

Role of Boys' Empowerment on Academic Achievement among Lower Primary School Boys in Mombasa County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Boy child empowerment is a topic that is emphasized among many educationists today. It has been proven that pupils who receive proper empowerment tend to excel academically as compared to their counterparts who do not. Boys and girls need to be targets in these empowerment programmes. However, in recent years, it has been observed that boys are usually left out of the school empowerment programmes. There is no much research to explain if this is the reason as to why the academic achievement of boys in the recent years is dwindling while girls within same schools perform very well. This study sought to interrogate if there is any relationship between empowerment of the lower primary schoolboys child and his academic performance. The theory that guided this study is the empowerment theory by Zimmerman. Gaps identified in the literature reviewed include; first, there is no ready literature directly relating the role of male teachers and the academic achievement of boys. Secondly, there is also no adequate literature showing whether boys taught by predominantly female teachers perform dismally in academics. The role of attitude is not adequately researched in relation to the variables under this study. There is evidently a gap in knowledge as to whether empowering boys in early childhood influences their academic achievement positively or not. Much of the knowledge available concerns older children and this leaves the formative years unattended and under researched. This gap in knowledge made this study very relevant and critical. The study applied the descriptive research design. Purposive sampling was used to sample schools where the study will be conducted. The simple random sampling was used in coming up with the learners and teachers who would take part in the study. A pilot study was done to test the tools. Questionnaires, interview schedules, achievement test and observation checklists were used to collect data. The data was collected over a period of three months. The data was then analyzed and presented using frequency distribution tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The study concluded that; the strategies used to empower boys are effective, there are no regular empowerment programs for boys in schools, the empowerment of boys in schools face several challenges that negatively impact the boys and that the male teachers are conspicuously missing in the preschools. Practical recommendations were made to school managers, curriculum developers and policy makers.

Keywords: Boys' Empowerment, Academic Achievement, Lower Primary School

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1. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is the process where a person or a group of people are aided to be in a position in which they can access opportunities and resources that are available so that they are ultimately able to make personal choices on issues that directly or indirectly affect them (Rockson, 2013). Rockson further asserts that such choices include basic ones like deciding what food to eat, what cloths to wear and what place to live in. He also argues that empowerment makes people to have some level of control over their immediate environment. According to the World Bank Report on child empowerment (World Bank, 2017), education goes beyond getting children into school. Once in school, they must be treated in a way that leaves them feeling safe and valued. The social environment should prepare them for the completion of all education levels in the future. The report proposed that socially empowered girls performed better than those that did not get any type of empowerment to boost their education. This report however, did not mention what the effects of boy child empowerment would be on his academic performance.

In the same report, it is stated that, “Girls’ empowerment is a strategic development priority. Empowered girls are socially healthier, participate more in school activities, get higher marks, face fewer disciplinary actions and are less likely to drop out of school. The report however shies away from drawing a similar comparison for boys. According to United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI, 2008), girls and boys have an equal right to education. However, this right requires an education system that gives both girls and boys equal opportunity to learn. For this to be achieved, teaching methodology and curricula must be designed to respond to pupils’ unique cultural backgrounds and learning styles. Education offered needs to be of high quality and very relevant to contemporary needs of the society. Such an education should therefore prioritize the acquisition of skills that children require to benefit from further opportunities for learning and employment. In other words, a good education should enable pupils to reach their maximum potential in an all-round manner (UNGEI, 2008). Girls are traditionally at a disadvantage in many countries globally (UNGEI, 2008). In the East Asia and the Pacific region (EAP), there is great disparity in the provision of and access to quality education between the two genders despite significant efforts by governments and activists to bridge the gap. Literature reviewed in the report showed that girls and women are excluded from many facets of life such as leadership and education. However, the middecade review of Education for All (EFA) revealed that in many countries within the EAP map where statistics are showing a gradual universal improvement in the access to quality education, enrolment, school attendance and academic achievement are on a downward trend for boys. Many boys are dropping out of school early and much fewer are continuing on to higher levels of education than in the past years. This indicates that the education system is not meeting the basic requirements of many boys in the developing world (EAP Report on Early Literacy, 2008).

