Use of formal mentoring in Kenyan primary schools as an intervention for enhancement of qualities attributed to academic success; mentees' perceptions.

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ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges that the Government of Kenya faces in an effort to achieve Education For All (EFA) is poor girls' participation in education. In spite of the government's as well as its partners' efforts and achievements in ensuring that girls participate in education, the prevailing disparities in the primary, secondary, and university levels in favour of boys are clear indications that there are still gaps to be filled and challenges to be met. There is clearly a need for concerted efforts to achieve higher participation of girls in education at all levels. This study visualized that a formal mentoring program can be a suitable intervention and further found it interesting to establish and report the girls' perceptions on the suitability of formal mentoring in the enhancement of qualities that are linked to academic success. These girls had participated in a formal mentoring programme prior to this study.

Introduction

Girls' participation in education in Kenya is one of the main challenges that the government faces in an effort to achieve Education For All (EFA) by 2015. Literature review on gender and education in Kenya shows that significant gender disparities have characterized the Kenyan education system at the national level and between various regions. The disparities are evident in enrolment, completion, transition and performance whereby there is a lower enrolment and completion rate for girls at primary school and subsequently lower transition to secondary school and to the university level than for boys (Mondoh & Mujidi, 2006; Republic of Kenya, 2007; Republic of Kenya, 2009; UNESCO, 2003; UNESCO, 2010).

Several factors contributing to gender disparities in schools in Kenya have been established in various studies in various regions of the country. It seems that there are greater challenges for girls at the primary schools' level than for boys. For instance, Elimu Yetu Coalition (EYC), a coalition of forty civil society organizations, professional groupings, educational research institutions and other practitioners conducted a study in Tharaka district in Eastern province of Kenya and Kajiado district in the rift valley province and found out that challenges that faced girls' education in Kenya were both in and out of school, and they span across economic, cultural and social facets (EYC, 2003). The main factors that damage girls' educational progress included social and cultural practices like female genital mutilation and early marriages, school girl pregnancies, poverty, the low social status of girls and women within their culture and girls' and boys' unequal labor burdens (ibid) .

The Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE), conducted a study to explore the status of girls education in the North Eastern province districts of Wajir and Mandera (FAWE, 2001). The study examined the perceptions of community opinion leaders, teachers and students about girls' education. Their sample comprised three hundred and twenty respondents.

Although the respondents had positive perceptions of girls' education, they perceived the important factors hindering girls' education as external to the girls themselves. Among these factors are negative attitudes of girls' parents and community, prioritization of boys' education over that of girls', female circumcision, early marriages, and prevailing high levels of poverty.

In a research on gender differences in the schooling experiences of Kenya adolescents by Barbara and Lloyd (1998), it was found that girls had poorer performance than boys at the end of primary schooling in all subjects except Kiswahili and English; teachers' attitudes and behavior also revealed lower expectations for girls than for boys. Dropout rates were higher for girls than for boys. This research was carried out in three different districts: Nakuru (Rift Valley province), Kilifi (coastal province), and Nyeri (central province). The districts represented a wide spectrum within the country because each was from a different province. The sample was composed of six primary schools and fifteen secondary schools.

Poverty is widespread in Kenya with over 58 % of the population living below poverty line and it is a major contributor to the gender disparities in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2007). As a result of poverty, Mungai (2002; & FAWE 2001) asserts that families choose who among their children goes to school, whereby often, the sacrifice of staying at home fall on girls. Impoverished parents need the girls' labor for extra income and to assist in the mothers' duties at home (Mungai, 2002). Girls in rural settlements, therefore, were frequently removed from school to get employment in households in urban areas (Mungai, 2002), and others to help in gruelling daily tasks such as long hours spent collecting firewood, fetching water, or caring for the younger children in the family (Mungai, 2002; EYC, 2005; UNICEF, 2009).

A study of urban poor by the United Nation International Children Fund (UNICEF)-Kenya (2009), carried out in Kibera,

the largest slum in Kenya reported that only one third of the girls in the slum go to school. Like the rest of the inhabitants, the girls struggle with extraordinary poverty and high rates of crime. Some girls who are not in school work with their families doing housework or taking care of sick relatives, while others get involved in drugs or prostitution or get married at an early age with the hope that their husbands will give them money to pay for school, but their hopes are almost never realized.

Despite the numerous challenges to girls' education, the importance of girls' education cannot be overestimated. According to a World Bank report (2009), countries that adopt specific measures to protect women's rights and increase their access to resources and schooling achieve faster economic growth than countries that do not. The report further established that countries with smaller gaps between women and men in areas like education, employment, and property rights have lower childhood malnutrition and mortality, cleaner business and government, and more rapid economic growth. In addition, it is evident that more educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn more income, have fewer children and provide better education and health care to their children, all of which eventually improve the wellbeing of individuals and lift households out of poverty. These benefits also transit across generations as well as to the communities at large (World Bank, 2008 and 2010).

