades carried out mobilisation targeting gender equality. These efforts culminated in a new constitution that was promulgated in 2010. Among other provisions, the 2010 Constitution requires that no more than two-thirds of members of any public institution be of the same gender. The National

Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), a creation of the constitution, and many other women profession-based organisations such as Federation of Women Lawyers have pushed for empowerment of women.

One outcome of women empowerment interventions has been the effort to eliminate discrimination against girls. However, the society, in the process, appears to have neglected the plight of boys (Chang'ach 2012; Pike 2020; Ministry of Education EMIS 2012). The narrative has been that boys have started falling behind girls in education. For instance, in 2010, the Minister for Education raised concerns over boy-child education. For instance, it was noted that in Central, Eastern and Nairobi regions, more girls than boys had sat for the primary school leaving examination. In 2009, the Kenya National Examination Council found out that girls had outperformed boys in literacy and the superior performance demonstrated by boys in numeracy was reducing. Girls had further stabilised in many aspects of schooling while their male counterparts had begun to decline. The literacy studies have corroborated these findings where girls at the end of the third grade outperformed boys in both rural and urban schools (RTI International 2014a).

This emerging trend of boys' low participation in education in parts of the country and in some areas such as enrolment, candidature at national examinations and completion rates need research attention. What seems not clear in the country is the extent to which boys are under participating in education. What do boys do or do not do to under participate in education? What has the Kenyan society been doing to or with boys that has led to this trend where boys are under participating in education?

Statement of the problem

In the last decade, statistics in some of the regions in the country have presented a pattern of boys' decline, particularly with regard to enrolment, retention and learning outcomes. This has led to a growing concern in Kenya that boys are gradually being left out of the gender equation. Unfortunately, research in this area continues to capture schooling experiences of girls with little attention to boys' circumstances. More disturbing is the observation that even when it is examined, boys' under participation in education is treated with a lot of suspicion. Consequently, fewer studies undertaken to demonstrate the disadvantage that boys face. This paper interrogated manifestations of boys' under participation in education in the counties of Busia and Kirinyaga in Kenya. In particular, the study looked at enrolment trends against the projected population of school-going-age children, attendance, candidature at KCPE and lastly KCPE performance since 2014 to establish whether boys were under participating in education.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the paper were:

(1) To establish the extent to which school attendance, enrolment, and retention reflect boys under participation in education.
(2) To determine whether boys are underperforming in national examinations.

Research methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design that involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Specifically, this was a convergent parallel sequential mixed method where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently with equal weighting.

Research sites

The study was conducted in Kirinyaga and Busia Counties in Kenya. The two counties were selected purposively based on the Ministry of Education statistics that identified them as among the counties where boys' enrolment in education, when compared to girls, were almost equal (KNBS 2015). Busia County is located at the extreme western side of Kenya covering an estimated area of 1,695 KM^2 while Kirinyaga County is in central Kenya covering an estimated area of 1,478.1 KM^2.

Sampling strategy

In each of the two selected counties, three sub counties were sampled based on their performance in the 2017 KCPE examination results. Stratified sampling was employed to get a mix of three strata namely; best performing, average performing and low performing sub-counties. From each sub-county, two primary schools were selected purposively; one where boys were underperforming and the other where girls were underperforming, giving a total of 12 schools. The study sample consisted of 12 head-teachers who responded to a school questionnaire. Further, the study interviewed two teachers from each school giving a total of 24 teachers. In each school, 40 pupils were sampled; 10 from each of class five to class eight, giving a total of 480 pupils (240 girls and 240 boys). The upper classes were chosen as they would independently complete a closed-ended questionnaire. The County Director of Education (CDE) and the three Sub County Directors of Education (SCDE) from each county participated in a 45–60-minute individual interview. In addition, the study sampled 15 households in each of the six school communities giving a total of 180 households.

Data analysis

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyse data from the household questionnaire, pupil questionnaire and school questionnaire. This mainly used descriptive statistics to demonstrate boys' participation in education. Analysis of qualitative data involved creation of thematic codes that were used to transform the interview transcripts and analysis into a report. Lastly, both the quantitative and qualitative reports were interpreted in a complementary manner to inform on the perception that boys were under participating in education.

