

Influence of Islamic Religious Practices on The Academic Performance of Muslim Female Students in Secondary Schools In Tana Delta Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: In Kenya the ministry of education has developed a number of strategies to improve performance of female students with special emphasis on the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Despite these efforts, reports from the ministry of education indicate that school completion rate among girls in ASALs that are predominantly Muslim is still low. This study, therefore, sought to Examine the influence of Islamic religious practices on the academic performance of Muslim female students in secondary schools in Tana Delta Sub-County, The study adopted a descriptive survey design and adopted functionalist theory and the contemporary feminist theory. The target population for this study were all the 1100 Muslim female students across 12 secondary schools in the 6 wards of Tana delta Sub County which included 10 mixed schools and 2 girl schools. The sample size was 285 female Muslim students and 12 school principals who were conducted an in-depth interview to provide in depth information regarding the academic performance. The main tool for this study will was a self-administered questionnaire for students and an interview guide for the school heads. Data from the study was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques and then presented in tables and narrations using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V. 28) software. Quantitative and presented as reported speech. The final analysis established that early marriage was common in schools, incidences of teenage pregnancy were also identified to affect performance of female students. The study further established that a number of students failed to attend school due to lack of school fee as the study site was in a hardship area. Religio-cultural practices that affected performance were early marriage as dictated by local cultures and supported by religious teachings. Another factor was the belief that being taught in English was advancing western and anti-religious ideologies. Sexual harassment was not reported highly among study respondents. The study also established that although the community took their girls to school, a greater preference was given to boys when it came to access to education.

Key words: Religious practices, Cultural practices, Muslim female students and Tana Delta Sub-County.

Background to the study

Education is recognized globally as a basic human right which shapes the destiny for every society Syomwene & Kindiki, (2015). This was summed up by 1993 Nobel peace prize winner and former South African president nelson Mandela who observed that “no country can really develop unless its citizens are educated. Individuals who have had the opportunity to educate themselves are the best people to lead any progressive country (Oprah.Com, 2001).

A study conducted by UNESCO (2010) found that gender equality, as well as the retention, completion, and performance of female students in secondary school, is still a big issue in a number of different regions of the globe. It has been shown that the problem is far more severe in developing countries, which are struggling with high levels of poverty and have insufficient resources to pay for education. For example, at the start of the 21st century, just 36% of Pakistani women had completed their high school education (Saya, Oriaro, & Murgor, 2017; Adepoju, Obafemi, & Oluchukwu, 2013).

Studies have indicated that fewer than 16 percent of girls from rural families in the sub-Saharan nations of Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, and Niger graduate from secondary school. This number is lower than the national average. This pattern has also persisted throughout Africa, which has likewise been recording low levels of academic achievement among its female pupils UNESCO, (2010). Since the beginning of the Education for All movement and the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, African nations have developed a variety of programs that aim to improve their education systems. These programs have been in response to the Education for All movement and the MDGs (Xanthe, 2013). As a result of this, a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, notably Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, amongst others, have reinstated free primary education (FPE) programs in compliance with the millennium development goals (MDGs).

Kenya is one of the few countries in Africa in which females make up half of the general enrolment in elementary schools. This is something that only happens in Kenya. This percentage, however, falls to less than forty percent in secondary schools, and it falls below thirty percent in postsecondary institutions (Ochieng, 2015). There is reason for concern given the dangerously low enrolment and retention rates of female students as they go up the educational hierarchy. These are the stages during which vocations are selected and training is acquired, thus this trend is particularly concerning. Education is widely acknowledged as a social aspect that contributes to the economic, political, and social development of a country, as well as the Kenyan government's position on the matter. Numerous individuals hold to this point of view (Republic of Kenya, 2012).

Education is viewed as necessary for individuals to attain self-satisfaction and national progress, as envisioned in Kenya Vision 2030, according to the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and various legislative efforts. This is in line with the goals outlined in Kenya Vision 2030. Due to gender discrepancies in education and employment, it is possible that the full fulfillment of social, economic, cultural, civic, and political rights would not be realized to its full potential (Ochieng, 2015; Mbugua, 2016).

Every child in Kenya has the right to a free and compulsory basic education, which is guaranteed by the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, which is written into the 2013 constitution of Kenya. It has been shown that gender inequalities in education and employment have a deleterious effect on the achievement of social, economic, cultural, civic, and political rights. (Asena, Simiyu, & Riechi, 2016; Mbugua, 2013). In addition to this, Kenya took additional steps in 2008 to implement Free Day Secondary School (FDSE), with the goals of reducing gender gaps in educational opportunities and increasing the number of students who had access to secondary education. FDSE stands for Free Day Secondary School, and it was implemented in Kenya in 2008. (Kamau & Wambugu, 2017). Investing financial resources into secondary education is one of the most essential things a nation can do to foster economic growth. This is due to the fact that secondary school acts as a transitional stage between elementary.