In agreement with the importance of the education of girls, the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2009) observes that systematic exclusion of women and girls from access to schooling and the labor force translate into a less educated workforce, inefficient allocation of labor, lost productivity and consequently diminished progress of economic development. Similar views are expressed by Sperling (2009) who sees education for girls as very crucial since investing in girls' education globally delivers huge returns for economic growth, political participation, smaller and more sustainable families, women's health and disease prevention

In the commitment to attain gender equality in education, the government and its partners have developed strategies and implemented a variety of initiatives to address gender in education. Initiatives by the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) include: bursaries and sponsorships, the implementation of alternative approaches to education, and the establishment of model schools for girls (EYC, 2005).The Kenya government also introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in January, 2003, which has resulted in steadily increasing enrolments (UNESCO, 2010). However, in spite of this growth there are still more boys enrolled than girls, and the gender difference in enrolment increased from 4.5 in 2003 to 6.3 % in 2007; the rate of completion and transition are continue to be lower for girls than for boys (Republic of Kenya, 2009).

This persistent disparity shows that further interventions beyond the ones that are currently in place are required if parity is to be achieved. In regard to secondary schools, the government introduced Free Day Secondary School in 2008, whereby the tuition fees was waived, in order to make secondary school more accessible. However, despite the tuition fees waiver, gender disparity remains a challenge in secondary school education (UNESCO 2010).

As an indicator of the government's commitment to gender and education, a gender policy in education which provides a framework for planning and implementation of gender responsive education as well as research and training at all levels was developed in 2008. Key gender related concerns in education including disparities in enrollment, retention and transition rates, and persistent negative social cultural practices and attitudes that inhibit the realization of equity are highlighted.

The other strong indicator is the government's efforts towards achieving the Education For All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) relating to education. MDG no 2 is to achieve Universal Primary Education and targets to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. MDG no 3 targets the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education in all levels of education not later than 2015.

In respect to the numerous challenges that impede the participation of girls in education as already discussed, and the prevailing gender disparities, there is clearly a need for concerted efforts to achieve higher participation of girls in education at all levels. While acknowledging the government's as well as its partners' efforts and achievements in ensuring that girls participate in education, this study observes that the initiatives and strategies already implemented by NGOs cover a very small population in the country because they target a few schools in only a few regions. At the same time, the governments' efforts in strategizing and implementing the FPE, and subsidizing secondary fees are enormous, but the prevailing disparities in the primary, secondary, and university levels in favour of boys are clear indications that there are still gaps to be filled and challenges to be met.

Statement of the problem

This study reasons that there is a clear need to support girls to participate in education through constant interventions that enhance their academic progression in spite of all the obstacles they face. Such interventions should start from the early years of schooling.

The study further posits that a formal mentoring programme for primary school girls as an intervention strategy can enhance their academic performance and progression. Mentoring is a process of career management used by organizations as a means of nurturing and developing their staff; it involves offering support, giving advice and guidance to others or providing a role model, and is based on respect, trust and confidentiality (Clutterbuck, 2004). Mentoring is also defined as a relationship between an older, more-experienced mentor and a younger, less-experienced mentee for the purpose of helping and developing the mentee's career (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

One major purpose of mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order to maximize their potential, develop their skills, and improve their performance (Parsloe, 2000). In addition to this, mentoring also enhances the mentees' personal growth in relation to self-worth, and self-efficacy (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

Given all the potential benefits of mentoring, this study visualized that it is possible for mentoring to have similar positive outcomes for the primary school girls on the threshold of secondary education (age 12-13, on average) in Kenya faced with age, academic and social economic specific challenges. The study further found it interesting to find out the perceptions of girls on the suitability of a formal mentoring programme as an intervention for empowering girls to participate in education in spite of all the obstacles that they face. .

Specific Objective

The objective of this study was to establish the mentees' perceptions on the suitability of a formal mentoring programme in the enhancement of the qualities that are linked to academic success and progression.

Significance of the Study

The findings will be crucial towards further establishment of whether a formal mentoring programme can be a valuable intervention towards ensuring more intensive girls' participation in education. This is especially so given the benefits accrued to education in a developing country like Kenya, as well as the high gains associated with female education. This study additionally contributes significantly to empirical findings on interventions that can improve girls' participation in education.

Methodology

Research Approach

Quantitative research approach was used to establish the mentees perceptions of the mentoring programme. Quantitative research is one in which the investigator primarily uses strategies of enquiry such as experiments and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data (Creswell, 2003). The underlying assumption in quantitative research as portrayed by Bryman (2004) and Gay and Airasian (2003) is that the world is relatively stable, uniform and coherent. For this reason it can be measured and presented in numerical data that can be generalized.