Demographics

The study showed that most children (89.5%) lived with their parents. A further 9.1% lived with relatives and an estimated 1.3% of the children were staying with non-relatives. The average household size was 6 (Kirinyaga County had 5 and Busia 6).

In the sampled schools, there were more female teachers (67.1%) than male teachers (32.9%). The teacher–pupil ratio in the sampled schools was 1:34. However, 1.9% of the teachers were untrained. The distance taken by pupils to access their schools has a bearing on their educational achievement. Other than the energy and time taken, hazards including encounter with wild animals and bandits may prevent pupils from accessing schools. In this study, the majority of households (97.2%) estimated that it took less than one hour for their children to walk to the nearest school. The communities were largely safe with over 96% reporting that their children's travel to and from school is either very safe or fairly safe. However, 4% still indicated that the communities were fairly unsafe for school-going children.

Research findings and discussion

The study had two objectives: first, to establish the extent to which school attendance, enrolment, and retention reflect boys' under participation in education and second, to determine whether boys were underperforming in national examinations.

The task for the first objective was to analyse enrolment data, school attendance and the population of students sitting for KCPE disaggregated by gender.

(a) *School enrolment*

Enrolment data have often been used to demonstrate learners' participation in education. The study examined pupils' enrolment in the sampled primary schools between 2014 and 2018 and the pattern is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that girls consistently recorded higher enrolment (51.7%, 51.1%, 50.9% and 50.6% for 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively) than boys. However, 2018 was exceptional, boys' enrolment was marginally more (50.2%) than girls (49.8%). The average gender gap based on the total enrolment in the two counties for the period 2014–2018 was 1.4%.

A line graph that compared enrolment in the two counties is as shown in Figure 1. Enrolment in Kirinyaga County was low.

Table 1. Enrolment data 2014–2018 in Kirinyaga and Busia Counties.

		Total				
Year/County		Boys		Girls		Total
2014	Kirinyaga	656	49.5%	680	51.3%	1326
	Busia	1468	48.1%	1581	51.9%	3049
	Total	2124	48.5%	2261	51.7%	4375
2015	Kirinyaga	644	49.3%	662	50.7%	1306
	Busia	1533	48.7%	1615	51.3%	3148
	Total	2177	48.9%	2277	51.1%	4454
2016	Kirinyaga	688	49.8%	693	50.2%	1381
	Busia	1553	48.8%	1632	51.2%	3185
	Total	2241	49.1%	2325	50.9%	4566
2017	Kirinyaga	1344	50.1%	1334	49.8%	2680
	Busia	1520	48.7%	1601	51.3%	3121
	Total	2864	49.4%	2935	50.6%	5801
2018	Kirinyaga	1443	50.4%	1409	49.2%	2862
	Busia	1519	50.0%	1520	50.0%	3039
	Total	2962	50.2%	2929	49.6%	5901

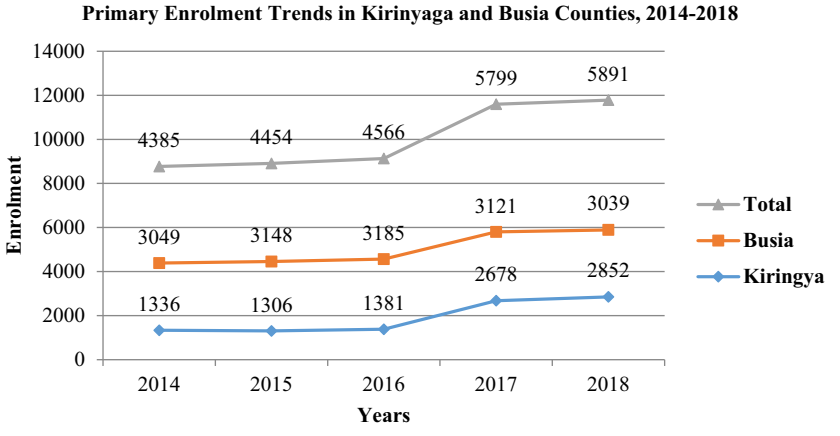

Figure 1. Enrolment trends, 2014–2018.

The sampled primary schools in Busia County, in the period 2014 and 2018, had slightly more enrolment than the sampled primary schools in Kirinyaga County.