In Kenya, attaining the Kenya certificate for secondary education, more often referred to as the KCSE, is seen as a major achievement in terms of education. This certificate is sometimes referred to as the KCSE. This is due to the fact that it aids in preparing the human capital of the country for development and provides opportunities in life (MOE, 2019; Asena, Simiyu, & Riechi, 2016). The commitment of the Kenyan government to the nation's educational system is shown by the fact that expenditures on education in 2018 accounted for more than 5.3% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country (World Bank, 2018).

A candidate or student in secondary school is expected to study a total of six subjects in order to get a grade. These six subjects include two scientific topics, one humanity subject, a practical technical subject, and English, Kiswahili, and mathematics, which are the three mandatory core subjects (KNEC, 2018). In this particular grading system, a grade of C+ is regarded as the minimal minimum that must be achieved in order to be admitted to a university. Students who have earned grades that are less than a C+ have the option of transferring to one of the other tertiary institutions in the area.

According to the National education strategy plan (NESP), during the period from 2013 to 2018, This growth in enrollment occurred despite the fact that the overall number of students enrolled in secondary education remained relatively stable (MOE, 2019). In spite of this, research indicates that the academic performance of female students in pastoral communities is continuing to decline. As students go from elementary to secondary school, the gender gap in access, participation, and achievement in secondary education also continues to increase. This pattern is seen in the movement of students from elementary school through middle school to high school (Komora, 2014). This issue is especially pervasive in Kenya's ASAL districts, such as the Tana River Sub County, for instance (UNICEF, 2019).

Studies have shown that despite the efforts of the education sector and non-state actors to address gender disparities in access to secondary education. This is the case despite the efforts that have been made to address these disparities. The difficulty of the situation is amplified significantly in the arid and semi-arid regions (ASAL), which are mostly inhabited by pastoralist groups (Odhiambo, 2016; UNFPA, 2016; UNICEF, 2019). These results are in line with those of previous research projects of a similar kind that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has carried out in other countries of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as an earlier economic study that was carried out between 2001 and 2002. (Komora, 2014; UNICEF, 2019).

The results of the KCSE 2020 paint an even gloomier picture, with male students in Tana Delta Sub County, who are predominantly Muslim, performing better on average than their female counterparts, who are predominantly Christian. This disparity is due to the fact that Muslim students tend to have a higher level of education than Christian students (see Table 1). Since the preliminary findings support more exploration into this topic, the researcher need to carry it further.

Table 1: KCSE Student enrolment and performance 2020 KCSE in Tana Delta

School	Gender	Entry	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
Kipini	boys	27	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	10	6	1	0
	Girls	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	5	6	0	1
Ngao	Girls	122	0	0	1	2	3	8	15	43	21	18	11	0
Oda	Boys	29	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	7	7	8	3	0
	Girls	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	5	3	1
Minhaj	Boys	18	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	9	2	1
	Girls	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3	7	0
Tarasaa	Boys	50	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	5	9	8	18	3
	Girls	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	6	0
Sane	Girls	44	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	7	8	16	6	0
Kitere	Boys	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	5	4	0
	Girls	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	1
Gadeni	Boys	30	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	7	3	10	4
	Girls	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	6	17	2
Mapunga	Boys	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	7	1
	Girls	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	3	1
Garsen	Boys	61	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	8	13	23	4
	Girls	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	3	17	1
Marifano	Boys	49	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	6	23	10
	Girls	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	16	2
Buyani	Boys	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	8	13	18	7
	Girls	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	13	7
		698	0	0	1	5	3	15	43	90	117	148	208	46

Source: SCDE Tana Delta Sub County

Statement of the problem

In the Tana Delta Sub-County of Tana River County, Kenya, a significant portion of the population identifies as Muslim, and their religious and cultural practices play a crucial role in shaping various aspects of their lives. Among these, the academic performance of Muslim female students in secondary schools stands out as an area of interest and concern. The intricate interplay between religious and cultural practices and academic achievement among this demographic remains understudied, and there is a need to comprehensively investigate this relationship.

Despite the importance of education and its potential to uplift individuals and communities, there is a lack of clarity regarding how specific religious and cultural practices influence the academic performance of Muslim female students in this region. It is imperative to address this gap in knowledge to better understand whether and how religious and cultural factors impact their educational outcomes. Moreover, as the Tana Delta Sub-County undergoes sociocultural changes and modernization, the potential shifts in traditional practices and their effects on academic performance merit thorough examination.