The Sample

The study sample comprised of forty-eight primary school girls from rural public primary schools. The study identified girls who had gone through a formal mentoring programme which had been applied as an in-school intervention for empowering girls to participate in education. The girls were then requested to respond to a researcher constructed questionnaire. These girls had already participated in a one academic year formal mentoring programme and they were therefore deemed the most appropriate to give perceptions of a programme in which they had participated.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to get a sample of girls who had gone through a formal mentoring programme. This sampling was chosen in order to get information rich cases for in-depth study into the mentees'perceptions of the a formal mentoring programme. The study also assumed that the girls had reliable information since according to McMillan (2001), in-depth study of a limited number of case yields many insights about the topic under study.

Data Collection Instruments

This study made use of a questionnaire as the instrument of data collection in establishing the perceptions of the mentees on the suitability of the formal mentoring programme in the enhancement of qualities attributed to academic success. Five main qualities attributed to academic success were presented. These qualities included: self awareness, self esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-motivation. The mentees were then requested to give their ratings to a number of aspects that pertain to the promotion of these qualities, by choosing one of the four options in the rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). They were also asked to give their ratings on the overall satisfaction with the mentoring programme. Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1. 4, 1.5, and 1.6 contain their responses.

Results

In an effort to ascertain the mentees' perceptions on the extent to which the mentoring programme promoted their self-awareness, four propositions were put forward, including: identification of strengths and weaknesses; ability to set goals; working towards goal achievement; and, need to use one's strengths more.

Table 1.1: Extent to which the Mentoring Programme Promoted Mentees' Self-Awareness

	SA	A	D	SD
	F	F	F	F
The mentoring programme helped me to identify my strength and my weaknesses	45	3	0	0
Through the mentoring programme, I was able to set my goal in life	42	6	0	0
The mentoring programme encouraged me to work hard towards achieving my goals	44	4	0	0
I have learnt that it is necessary for one to work on her weaknesses and use her strengths more	31	13	4	0

Table 1.1, shows that forty-five mentees strongly agreed to the proposition that the mentoring programme helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, three of them agreed, and none of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Forty-two mentees strongly agreed that through the programme, they were able to set their goals, six of them agreed, and none of the mentees disagreed with this proposition. Forty-four mentees strongly agreed, and four agreed, that the mentoring programme encouraged them to work hard toward achieving their goals. On the proposition on the need to work on weaknesses and use the strengths more, thirty-one mentees strongly agreed, thirteen agreed, four disagreed and none strongly disagreed. Overall, it emerged that the mentees held strong positive perceptions on the impact of the mentoring programme in promoting their self-awareness.

Table 1.2: Extent to which the Mentoring Programme Promoted Mentees' Self-Esteem

	SA	A	D	SD
	F	F	F	F
I learnt that it is important to know the good things about myself	42	5	1	0
I learnt that I am an important person with all my weaknesses and strengths	36	11	1	0
Through the programme, I realized that I should have a positive view of myself	30	14	2	2
I learnt that it is important to make good decisions concerning my life	42	5	0	1

Table 1.2, reflects the mentees responses to the propositions presented by the research in an effort to gather their perceptions on the extent to which the mentoring programme promoted their self-esteem. Forty-two strongly agreed that they learnt that it was important to know the good things about oneself, five agreed, one disagreed and none disagreed strongly. Thirty-six of them strongly agreed that they learnt that they were important people even when they had weaknesses, eleven agreed, one disagreed and none strongly disagreed. On the proposition that through the programme they realized that they should have a positive view of themselves, thirty strongly agreed, fourteen agreed, two disagreed and two strongly disagreed. On the fourth proposition that they learnt that it was important to make good decisions concerning one's life, forty-two strongly agreed, five agreed, none disagreed and one strongly disagreed. From the table on the mentees' ratings, it is evident that a vast majority

had positive perceptions on the mentoring programme's ability in the promotion of their self-esteem.

Table 1.3: Extent to which the Mentoring Programme Promoted Mentees' Self-Efficacy

	SA	A	D	SD
	F	F	F	F
Through the mentoring programme, I learnt that I am capable of improving my school performances	45	2	1	0
I learnt that working hard in school will increase my chances of having a better future	43	5	0	0
I learnt that I am capable of achieving my goal in life if I remain focused	33	13	2	0
I have learnt that it is possible to have too many duties at home and yet perform well in school	25	20	1	2

This study was also interested in finding out the mentees' perceptions on the extent to which the mentoring programme promoted their self-efficacy. Table 1.3 shows their responses to a number of propositions on enhancement of self-efficacy. In response to the proposition that through the mentoring programme they learnt that they are capable of improving their school performance, forty-five strongly agreed, two agreed, one disagreed and none strongly disagreed. Forty-three strongly agreed that they learnt that working hard in school would increase their chances of having a better future, five agreed and none either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thirty-three mentees strongly agreed that they learnt that they were capable of achieving their goals in life if they remained focused, thirteen agreed, two disagreed and none disagreed strongly.