When enrolment trends were analysed alongside the age projection for age 6–13 by the KNBS (2015), marginalisation of boys emerged. For instance, KNBS Report had projected boys' population for age 6–13 years in the two counties to be at 50.3% compared to girls' 49.7% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2015). The projections indicated slightly more school going-age boys than girls. However, the actual enrolment in schools had slightly more girls (51%) enrolled than boys (49%). The findings corroborate well with what was established at the household level. The household data showed that 5.9% of school-going age children were out of school. When disaggregated by gender, more boys (3.8%) than girls (2.2%) were out of school. Boys were beginning to under participate in education.

Poor enrolment among boys was equally voiced by education stakeholders in the two counties. According to the stakeholders, boys were being raised in an environment that was not gender-neutral. The cultural beliefs in the two communities perceived boys as young as 10 years to be 'men' with responsibility of providing basic needs to their households. This might explain why more boys than girls were exposed to income-generating activities like riding boda boda (motorcycles), sand harvesting, washing trucks/vehicles and child labour in coffee and tea industries. There was an apparent understanding that boys can 'misbehave' a little, can stay alone or even be left to shelter themselves outside their homesteads. This perception made boys believe that they could be involved in providing basic needs to their households as a normal way of graduating into adult life. When boys stay alone or far away from their homesteads, there is the likelihood of irregular school attendance compared to when they are closely monitored within homesteads. Whilst communities gave boys a considerable level of independence including staying outside their homesteads, this was not the case for girls. Families were too protective of girls whom they closely monitored in the homesteads. This apparent lack of attention given to boys could partly explain their low numbers in classes when compared to girls. Some of the views were captured and presented thus:

> In Teso South, we have more girls enrolled than boys. For instance, this year, the total number of girls enrolled for KCPE is 2050 while that of boys is 1975. The same trend continues up to secondary. Boys who are out of school are more compared to girls in Teso South .... [*why is this the case?*] ... because boys are exposed more than girls and others see no sense to continue with education when they can make money early enough through riding boda boda, sand harvesting than girls who are confined within homesteads most of the time ..... boy child is not given equal attention that is given to the girl. He's exposed to the environment while the girl is protected by parents. Boys drop to venture in sand harvesting, boda boda riding and washing trucks at the Malaba border (**SCDE Teso South 11 October 2018).**

More enrolment of girls than boys in the sampled schools in the two counties confirms the fear in the country that boys have started to under participate in education. These findings corroborate earlier studies that had raised concerns of boys falling behind girls at an alarming rate. In 2010, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) Report (2013) indicated that the NER for primary school in Kenya was 92.3% for girls and 90.6% for boys. Furthermore, out of the 47 counties, 39 (83%) had better NER ratios for girls than boys, indicating that more girls than boys of appropriate age were accessing primary education in Kenya.

Low enrolment of boys in primary school has not been confined to Kenya alone. Jha and Kelleher (2006) reported that Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Mauritius had recorded more enrolment of girls than boys in their primary schools and secondary levels. This was equally confirmed by Zimba (Undated) in his analysis of data from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia. A study targeting Commonwealth countries showed that the gender gap at primary school has either disappeared or has turned in favour of girls (Jha, Menon, and Chatterjee 2017).

Boys' under participation in education in Busia and Kirinyaga counties was linked to child labour where they were involved in income-generating activities. Parents, teachers and education officials reported that boys spent most of their school time engaged in motorcycle-transport business, sand harvesting, washing trucks/vehicles and picking coffee and tea. Involvement of boys in child labour points to poverty levels among the two communities. The Human Development Index (HDI) for Busia County was at 0.43, lower than the national average of 0.52 and the unemployment rate was around 66.7% (Busia County Integrated Development Plan 2018–2022 2018). These are clear indicators that most households in the county experience high poverty levels.

In low-income economies and poor communities such as Busia County, children are seen as an economic resource for poor parents. As a consequence, parents depend on children's labour earnings to cushion themselves during harsh economic situations (Ahmed and Ray 2011). Hence, poverty remains the greatest single most factor pushing children from poor households into the workplace. The unfortunate thing is that when children leave school and enter the workforce while young, they join cadres of occupations that do not help them break out of the poverty cycle. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 2015, child labour has devastating effects on schooling of children. From a policy perspective, the concern is whether working affects in any way their participation in education. We contend that boys who spend school hours providing labour will struggle attending school regularly and keeping at par with school assignments. In addition, it is almost expected that the exhaustion that

comes with long hours of working will affect their concentration in class. The wholesome effects of these would be poor performance, irregular school attendance, low NERs, dislike of schooling and cases of increased school drop-outs among boys (Ahmed and Ray 2011).

