THE EFFECT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS ON ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN IGEMBE NORTH DISTRICT, MERU COUNTY, KENYA

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Although the government has attached so much importance to education through finance and policies, there is still poor performance, low participation, high levels of wastage and poor transition from primary to secondary school in Igembe North district. The purpose of this study is to establish the extent to which cultural and socio-economic factors affect participation and access of students in secondary education in Igembe North district, Meru County. The main objectives of this study is to identify the main cultural and socio-economic activities affecting secondary school students, to find out the level of participation and wastage in secondary schools, to find out which gender, among the secondary school students, is the most affected by socio-economic and cultural activities and to determine the effect of parents' cultural activities towards their children's secondary education in Igembe North district. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The total target population was all secondary school students, Guidance and Counseling teachers, class masters/mistresses and principals from Igembe North District. The district has about 3300 female students, 2400 male students, 20 Guidance and Counseling teachers, 80 class masters/mistresses and 20 principals giving a total population of about 5820. Random sampling was done to select 50 percent of the schools. Stratified sampling was then used in selecting students, principals, guidance and counseling teachers and class masters/mistresses. The actual sample size was 345. The study used two types of instruments: questionnaires and interview schedules. Piloting was done in one school in the district, which was identical but was not used in the study, to establish the validity and reliability of the instruments. Validity was done through expert judgment of the supervisors while reliability was ascertained using test-retest method. Data collection was done through questionnaires and interview schedules. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis procedures and presented using frequency tables and pie charts. Qualitative data were organized into the main themes relevant to the study, summarized and reported according to the main views. The study found that the main cultural activities are chewing *miraa*, early marriage, circumcision and polygamy. The main socio-economic activities are *miraa* business, farming and pastoralism. Boys' education is mainly affected by the socio-economic factors while girls' education is mainly affected by retrogressive cultural factors in the district. The research concluded that there are a number
of cultural and socio-economic activities affecting secondary education. Wastage rate is relatively high and the effect of cultural and socio-economic activities varies with gender. The study recommended that schools should liaise with community leaders ensure that all students are retained in school by ensuring there is no child labour. Campaigns against retrogressive cultural practices such as female circumcision should be done in the district. Civic education on importance of education should also be done in public gatherings. Life skills, as a subject, should be emphasized in secondary schools.