

Declining Boys' Participation and Performance in Kenyan Schools: Are Girls' Education Projects Influencing New Forms of Masculinities?

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Abstract

This study was designed to interrogate the basic assumption that boys in specific regions in Kenya were –compared with girls– beginning to underperform in school attendance, performance and completion rates. The study took cognisance of the fact that Girls' education has, for many years, been the preserve of projects. While these projects have produced some impressive results, they are necessarily limited in terms of promoting gender equality in the long-run because of their “blindness” to the issue of boys' education. This study, therefore, challenges the fundamental feminist standpoint theories that present men – as a group – as the *defacto* benefactors of the patriarchal power structures that oppress women and girls.

Importantly, by focusing critically on the school experiences of boys in the context of the presumably advantaged girls in co-education settings, the study makes a departure from the traditional Kenyan gender researches which often foreground the girls while presenting them as universally marginalized –socially and educationally. The study moves to problematic the positioning of boys in 8 selected primary Kenyan schools that were distributed equally in the Counties of Nairobi city and rural Kirinyaga County. Using mainly qualitative methods that were complemented by a quantitative survey questionnaire, our findings reveal explicitly that awareness of gender issues in education was commonplace in all the 8 schools, albeit being concretized in varying degrees. Hence, a major finding was that gender awareness in the schools did not always translate into a practice of gender equality of outcomes. With regard to outcomes of schooling such as academic performance, school attendance or even completion, girls outperformed boys in over half of the school, especially in rural Kirinyaga and in at least one school in Nairobi. There was evidence of conscious effort by female school administration as well as female teachers to support girls with a clear aim of keeping them in school and enabling them perform well academically. In comparison, male teachers in both counties presented themselves as being “laid back” suggesting weak role models for the boys. Parental involvement in their children's schooling also revealed a bias towards the school achievements of their daughters more than of their sons, yielding a dominant discourse that presented girls' education as a relatively worthwhile investment compared with that of the boys. A key recommendation for this study is the enhancement of gender knowledge for school teachers to enable them more responsive to boys schooling with equal attention to that of the girls.

Keywords: Masculinities for African boys, Gender relations, Gender equality, Successful Masculinities.

Full text: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Declining-Boys%27-Participation-and-Performance-in-%3A-Chege-Likoye/deac3d6058e5c89c05f0daf4c628de2c4bf41a3c>