It is not the intention of this article to argue that girls in Kenya are not involved in child labour. Child labour in Kenya affects both boys and girls (National Gender and Equality Commission 2015). However, child labour involving boys seems to leave explicit effects on their schooling experiences that would warrantee an explanation. What explains the devastating effects of child labour to boys? The numbers of male and female participating in child labour notwithstanding, studies have reported that girls, more than boys, tend to combine schooling with work in rural areas better (Khanam 2008). Would this be because of the different types of work that girls and boys engage in? On average, boys work mostly outside the home while girls are engaged mostly within homes and therefore the latter can still access their learning materials. More studies will need to be conducted to find the explanation for girls' resilience when it comes to combining work and schooling.

Kenya has enacted laws intended to protect children from child labour. The Parliament enacted the Children Bill, 2017 which prohibits, among other things, child labour. However, the law only protects children engaged on 'contractual agreements'. Where children are engaged in child labour without a contract or the children do not derive any benefit from their work directly or indirectly, the Children Act does not adequately cover them. This is a gap in the legal frameworks that was to support communities fight child labour. The context in Kenya is that most of the school-going boys and girls are engaged without a contract, making it difficult to enforce the existing law.

(b) School attendance

School attendance is another education indicator used to determine gender participation in education. Irregular school attendance has a disruptive effect on the education of children, making it an important indicator of marginalisation of either girls or boys. In this study, school attendance is used to refer to the actual headcount, that is, the actual number of boys and girls that were present during the day researchers visited the selected schools. An analysis of children's attendance showed that Kirinyaga and Busia counties experienced chronic absenteeism as shown in Table 2.

Twenty-one per cent of the pupils were absent on the day the researchers visited the schools. Absenteeism in Busia County was chronic with 32% of the boys absent on the day of the school visit. Indeed, irregular school attendance was one cause of boys under participation in education in Busia County.

Interviews with the informants showed that the counties had irregular pupils' school attendance. School absenteeism was linked to a number of factors among them high levels of poverty and availability of monetary activities for boys. Presence of monetary activities was a source of motivation for boys to miss school and/or drop out of school. In one of the interviews with one of the Deputy Head-teachers, factors for high absenteeism were indicated thus:

> The predominant cultural practices that affect attendance and performance in this community includes; brewing of local liquor, attending "disco matanga" (local disco) and going to the

Table 2. School attendance by headcount.

	Busia			Kirinyaga			Total		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Std 1	62%	77%	68%	81%	81%	81%	70%	79%	75%
Std 2	76%	68%	72%	87%	86%	86%	81%	76%	79%
Std 3	62%	66%	64%	86%	86%	86%	74%	76%	75%
Std 4	61%	74%	67%	92%	96%	94%	76%	85%	80%
Std 5	69%	62%	65%	97%	80%	88%	83%	72%	77%
Std 6	65%	63%	64%	89%	94%	92%	79%	80%	79%
Std 7	81%	62%	70%	90%	92%	91%	86%	78%	82%
Std 8	74%	74%	74%	101%	89%	95%	89%	82%	86%
Total	68%	68%	68%	91%	88%	89%	80%	78%	79%

> market. Boys go to market with their parents to sell animals while girls stay home to take care of young ones. Additionally, local liquor and disco matanga affects mostly boys' participation and performance. (**Deputy Headteacher Katelenyang Primary, 9 October 2018)**

The term 'matanga' is a Swahili word for 'funeral' and therefore 'disco matanga' refers to the local disco that involves partying at a funeral and normally happens at night. They facilitate causal and sometimes careless sex among young girls and boys. The intense atmosphere facilitated by music, where songs always have strong sexual connotations, explicit lyrics, punctuated by suggestive dancing with little parental control are a motivator for sexual debut and school disruption. There was a feeling among informants that school-going boys were left free in the communities to attend disco matanga. Besides poisoning children minds, school-going children do not get enough sleep affectively negatively their concentration in class. In addition, liquor was an impediment to boys' schooling. Boys were engaged in brewing of local liquor as a source of income for their families. Some were equally noted to have already been recruited into drinking.