The EAP Regional United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI, 2011) conducted a detailed research review to investigate the under enrolment and underperformance of boys in early education in Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Mongolia. The review was based on the proposition that the factors that contribute to under enrolment and underperformance of boys should not be overlooked. Despite wide differences in data collected from these four countries, the consistent underperformance of boys was evident. Boys indeed lagged behind (UNICEF, 2009). According to the UK Government (2010), boys’ performance is dwindling. This is attributed to the use of performance of girls as the only measure of gender equity in education. Unfortunately, the UK, for a long time assumed that boys were in the lead, and were consequently unconsciously ignored. Additionally, in his study (Leach, 2005)

conducted in Ghana and Botswana, the school environment was found to be continually becoming unfriendly to the boy child but favouring the girl child. For instance, during corporal punishment, it was observed that boys were treated more harshly than girls for similar mistakes. Mkhize (2016), further asserted that the African continent is preparing itself for an impending social problem because of over emphasis on the empowerment of the girl while paying no proper attention to the boy. He further recommended that Africa, being a very patriarchal society, should handle the feminist agenda, in such a way that the boy is not left out (Mkhize, 2008 & 2016). The cultural set up generally positions the boy ahead of the girl, and when the African boy is not socially in the lead, he suffers from feelings of inferiority. The ego is challenged and his pride diminishes. The girl then takes over the control of nearly every area of life and the boy socially disappears. This is a problem that stems from the way children are handled in their early years (Silberchmidt, 2015).

Additionally, UNICEF supported gender research audits in a total of 14 ESA countries, to assess the types and number of research conducted on the needs of girls in schools (UNICEF, 2012). It was found out that remarkable research work had been done and was ongoing in the area of girl child education and empowerment. This was good news for the girl, but there was no such research done on issues that negatively affect the boy in school. In 2008, under the UNGEI partnership, the Girls' Education Movement (GEM) was established in South Africa, Lesotho, Uganda and Swaziland. The movement to date, sponsors research on the girl child, mobilizes local communities to support girls' education (UNICEF, 2012). In those same countries, there is no dedicated effort to conduct similar research for boys (UNGEI, 2009). A recent unpublished report on numeracy and literacy among lower primary school children in Kenya, revealed that girls performed much better than boys in literacy by 10% while boys outdid them in numeracy with a much lower margin of 4% (GOK 2010). The Ministry Of Education Report for the year 2016, indicated that lower primary boys performed poorly as compared to girls (MOE December, 2016). This should concern educationists, not because girls are performing better than boys, but the continuous underachievement of these boys needs to be explained. Considering that recent campaigns had focused on the girl child, it is necessary to establish whether the boy child has received the necessary empowerment. Consequently this study seeks to investigate the status of the boy-child empowerment with a focus on its impact on academic achievement.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been much research, writing, oration and action dedicated to the girl child, but status of empowerment of the boy child has received minimal, attention especially in the school set up. Many have argued that the female is a weaker sex, that if not well supported will lag behind in most things. On the other hand, the male are considered superior and in a better place to handle their challenges without much support. In the Traditional African Society for instance, it is a generally accepted fact that males who cry or exhibit an inability to perform tasks better than the female are weaklings. This type of argument could therefore be very misleading and putting the boy at even greater risk than he is already. In school, the boy child has thus been left to deal with his own problems. In Kenya, limited research has been tabled on the topic of boy child empowerment in relation to his school achievement, despite the dwindling academic performance of the boys in the examinations. The boys have been outperformed by their female counterparts in the national examinations since. This kind of trend raises pertinent questions that ought to be answered by engaging in more research. This study therefore sought to interrogate the emerging gender trends in education of boys. This was based on the premise that the gender and education targets in the EFA goals and the MDGs shall remain unattained if the focus on boys' education and his social empowerment

are not addressed. In response, the proposed study sought to ascertain the role of the boy child's empowerment on his academic achievement, because boys in Mombasa county are lagging behind in academic achievement.

3. OBJECTIVES

To establish the degree of the boy child's empowerment and how it impacts on academic achievement among boys in lower primary schools.