This study aims to uncover the multifaceted effects of religious and cultural practices on the academic performance of Muslim female students in secondary schools within the Tana Delta Sub-County. By exploring the dynamics between religious observances, cultural traditions, and academic achievement, this research seeks to provide insights that can inform educational policies, teaching methodologies, and support systems tailored to the unique needs of this demographic. As such, a comprehensive investigation into these effects holds the potential to positively impact the educational landscape and contribute to the holistic development of Muslim female students in the region.

This poor performance of Muslim female students in KCSE as evidenced in the 2019 KCSE threatens to further undermine the efforts that are being undertaken in order to accomplish both "vision 2030" and the Millennium Development Goals. (MDGs). At a time

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when people look to religious leaders to help champion for the rights of the underprivileged in society, the question that needs to be asked is therefore, what is the role of religious and cultural traditions in the performance of female Muslim students in secondary schools within the delta? This question needs to be asked because it comes at a time when people look to religious leaders to help champion for the rights of the underprivileged in society. As a consequence of this, the purpose of this study was to determine whether or not social and religious factors that advocate for preparing girls to be married off at the beginning of adolescence have a significant effect on the performance of Muslim female students in an environment where laws and interventions are aimed at improving the performance of female students. This was done in an environment where laws and interventions are aimed at improving the performance of female students. In addition, the goal of the study was to evaluate the degree to which religious and traditional practices, such as gender stereotypes, have an influence on the manner in which Muslim female students perceive their educational experiences.

Objectives

To Examine the influence of Islamic religious practices on the academic performance of Muslim female students in secondary schools in Tana Delta Sub-County, Tana River County.

Justification of the Study

This study is important because it will examine factors that contribute to poor performance among Muslim female students in Tana Delta Sub County. Its findings will thus benefit to the MOE and the county education office as it will give insight on how to improve performance of female Muslim students within Tana River County. Such findings can be applied in other ASAL regions and the entire country. The study will also benefit researchers and academicians willing to conduct similar studies in other parts of the world.

Literature Review

Jeynes (2003) carried out study to determine the extent to which a student's religious dedication affects their overall academic performance, taking into account both their urban and their non-urban peers. The inquiry that was carried out in order to compile this study made use of the data collection that was collected as part of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) in the year 1992. The analysis of the data collected for the study showed that the level of religiosity of urban students led to superior performance when compared to their peers who were less religious. This was the conclusion drawn from a comparison of the two groups. This was the inference that could be made from the findings of the research. For the most part, this research concentrated its attention on young people who adhered to the Christian religion. Furthermore, it was shown that the impacts of religion were often experienced with greater intensity by urban children than they were by nonurban children. This was the case in many instances. The findings of subsequent study indicated that there was no difference between pupils who declared a belief in the Catholic religion and those who stated a belief in the Protestant faith. Nevertheless, there were distinctions to be made between students who followed the Christian religion and those who followed other religious views.

Rosliza, Inayah, Emiza, Merani, and Yusliena (2017). conducted a literature review on the topic of the connection between spirituality and education in Malaysia. Their findings are presented below (2017). They came to the conclusion that the vast majority of studies on spirituality show a positive link with academic ability. They came to this realization all on their own. To be more specific, they discovered that those who participated in spiritual activities had high academic accomplishment. According to the findings of the research. This was the case across all of the students in the study. The International Islamic University in Malaysia was the location of the research that was done. These people were students at the university and took part in the institution's accounting program when they were there. Students who participate in "spiritual" activities such as praying the five daily obligatory prayers (Solat), reciting the Qur'an, praying the Qi yam al-lail (night prayers), and making tawakkul (reliance) on Allah claim to have greater emotional wellbeing, and as a result, they are better able to focus on their studies and perform better overall in their academic careers, according to the scholar who drew the conclusion from the study. The aforementioned "spiritual"

Students are expected to develop into the persons they see becoming while they are enrolled in college. In addition, they are expected to become more self-reliant and responsible to both themselves and others (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) also suggested that students should acquire the skills necessary to better manage their time and discover solutions to difficulties while simultaneously attempting to strike a balance between the requirements of education and the requirements of a social life. Arnett (2000) also suggested that students should acquire the skills necessary to better manage their time and discover solutions to difficulties while simultaneously attempting to discover solutions to difficulties. College students who are able to achieve this balance have a far better chance of being successful academically across the board. As a result, the reason for doing this study was to explore the ways in which religious and spiritual activities impact the academic performance of college students. It has been shown that college students who actively participate in

religious and spiritual activities on a consistent basis have better grade point averages. Students who participate in religious and spiritual activities may discover that it is simpler for them to define their long-term objectives, fill their lives with meaning and purpose, and keep their concentrate on the aspects of their lives that are most important.