Data on school attendance by gender in sub-Saharan Africa are reported to be scarce and Kenya is not an exception (di-Marco 2016). However, the few studies available indicate that school absenteeism is not uncommon in Kenya's primary schools. For instance, Uwezo-Kenya reported that the percentage of enrolled pupils attending school was 88.6% (90.7% and 86.6% for girls and boys, respectively) (Kenya 2012). Accordingly, more boys (13.4%) than girls (9.3%) missed schools, highlighting the disadvantage boys face.

(c) Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) candidature

There has been reported fear that although enrolment of boys and girls is at par or even higher for boys in the early years of schooling, dropout rates for boys are higher in upper classes (Kenya 2010). This reduces, significantly, the number of boys who sit for KCPE examinations. The findings on boys and girls sitting for KCPE between 2013 and 2017 are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that more girls (51.7%) than boys (48.3%) sat for KCPE between the period 2013–2017. Therefore, it is notable that more boys than girls had dropped out of school in upper classes in the selected schools in the two counties. These findings corroborate what Chang'ach (2012) had reported in Keiyo South District in Kenya.

Table 3. Candidature for KCPE 2014–2017.

Year	Gender	Busia	Kirinyaga	Total
2013	Boys	91	65	156
	Girls	108	69	177
2014	Boys	113	83	196
	Girls	119	86	205
2015	Boys	128	74	202
	Girls	145	71	216
2016	Boys	145	86	231
	Girls	133	79	212
2017	Boys	110	75	185
	Girls	131	97	228
Total	Boys	587	383	970
	Girls	636	402	1038

The number of boys registered for KCPE national examinations in the district between 2000 and 2010 was lower than girls.

(d) Pupil–Teacher ratio

Teachers are role models for pupils. Some scholars have argued for same-sex role model in improving educational performance and behaviour of pupils (Carrington and McPhee 2008; Kelleher 2011; Lloyd 2009). Inadequate and lack of same sex role models in schools linked to poor educational achievement, poor behaviour and general gender identity crisis among children. This study examined the pupil (boy)-male teacher ratio and pupil (girl)-female teacher ratio to ascertain if they are in line with the recommended ratios.

The teacher–pupil ratio for the sampled schools was 1:34 which was within the recommended staffing standards of the Ministry of Education (MoE) of 1:40 (Teachers Service Commission 2006). However, the ratio showed that boys had less chances of interacting with a male teacher (1:52) as compared to girls (1:25). Boys in Kirinyaga were at a greater disadvantage with a male teacher to boy ratio of 1:60 as compared to female teacher to girl ratio of 1:20. Access to mentors and role models is at the heart of a quality education. Whereas the current study did not establish whether the more feminised school environment had affected boys' participation in education in Kirinyaga County, inadequate numbers of male teachers in schools affect boys. Studies by Carrington and McPhee (2008) argued that lack of enough male teachers in schools negatively affects performance and behaviours of boys and girls. This is a cause for concern given that poorly behaved pupils and those with low achievements have increased chances of dropping out of school.

The current study established that there was a higher proportion of female teachers (67.1%) in the two counties. This trend of underrepresentation of male teachers in the teaching force in primary schools is common in many education systems across the world (Carrington and McPhee 2008). In Australia, Davis and Hay (2018) indicated that the primary school teacher workforce only had 8% male teachers. Globally, there are increased calls for more male teachers as the teaching profession is accused of being 'feminised', a situation which is assumed to have negative effects on the education of boys. Therefore, for schools to become more 'boy friendly' and thus contribute to improving boys' participation in education, employment and proportionate distribution of male teachers is inevitable. In Kenya, enrolment data in primary Teachers Training

Colleges presents a pattern of dismal numbers of male teacher trainees enrolling and those completing their two-year programmes. The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) reported that in the past five years, more female candidates sat for the Primary Teacher Education (PTE) examination than their male counterparts. In the 2018 PTE examinations, 60.5% of the candidates were female compared to 39.5% who were male (Wanzala 2018). This means more qualified female teachers than male teachers available for recruitment in the next 10 years.