Specific Objectives were:

- i. To explore strategies of empowering the boy child used in the school setting
- ii. To find out how regularity of school empowerment activities impact on academic achievement among the boys in lower primary.
- iii. To establish the challenges of boy child empowerment in lower primary.
- iv. To find out the strategies that are used to mitigate challenges facing boy child's empowerment in school setting.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that guided this study is Marc Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory (1995). The theory asserts that empowerment is both a process and an outcome. He states that the desired outcome of empowerment is usually an end product of a long process. This process includes the incorporation of specific actions, activities and structures (Zimmerman, 2015). In this particular study, the desired product of empowerment was an improved academic performance among the boys while the process entailed active involvement of the boy in relevant school activities such as symposia, engagement in leadership positions and extra-curricular activities. The other specific activities that constituted the empowerment process in this study included increased talks about positive self-image, self-awareness teaching, and increased engagement of male teachers as role models as well as involve parents and guardians of the boys in more of the school activities. In his later work, Zimmerman supported his earlier stand by stating that empowerment at the individual level requires one to give and receive help in a mutual process that focuses on gaining control over one's life (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). In other words, the object of empowerment must play an active role to play in his empowerment process. In this study, active involvement of the boy child will be observed as indicated above. The study endeavored to use activities and strategies that fully involve the boy child actively. In as much as Zimmerman believed in the use of tangible ways to initiate empowerment, he admitted that the process, incorporating the exact ways in which empowerment can occur is difficult to assess. This is due to its dynamic nature and is thus studied using qualitative methods (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 2014).

Since empowerment is a psychological process in which individuals are aided to think positively about their own abilities and gain full mastery over issues at individual and social levels, it is not very easy to measure the process. The outcome of the empowerment becomes an indicator of the efficacy of the empowerment process (Zimmerman, 2015). This aspect of the theory was applied to this study. The researcher did not aim at measuring the process, but rather, the outcome which in this case was academic performance. He further identified intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral outcomes of empowerment as the aspects that are easily measurable. (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 2015). The intrapersonal component is the person's set of beliefs about their control, self-efficacy, and perceived competence. The interactional component on the other hand includes one's relationship to their social

environment and how it impacts on the person's intrapersonal view. Finally, the behavioral component focuses on a person's actions taken to exert some control over the environment.

In this study, the child's interactional component was studied, and its effects on his intrapersonal aspect analyzed. Specifically, the activities incorporated in the empowerment program were studied against the academic performance. A positive outcome was desired, and it indicated that the intrapersonal component was positively enhanced.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are a number of strategies that teachers could use to empower the boy child. These strategies and their probable impact on the boy child academic performance are presented in figure 1.