They employed a sample size of 740 students as their participants in the research that Li and Murphy (2017) carried out on the link between religiosity and academic performance among college students in the United States. The research was focused on college students who were attending college. These students practiced a broad variety of religions and belonged to a number of distinct religious communities, indicating the diversity of their religious upbringings. According to the findings of the study, there is an interaction effect on performance that is detrimental when religiosity is combined with Islam, that there is an interaction effect on performance that is advantageous when religiosity is combined with Christianity, and that there is no interaction effect on performance when Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism are combined with religiosity.

Theoretical Literature Review

The functionalist theory put out by sociologist Emile Durkheim in 1843 serves as the foundation for this investigation. The functionalist philosophy places an emphasis on maintaining social balance. Society is a system of interrelated parts, and no one part can function without the other.

Emile Durkheim (1843), a French sociologist, is credited with being the originator of the functionalist theory, which is also known as functionalism. Durkheim hypothesized that society functioned like an organism, with several elements that are interrelated and work together to achieve harmony (Crossman, 2020). According to the functionalist point of view, the primary components of society, including the family, the educational system, religious practices, the economic system, and the government, all collaborate in order to maintain social peace and order. According to the functionalist concept, society should be seen as an organism; hence, no component of society can operate independently of the others.

In the context of this study, the family functions as a unit that reproduces children, educates them, and instills in them the family and social traditions that are necessary to make them conform to social ideals. On the other hand, religion directs moral behavior by prescribing what is right and wrong. The educational system equips the society with the skills necessary to make its members productive. The economy provides the means for the production and distribution of goods and services, and the government provides the means for governing.

From a functionalist point of view, religious practices and teachings that place more of an emphasis on the importance of boys over girls socialize girls into believing that they are lesser beings when compared to boys. This not only brings down their self-esteem but also has the potential to affect how well they do in school. Because of this, the activities in question have the potential to bring to social disorder in a society, which is synonymous with an unstable state. Taking into account the functional perspective, we can say that a society is functional if all of its components strive toward achieving gender equality in educational opportunities. According to Durkheim, aspects of a society are functional if they help maintain social stability, while they are dysfunctional if they work against maintaining social stability (Crossman, 2020).

Research Methodology

Research Design

A research design is an organization of circumstances for the gathering and analysis of data in such a manner that blends their linkages with the objective of the study being conducted. A descriptive approach is going to be used for this investigation. The descriptive research design has been selected because it examines data from a population at a specific moment in time. As a result, it can be used to assess factors of organizational performance and define characteristics of the population that is the subject of the investigation (Snyder, 2019). In addition, the method has been characterized as a non-intrusive research design by a number of academics, and it is expected to generate data from a wide pool of respondents while preserving their anonymity (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Hashem, 2015; Hansen & Machin, 2018). It was determined that the design was appropriate given that the purpose of the study was to collect data while keeping the respondents' anonymity intact. In addition, the design allowed the researcher to explain how different variables within the study population, such as age, gender, and family background.

Location of the Study

This study was conducted within Tana delta sub-County of Tana River County. The area is divided into six administrative areas or wards namely Garsen Central Ward, Garsen West Ward, Garsen South ward, Garsen North ward, Kipini West ward and Kipini East ward (KNBS, 2019). The area has 12 secondary school out of which only 2 are female boarding schools while the rest are mixed.

Tana Delta Sub-County is characterized by a rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity, with a significant Muslim population. This diversity provides a unique setting to examine the interplay between religious and cultural practices and their potential impact on

academic outcomes. By focusing on this specific geographical area, the study can offer insights into how cultural and religious factors may influence academic performance within a complex and multi-dimensional context.

There is growing interest in understanding the relationship between cultural and religious practices and academic performance, there is often a lack of research conducted in specific regions like Tana Delta Sub-County. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on an understudied area, providing valuable insights that can inform educational policies and interventions tailored to the local

Target Population

The target population for this study is all the 1100 Muslim female students in secondary schools within the Tana delta sub county. The population is spread across 12 secondary schools which included 10 mixed and 2 girl school. Study population or universe is the entire group of individuals, institutions or items that the researcher is interested in generalising study findings. A population must have a common characteristic that is of interest to a researcher (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Velentgas, Dreyer, Nourjah, Smith, & Torchia, 2013).