Studies have already linked the presence of female teachers in school to increased enrolment of girls especially in sex-segregated contexts where parents are hesitant trusting their daughters with schools staffed with male teachers (Kelleher 2011; Lloyd 2009; Plan International 2013). In the same prism, inadequate population of male teachers in schools would affect enrolment of boys as parents contemplate on the role models of their boys in schools that are predominantly female. Studies have also provided positive relationship between sex matching between teachers and students and improved academic achievements for both boys and girls in North America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Plan International 2013). This corroborates well with earlier studies that linked lower performance of boys to underrepresentation of males in the teaching force (Harris and Barnes 2009; Carrington, Tymms, and Merrell 2008; Holmlund and Sund 2008).

Matching pupils and teachers by gender as an effective strategy for role modelling has elicited varying arguments. There are those who support gender-stereotypic model where boys do well in their academics when taught by male teachers and then the gender-invariant model where performance of girls and boys is the same when handled by either men or female teachers. In one of the studies, academic motivation and engagement did not vary significantly as a function of their teacher's gender (Martin and Marsh 2005). Other studies in the USA, Finland, Canada and Netherlands have also refuted these claims (Driessen 2007; Sokal et al. 2007). Despite the emerging contrary empirical evidence on same sex role model, this study argues that availability of both male and female teachers in adequate numbers is crucial in improving achievement and attitudes of boys. In cases, as established above, that the number of male teachers is inadequate, makes the learning environment in the selected primary schools inappropriate for boys.

(e) Learning outcomes

The second objective in this study was to determine the performance of boys in national examinations relative to girls in order to establish if they were underperforming. The study analysed the performance of the sampled schools between 2013 and 2017 and the findings are as shown in Table 4.

The overall finding on the arguments and observations that, when compared to girls, boys post poor education performance lacked empirical evidence. Over the study period as shown in the table, boys still posted better results. Notable is the consistent better results in Kirinyaga County where the mean score for the sampled schools was above average. This was not the case for Busia County where both boys and girls posted poor academic performance. Over the years, the mean score for the sampled schools in Busia County was below average. Again, this signifies the disadvantage that boys face in pursuing post primary education.

Table 4. Mean score for the period 2013–2017.

		Mean Score		
Year	Gender	Kirinyaga	Busia	Total
2013	Boys	267.7	249.2	258.5
	Girls	259.8	227.2	243.5
	Total	273.4	252.1	262.7
2014	Boys	256.1	251.6	253.9
	Girls	253.3	239.3	246.3
	Total	264.9	243.4	254.1
2015	Boys	265.5	229.8	247.6
	Girls	272.0	212.9	242.5
	Total	278.2	248.4	263.3
2016	Boys	276.6	198.4	237.5
	Girls	271.1	189.9	230.5
	Total	274.8	217.1	246.0
2017	Boys	281.2	231.3	256.3
	Girls	279.0	224.6	251.8
	Total	279.6	236.8	258.2

One of the SCDEs in Busia County acknowledged that the county has not been doing well in national examinations, although the past three years had witnessed a steady improvement. This was captured in one of the interviews thus:

> Primary education in Teso sub-county is below average though with notable improvements for the last three years. We work with area leaders around to sensitize the community on importance of taking their children to school (**SCDE Teso South 11 October 2018).**

Boys in the selected primary schools still posted better performance than girls. This corroborates findings of earlier studies that had indicated that boys in the country still post better performance (Fatuma et al. 2013). However, analysis of boys' underperformance is reported to be more pronounced in contexts where both boys' and girls' participation in education is very high. Whereas overall performance shows boys are better, literacy data show girls have, on average, higher reading achievement levels than boys (Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality.

Conclusion and recommendations

The perception that boys are less engaged in education was confirmed by school data on enrolment, KCPE candidature, and school attendance. However, this was not the case for academic performance as girls still lagged behind. Whereas boys still performed better than girls in Busia County, the mean score was below the average mark of 250, highlighting the disadvantage that both girls and boys faced. Most boys were below average, limiting their chances of transitioning to well-resourced secondary schools. The findings on staffing revealed that schools had a poor male teacher–boy ratio. This meant boys had fewer role models to emulate, a situation likely to have affected negatively their school behaviour and attitudes and contributed to their under participation in schools. The following recommendations are therefore made:

(1) There is a need to increase efforts to bring back more boys to schools and have a range of compensatory measures to ensure that there is improvement in school attendance.
(2) The staffing officers at the Ministry of Education have to work closely with schools to ensure fair distribution of both male and female teachers in primary schools in Kenya. This is important in providing an adequate number of both male and female role models to support education of boys and girls.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the University of Eldoret [Vice Chancellor's Grant].