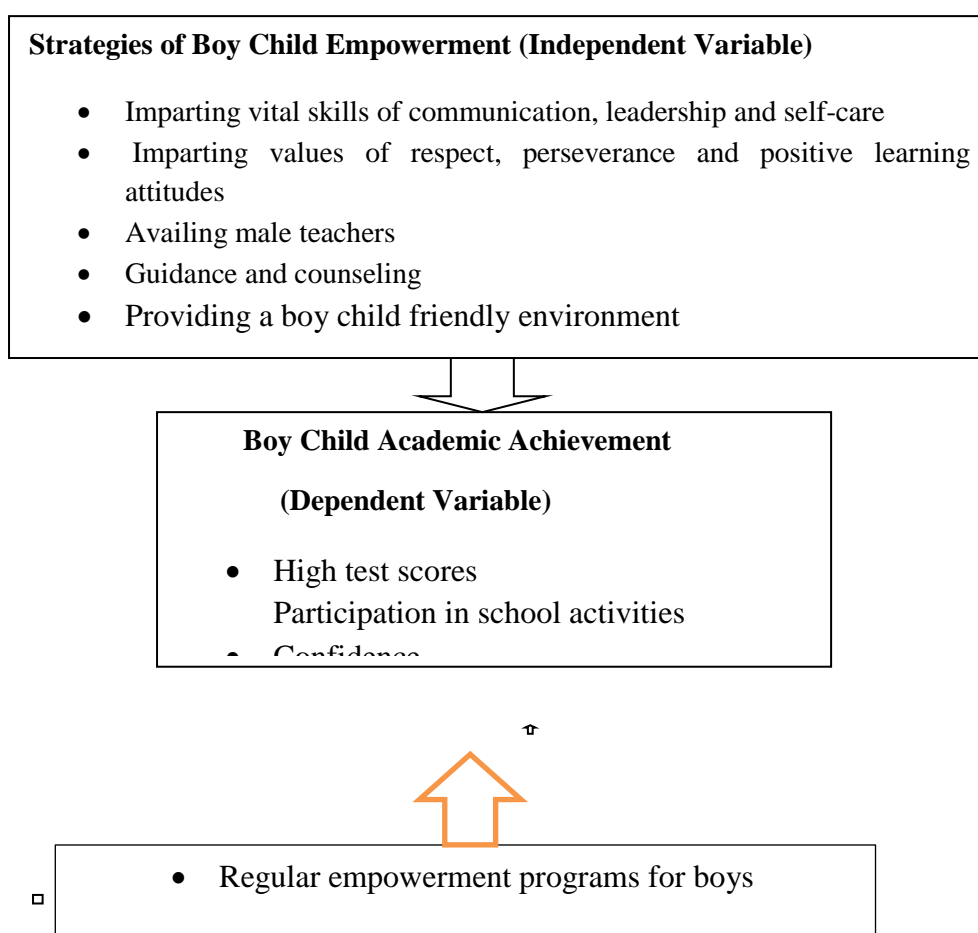


Fig. 1 Effects of Boy Child empowerment on Academic Achievement

From the above illustration, the independent variable is boy child empowerment while the boy child academic performance is the dependent variable. After the boy has been put through an intensive program of empowerment that includes imparting vital skills, life values, availing male teachers, guidance and counseling, providing a boy child friendly environment and more parent/ guardian involvement in the empowerment process, the outcomes achieved were better academic performance as indicated by the test scores, more participation in school activities and more confidence.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive research design. This design seeks to explore the strategies and challenges of boy child empowerment and how academic performance is consequently affected. This design was chosen because the data collected was qualitative in nature and very in depth. There was therefore need for the researcher to describe the characteristics of the group under study using words, thus making this design the most appropriate to use. The researcher explored the role that boy child empowerment played on academic performance. This study was conducted in six public primary schools within Shanzu Ward Kisauni Constituency, Mombasa County in Kenya. This area was chosen because according to the Kisauni Sub- County Education Report of 2015/2016, it was observed that the average performance of boys had tremendously dropped among lower grades as compared to the previous years. The report further indicated that in this region, so many empowerment programmes have been initiated and implemented to support girl child education, protection and development. However, there were very few similar programmes in support of the boy child. This being a tourist region where girls run the risk of dropping out of school to lead the beach life, educationists and the society as a whole easily got worried and thus joined hands to try help the girl stay in school through empowerment talks. No significant efforts had been made for the boys, yet boys are equally lured into juvenile criminal activities in equal measure. It was also evident that boys drop out of school early to work as beach boys, in some instances as early as pre- teen years. This made this locality very suitable for the study.

The population of interest in this study was the lower primary (Grade 1 up to Grade 3) school boys in the public schools in this region. This age group was chosen because it comprises the early childhood years according to the Kenyan classification system. Public schools were preferred because they possess similar characteristics in terms of policies, curriculum , teachers and resources. According to the County Education Report (2014/2015), these six schools (A, B, C, D, E and F) had realized a total learner enrolment of 1,926 in the lower primary with 900 being girls and 1,026 being boys of the age of between 5-8 years. The target populations of this study were 1,026 boys (N). In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling technique to select the county, sub- county and zone of study. This was so because of convenience in proximity. Simple random sampling method was used to select learners that formed the sample. The simple random method ensured that each learner had an equal opportunity of forming part of the sample. It was the most appropriate sampling technique since it gave equal chances for selection among the boys as some schools had more than one stream per class. The sampled learners were used as a representation of the entire population. The researcher then checked the questionnaires to ascertain whether they had been answered appropriately. Data collected using the different tools was compared for corroboration. Qualitative data were analyzed per objective. The researcher identified the themes and patterns that arose from the responses and attached meanings and significance to the coded data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive methods. Frequency distribution tables, were then used to present the analyzed data. Percentages were calculated from the responses out of the total study sample response per item.

7. FINDINGS

The first task in this study was to explore the strategies used by lower primary teachers to empower boys in school. The teachers interviewed were asked to state the methods that they used to empower boys in their schools. Teachers claimed that they often appointed boys as class prefects and as heads of groups during class activities. This was in line with Robinsons (2009) argument that boys' confidence was enhanced when they were assigned such responsibilities. The teachers indicated that when in school, the boys were continually instructed on the benefits of positive values such as respect, honesty and time consciousness.