Sample Size

This study will involve 285 respondents from the total population of 1100 female Muslim students within Tana delta Sub County. This study also targeted to interview 12 principals from the targeted schools. The sample size of 285 will be arrived using a simplified formula for proportions by Yamane (1967) and Ray (2011) $n = N/1+N(e)^2$

Where

n is the sample size

N is the total available population in the 12 schools within Tana delta (1100)

While “e” is the level of precision (0.05) with 95% confidence level.

To compute the sample size, the researcher will identify the total accessible population who in this case are 1100 female Muslim students within 12 secondary schools in the 6 wards Tana delta sub county.

FINDINGS

A total of 285 questionnaires were distributed out of which 211 were returned. This translated into a 74% return rate which is acceptable for analysis according to (Fincham, 2018) on the other hand only 8 out of the 12-school head consented to be interviewed. This chapter therefore presents the analysis of the study data.

The researcher sought to establish the extent of religiosity within respondents’ households in order to find out how this influenced school attendance and performance. From the analysis presented in table 8 below, the study shows that 58.8% felt that their families were strict Muslims (11.4% agree, 47.4 strongly agree). Those who felt that their families were not strongly religious were 5.2% (4.4% strongly disagree, 0.9% disagree). 36% remained neutral. From the analysis, the researcher concluded that most of the respondents were from families that followed strict Islamic teachings.

Table 2: My Family Follows Strict Islamic Laws

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	4.3	4.3
	Disagree	2	.9	5.2
	Neutral	76	36.0	41.2
	Agree	24	11.4	52.6
	Strongly Agree	100	47.4	100.0
	Total	211	100.0	100.0

The study further investigated the extent to which religio-cultural beliefs affected school attendance and student performance by asking if family had problems with respondents attending school. From the analysis, 87.2% (41.2% strongly agree, 46% agree) felt that their families had no problem with girls attending school. Only 10.4% of respondents felt that their families had problems with girls attending school. Neutral responses were 2.4% (n=5). From the analysis the study concluded that many Muslim families within the Tana Delta had no problem with girl education although some families were still having problem letting their girls attend secondary school.

Table 3: My Family Has No Problem with Me Going to School

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	1.4
	Disagree	19	9.0
	Neutral	5	2.4
	Agree	97	46.0
	Strongly Agree	87	41.2
	Total	211	100.0

In examining how study respondents felt about the influence of religion on secular education, data presented on table 10 below shows that 94.3% of all responses indicate that study subjects felt that religion cannot stop them from pursuing secular education. Only 3.8% (n=8) felt that religion could stop them from pursuing secular education while 1.9 (n=4) were neutral.

Table 4: Religion cannot stop me from advancing in secular education

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	8	3.8
	Neutral	4	1.9
	Agree	60	28.4
	Strongly Agree	139	65.9
	Total	211	100.0

In testing how respondents perceived religious teachings on early marriage vis-à-vis education, the analysis on table 10 shows that most respondents felt that people should not marry early as dictated by religion. The analysis indicates that 59.7% of respondents disagreed with the research question which stated that people should marry early as dictated by religion. Another 23.7% agreed with the statement while the remainder 5.7% were neutral. This analysis shows that though many respondents came from strict Muslim families, the strong beliefs did not influence their thinking about early marriage.

Table 5: People should marry early as dictated by religion

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	108	51.2
	Disagree	39	18.5
	Neutral	12	5.7
	Agree	44	20.9
	Strongly Agree	8	3.8
	Total	211	100.0

Conclusions.

The study concluded that early marriage was widespread in schools, and that adolescent pregnancy had an impact on Muslim female students' performance. The study also found that a number of pupils missed school owing to a lack of school fees because the study site was in a low-income area. Early marriage, as imposed by local customs and backed by religious doctrines, had a negative impact on performance. Another aspect was the perception that teaching in English promoted anti-religious and anti-western ideologies.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the National government and the Tana River County Government should collaborate to ensure that every Muslim girl gets the right to education just that like other girls. This can be done by enacting laws to parents that deny their children the right to go to school.

This study recommends that through the relevant stakeholders and organizations, there should be continuous surveillance to ensure that no underage girl is engaged and given out in marriage at the expense of education. This is because every girl has the right to education regardless of age or religion.

To maximize the impact of initiatives, the study proposes that relevant stakeholders understand governance, community dynamics, and coordination difficulties. This will help to promote education for Muslim female students.

The study recommends that there should be a fair selection and a 100% transition of the female Muslim students to secondary schools despite gender or religion. This can be achieved through the local administration should ensuring that laws that protect children and government policies are adhered to.

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