ORCID

Jafred Muyaka http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9398-3453

References

Ahmed, S., and R. Ray. 2011. *Trade-Off between Child Labour and Schooling in Bangladesh: Role of Parental Education*. Australia: Department of Economics, Monash University.
Busia County Integrated Development Plan 2018–2022. 2018. *Busia County Integrated Development Plan 2018–2022*. Busia: Busia County.
Carrington, B., and A. McPhee. 2008. "Boys' Underachievement' and the Feminization of Teaching." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 34: 109–120. doi:10.1080/02607470801979558.
Carrington, B., P. Tymms, and C. Merrell. 2008. "Role Models, School Improvement and the 'Gender Gap' – Do Men Bring Out the Best in Boys and Women the Best in Girls?" *British Educational Research Journal* 34: 315–327. doi:10.1080/01411920701532202.
Chang'ach, J. K. 2012. "An Unfinished Agenda: Why Is the Boy Child Endagered?" *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 2 (4): 181–186.
Chant, Sylvia, and Matthew Guttmann. 2000. *Mainstreaming Men into Gender and Developmnet: Debates, Reflections, and Experiences*. Bounemouth: Oxfam GB.
Chege, F., and F. Likoye. 2015. "Education for All? Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Process of Schoolboys Becoming Men in Kirinyaga and Nairobi Counties, Kenya." *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*17 (2): 55–71.
Davis, I., and S. Hay. 2018. "Primary Masculinities: How Male Teachers are Regarded as Employees within Primary Education – A Global Systematic Literature Review." *Sex Education* 18 (3): 280–292. doi:10.1080/14681811.2017.1400963.
di-Marco, A. 2016. *Disadvantaged Girls in Kenyan Schools*. Reading: Education Development Trust (EDT).
Driessen, G. 2007. "The Feminization of Primary Education: Effects of Teachers' Sex on Pupil Achievement, Attitudes and Behaviour." *Review of Education* 53 (2): 183–203.
EAP UNGEI. 2011. *In Focus: Why Boys Do Poorly in School. East Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls' Education Initiative Newsletter Issue No. 8*. Bangok, Thailand: UNGEI.
Edwards, C. P., L. Knoche, and A. Kumru. 2003. "Socialization of Boys and Girls in Natural Contexts." *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* 34–41.

Fatuma, C., F. Likoye, S. Nyambura, and H. Guantai. 2013. "Declining Boys' Participation and Performance in Kenyan Schools: Are Girls' Education Projects Influencing New Forms of Masculinities." https://cice.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/publications/series/5-1/5-1-21.pdf

Harris, K., and S. Barnes. 2009. "Male Teacher, Female Teacher: Exploring Children's Perspectives of Teachers' Role in Kindergartens." *Early Child Development and Care* 179 (2): 167–181. doi:10.1080/03004430802667005.

Herz, B., and G. B. Sperling. 2004. *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World*. New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations.

Holmlund, H., and K. Sund. 2008. "Is the Gender Gap in School Performance Affected by the Sex of the Teacher?" *Labour Economics* 15 (1): 37–53. doi:10.1016/j.labeco.2006.12.002.

Jha, J., and F. Kelleher. 2006. *Boys' Underachievement in Education: An Exploration in Selected Common Wealth Countries*. Australia: Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

Jha, J., N. Menon, and D. Chatterjee. 2017. *Boys' Underperformance in Education: Revisiting the Issue in the Commonwealth*. Australia: Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

Kelleher, F. 2011. *Women and the Teaching Profession: Exploring the Feminisation Debate*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat and UNES.

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis. 2013. *Kenya Economic Report*. Nairobi: KIPPRA.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2015. *Busia County KNBS Statistical Table*. Nairobi: Government Printer.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2019. *Economic Survey 2019*. Nairobi: Government Printer.

Kenya, U. 2010. *Are Our Children Learning? Annual Learning Assessment Report Kenya 2012*. Nairobi: Uwezo Kenya WERK.