They consequently observed that most of the boys could not be easily persuaded into bad decisions by their peers. As a result, the relationship among the boys became friendlier and more peaceful. This concurs with the CRRC Report (2016), which suggested that empowered boys are less problematic than their peers. The teachers claimed that they intentionally endeavored to demonstrate positive behavior that the boys would easily imitate. This strategy is in agreement with literature reviewed. One of the key components of boy child empowerment is the provision of male figures that the child can look up to as models. Such males could be fathers, older brothers, male relatives, religious leaders or teachers in school (Maureen Healy, 2009). The teachers reported that they consciously made effort to recognize and reward the daily little achievements of the boys in their schools. The reviewed literature supports this observation. Reinforcement of desired behavior results in mastery of the behavior. Furthermore, when boys expect that they will be appreciated for good behavior, they are likely to make more effort to do it again (Bunyi, 2010). While admitting that it was difficult for them to do it, most of the teachers reported that when they left the boys to make their own choices on minor issues like what to eat for snacks or what game to play, they became more engaged in school activities, and felt appreciated and valued. UNICEF, 2010 report supports this observation. The teachers taught the boys skills such as personal hygiene and how to relate with strangers. They observed that the boys became more confident, active and more aware of their surroundings as a result. The teachers allowed the boys to demonstrate their abilities to self-manage. The teachers only played the roles of guides and not instructors. The confidence levels of the boys was greatly enhanced. This observation confirms reviewed literature (UNICEF, 2010). The second task of this study was to establish the relationship between the regularity of school empowerment activities and academic performance among the boys in lower primary. The findings were as follows:

The researcher asked the respondents to select from the scale of 1 – 5 the question on “My school holds regular empowerment programs specifically for boys”. (1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Uncertain, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree). The following table shows the results.

Table 1: Empowerment for all Pupils Regularly

Type of response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	33.3	33.3	33.3
Disagree	2	13.3	13.3	46.7
Uncertain	5	33.3	33.3	80.0
Agree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The results on regular empowerment for boys shows that those who strongly agree and those who are uncertain are tying at 33.3% indicating that the empowerment program for all pupils were at minimal. None of the teachers agreed that there were regular empowerment programmes for boys. This is an indication that a majority of the schools studied did not have boy-specific well-structured empowerment programs in their day-to-day activities. The GNC report of 2004 proposed that the cultures around the globe condition us to believe that boys do not need any extra empowerment, and so, schools are reluctant in allocating resources towards the same (GNC, 2004).

From a review of past academic reports of the boys and the test scores in the examinations administered to them during the study, there was a clear indication that boys from schools where there were more regular empowerment programmes, performed better than their counterparts in other schools. Out of the six schools, only two had strategies for boys' empowerment implemented. Consequently, these two schools scored highest in the achievement tests given to the boys during the study. This observation agrees with the GNC report of 2004 which indicates that when boys are empowered, they tend to improve in their academic performance and school life in general.

The third task that this study sought to accomplish was to establish the challenges of boy child empowerment in lower primary school. The findings were as discussed in the sub sections below: To obtain this information, teachers were asked to respond to the statement; I am well equipped to conduct empowerment programs for boys. The responses were as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Response to “I am well equipped to conduct empowerment programs for boys”

Type of Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
Uncertain	8	53.3	53.3	60.0
Agree	6	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The teachers were given questionnaires with items that they were to check depending on their level of affirmation along a scale of 1-5 where (1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Uncertain, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree). The result shows that 53.3% were uncertain whether they were equipped with skills to conduct empowerment programmes for boys, 40% agree while 6.7% disagree. None of the respondents strongly disagree neither strongly agree. This has the implications that some teachers were quite conversant with empowerment programmes in their schools. This finding is concurrent to the (UNICEF, 2008) and the (GNC, 2004) reports that indicate that stereotypes based on gender is another factor that has contributed to lack of boys' empowerment. Teachers in most developing countries have not been fully equipped to handle gender- related challenges that they might face in the course of their teaching. They were also not aware of how using particular methods of teaching could disadvantage one gender or another.

The teachers were asked to respond to the statement; the curriculum adequately incorporates skills appropriate for boy child empowerment. The responses were as presented in table 3.