In response to the proposition that they learnt that it was possible to have too many duties at home and yet perform well in school, twenty-five strongly agreed, twenty agreed, one disagreed and two strongly disagreed. Although the majority of the mentees had very positive perceptions on the programme in enhancement of self-efficacy, it was noticed that twenty of them only agreed on the proposition addressing many duties at home, and two actually disagreed strongly. This might be an indication of the reality that many duties at home actually interfere with good school performance.

The study was also interested in establishing the mentees perceptions on the extent to which the mentoring programme promoted their self-regulation. As reflected in Table 1.4, forty-one of them strongly agreed that through the programme they have gained more knowledge on how to prepare good personal timetables, six agreed, one disagreed and none of them strongly disagreed. Thirty-three strongly agreed that the information on how to develop interest in a subject was useful to them, twelve agreed, two disagreed and one strongly disagreed. In response to the proposition that the information on how to sit for examinations was helpful, thirty-six strongly agreed, eleven agreed and one strongly disagreed. Forty mentees strongly agreed that if they put extra effort in school work they can succeed, six agreed, one disagreed and another one strongly disagreed. The ratings generally reflected highly positive perceptions.

Table 1.4: Extent to which the Mentoring Programme Promoted Mentees' Self-Regulation

	SA	A	D	SD
	F	F	F	F
Through the mentoring programme, I have gained more knowledge on how to prepare a good personal timetable	41	6	1	0
The information on how to develop interests in a subject was useful for me	33	12	2	1
The information on how to sit for examinations has helped me a lot	36	11	0	1
Other girls from backgrounds the same as mine have succeeded in school work, therefore I can also succeed, if I put extra effort like them	40	6	1	1

Table 1.5: Extent to which the Mentoring Programme Promoted Mentees' Self-Motivation

	SA	A	D	SD
	F	F	F	F
I feel I should not always complain about issues in my life	16	28	3	1
I feel more interested in school work	39	5	2	2
I now belief that I will score good marks, and continue schooling to secondary school and beyond	44	2	0	2
I have acquired new knowledge and skills that will help me improve my school work	35	11	0	2

Self-motivation was another quality that the programme targeted to improve in the mentees. The study, therefore, wanted to establish the mentees' perceptions on the extent to which the programme promoted their self-motivation. Table 1.5 shows that only sixteen mentees strongly agreed to the proposition that they should not always complain about issues in their life while twenty-eight agreed, three disagreed and only one strongly disagreed. Thirty-nine strongly agreed that they felt more interested in school work, while five agreed, two disagreed and two strongly disagreed. In response to the proposition on their belief in scoring good marks and continuing school to secondary school and beyond, forty four strongly agreed, two agreed, none picked the option of disagree and two strongly disagreed. Thirty-five mentees strongly agreed that they had acquired new knowledge and skills which would help them improve in their school work, eleven agreed, no mentee chose the option of disagree and to strongly disagreed. Except for the proposition on not complaining always about issues in life where only sixteen mentees strongly agreed, the perception of the mentees on promotion of self-motivation through the programme were positively rated by most of the mentees.

The ratings of the mentees' overall satisfaction with the mentoring programme were determined. Table 1.6 shows that twenty-six of the mentees strongly agreed that their individual needs were met, twenty agreed, one disagreed and one strongly disagreed. In response to the proposition that they gained more

confidence in dealing with challenges and issues in their life, thirty-three strongly agreed, nine agreed, five disagreed and one strongly disagreed.

Table 1.6: Mentees' Overall Satisfaction with the Mentoring Programme

	SA	A	D	SD
	F	F	F	F
My individual needs were well addressed.	26	20	1	1
I have gained more confidence in dealing with challenges and issues in my life.	33	9	5	1
I have a clearer direction for my future career.	36	11	0	1
In my opinion, the mentoring programme has made me a better person.	39	7	1	1
After going, through the mentoring programme, I have more hope for a better academic future.	41	6	0	1

Thirty-six mentees strongly agreed that they had attained a clearer direction for their future, eleven agreed, none of the mentees chose the option of disagree and one strongly disagreed. Thirty-nine mentees strongly agreed that the mentoring programme had made them a better person, seven agreed, one disagreed and one strongly disagreed. Forty-one mentees strongly agreed that through the programme they had more hope for a better future, six agreed, none of the mentees chose the option of disagreed and one strongly disagreed. Again the ratings by the mentees were very high on the positive side.

Conclusion

The mentees' responses on their perceptions of the formal mentoring programme reflected very high positive ratings. They had had positive perceptions on the impact of the mentoring programme in promoting their self-awareness, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-motivation Similar high ratings were given in the mentees responses to their overall satisfaction of the programme.

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