Kenya, U. 2012. *Are Our Children Learning? Annual Learning Assessment Report Kenya 2012*. Nairobi: Uwezo Kenya Twaweza.

Khanam, R. 2008. "Child Labour and School Attendance: Evidence from Bangladesh." *International Journal of Social Economics* 35 (1/2): 77–98.

Kirinyaga County. 2018. *Kirinyaga County Integrated Development Plan*. Kutus: Kirinyaga County.

Kuper, S., and E. Jacobs. 2018. *Financial Times*, December 14. https://www.ft.com/content/3b2509f2-fda2-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521

Lindsay, G., and D. Muijs. 2006. "Challenging Underachievement in Boys." *Educational Research* 48 (3): 313–332. doi:10.1080/00131880600992389.

Lloyd, C. B. 2009. *New Lessons: The Power of Educating Adolescent Girls: A Girl's Count Report on Adolescent Girls*. New York: Population Council.

Marie-Pierre, M. 2011. "The Societal Construction of 'Boys' Underachievement' in Educational Policies: A Cross-National Comparison." *Journal of Education Policy* 26 (2): 161–180.

Martin, A., and H. Marsh. 2005. "Motivating Boys and Motivating Girls: Does Teacher Gender Really Make a Difference?" *Australian Journal of Education* 49 (3): 320–334. doi:10.1177/000494410504900308.

Miller, C. C. 2018. *The New York Times*, September 14. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/14/upshot/gender-stereotypes-survey-girls-boys.html

Ministry of Education EMIS. 2012. *Basic Education Sector*. Nairobi: MoE.

MoE. 2005. *Sessional Paper No. 1 (2005) on A Policy Framework for Education Training and Research*. Nairobi: Government Printer.

National Gender and Equality Commission. 2015. *The Status of the Boy Child in Kenya: A Report of Emerging Perception on the Exclusion of the Boy Child in the Gender Equality Agenda*. Nairobi: NGEC.

Nethanomsak, T., T. K. Ngang, and S. Raksasataya. 2019. "Gender Issues in Education: Why Boys Do Poorly." *Pertinika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 27: 119–138.

Pike, I. 2020. "A Discursive Spectrum: The Narrative of Kenya's "Neglected" Boy Child." *Gender & Society* 34 (2): 284–306. doi:10.1177/0891243219863029.

Plan International. 2013. *Girls' Learning: Investigating Thee Classroom Practices that Promote Girls' Learning*. London: Plan UK.

Ray, R., and G. Lanchaster. 2005. "The Impact of Children's Work on Schooling: Multi-Country Evidence." *International Labour Review* 144 (2): 189–210.

Republic of Kenya. 2012b. *A Policy Framework for Education and Training on Reforming Education and Training Sectors in Kenya (Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012)*. Nairobi: Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, Science Technology. Government Printer.

Republic of Kenya. 2016. *National Needs Assessment Survey*. Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. Nairobi: Government Printer.

RTI International. 2014a. *Reading Skills and Gender: An Analysis [Brief, 2 Pp]. Prepared under the Education Data for Decision Making (Eddata II) Project, Task Order No. EHC-E-00-04-00004-00 (RTI Task 1)*. Washington, DC: RTI International.

Sokal, L., H. Katz, L. Chaszewski, and C. Wojcik. 2007. "Good-bye, Mr Chips: Male Teacher Shortages and Boys' Reading Achievement." *Sex Roles* 56 (9): 651–659.

Teacher Service Commission. 2006. *Policy on Teacher Recruitment and Selection*. Nairobi: Teacher Service Commission.

Torres, A. 2011a. "Analysis on Why Boys Do Poorly: Philippines Case Study." Unpublished Manuscript. UNGEI.

Undarya, T., and D. Enkhjargal. 2010. *Factors that Impact on Boys' Education (Enrollment, Attendance and Achievement): Qualitative Study Commissioned by UNICEF Mongolia*. Mongolia: UNICEF Mongolia.

UNICEF. 2006. "Child Friendly." May 18. https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf

Wanzala, O. 2018. *Daily Nation*, November 23. https://www.nation.co.ke/news/education/More-male-students-shun-teaching/2643604-4864702-11un9diz/index.html

World Bank. 2011. *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Zimba, R. F. Undated. *Manifestations of Namibian Boy's Underachievement in Education*. Windhoek: Forum on Public Policy.