Table 3: Incorporation of boy empowerment skills in the curriculum

Type of Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	46.7	46.7	46.7
Disagree	2	13.3	13.3	60.0
Uncertain	1	6.7	6.7	66.7
Agree	5	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The result shows that 46.7% strongly disagreed, 33.3% agreed, 13.3% disagreed. Only a minority was uncertain on whether curriculum adequately incorporates skills appropriate for boy empowerment in their various schools. The literature reviewed indicated that boys, traditionally got empowered during the rites of passage, where they were introduced to their roles in the society. This role seems to diminish in the school setting (GNC, 2013). In this sense, there is a gap in the school curriculum. It does not adequately have intentionally designed components to empower boys.

This information was obtained by asking the teachers to respond to the question; ‘male teachers in my school are good role models to the boys.’ The responses were as presented in table 4.

Table 4 Male teachers as good role models to the boys

Type of Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	33.3	33.3	33.3
Disagree	5	33.3	33.3	66.7
Uncertain	4	26.7	26.7	93.3
Agree	1	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The result shows that those who strongly disagree and those who agree were both at 33.3%, those who were uncertain were at 26.7% and 6.7% agree that male teachers in their schools were role model to the boys. However, none of the respondent did strongly agree on the question of male teachers being role model to the boys in their schools. These findings agree with the literature reviewed. Healy for instance supported the role of models in the lives of boys. She observed that one of the key components of boy child empowerment is the provision of male figures that the child can look up to as models. Such males could be fathers, older brothers, male relatives, religious leaders or teachers in school (Maureen Healy, 2009).

The CRRC report, 2008 also emphasizes the need for male models for boys. To obtain this information, the teachers were asked to respond to the question; my school administration recognizes and supports activities to empower boys. Their responses were as presented in the table 5 below.

Table 5: School administration on recognition and support of boys’ empowerment

Support of the Empowerment by Administration	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	46.7	46.7	46.7
Disagree	2	13.3	13.3	60.0
Uncertain	3	20.0	20.0	80.0
Agree	3	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The respondents were finally asked to give their view whether the school administration support empowerment programmes for boys in their schools. The findings showed that 46.7% strongly disagree, 13.3% disagree while those who were uncertain and agree were tying at 20%. This is an indication that the schools do not support the empowerment of boys. The UNGEI report 2008 portrays a very different scenario in comparison to the empowerment of

girls. Many schools recognize their role in the empowerment of girls but quite few of them recognize that boys require a similar level of commitment to be empowered (Oluoch, 2008).

The respondents interviewed were asked to propose solutions to the challenges they feel hinder the empowerment of boy child empowerment in their schools. The following responses were given: Equipping teachers with skills of boy child empowerment at the teacher training level; Building well balanced empowerment programs that do not overemphasize the empowerment of the girl child at the expense of the boy; Incorporating aspects of boy child empowerment in the school curriculum; Male teachers in schools should be models of good behavior and values. This was the most frequent among all the strategies mentioned. Over two thirds of the respondents cited the role of male teachers in empowering boys as important; In the deployment of teachers to schools, there should be a fair balance in gender; School administrations to support the boy empowerment programs in their schools adequately.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study has led to five main conclusions. Firstly, the strategies used to empower boys are effective because they resulted in better academic performance. The most outstanding strategy for boy child empowerment according to the findings is the use of male teachers as role models. Secondly, the findings reveal that there are no regular empowerment programs for boys in schools. This results in the boys missing out on opportunities for empowerment. Thirdly, the findings indicate that the empowerment of boys in schools face several challenges that negatively impact the boys. The male teachers are conspicuously missing in the schools, especially in the lower primary classes. In cases where the male teachers are available, they lack the skills and knowledge on how to empower the boys in schools. Furthermore, there is no adequate coverage of the topic of boy child empowerment in the curriculum, both at the school and the teacher training levels. Fourthly, it emerged that the challenges of boy child empowerment can be mitigated at three levels. These include the school, curriculum development and policy making levels. Lastly, the findings indicate that boy child empowerment has a direct role in influencing academic performance of the child. In the case of this study, it was evident that when boys are consciously empowered, they score higher marks in class than before.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS


According to the conclusions on the findings discussed above, the researcher hereby makes the following recommendations: The curriculum developers should incorporate components of boy child empowerment in the lower primary and teacher training levels. In the deployment and employment of teachers, the Teachers' Service Commission should ensure that the each school has male and female teachers to provide enough role models for both boys and girls; Enough resources in terms of time and finances should be provided to help in the process of empowering boys in the school setting; Education leaders of all ranks should use their positions to educate the society on the need to empower boys in schools.

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