

# African Journal of Education and Practice (AJEP)

**Influence of Cultural Norms on Student Academic Performance in Marsabit Central  
Sub-County**

Oscar Okoth Ojwang, Dr. Stephen Asatsa and Prof. Peter Koros

### **Influence of Cultural Norms on Student Academic Performance in Marsabit Central Sub-County**



<sup>1\*</sup>Oscar Okoth Ojwang

Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi-Kenya



<sup>2</sup>Dr. Stephen Asatsa

Head of Department Counselling and Psychology,  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Catholic  
University of Eastern Africa



<sup>3</sup>Prof. Peter Koros

Dean School of Education, Faculty of Education,  
The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

#### **Article History**

*Received 19<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

*Received in Revised Form 21<sup>st</sup> August 2024*

*Accepted 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024*



How to cite in APA format:

Ojwang, O., Asatsa, S., & Koros, P. (2024). Influence of Cultural Norms on Student Academic Performance in Marsabit Central Sub-County. *African Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(3), 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ajep.2966>

#### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to assess the influence of cultural norms on student academic performance in Marsabit Central Sub-County

**Methodology:** The study adopted a mixed method research approach. A convergent parallel design was used. The study adopted a mixed sampling technique of both probability (stratified sampling) and non-probabilistic sampling (purposive sampling) techniques to determine the sample population and size for the study. The study obtained its study population from the six secondary schools in Marasabit Central sub-county hence the general sample was obtained purposively but in the presentation of their respondents was stratified arranged to give distinct categories of their correspondence. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview guides and document analysis guide. Validity and reliability were attained following an expert opinion by the study supervisors and were tested using the Cronbach alpha reliability test in determining the tools effectiveness in data collection. Quantitative data was used to analyze descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis technique.

**Findings:** The study found out that cultural practices had an influence on learners' academic performance.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study recommends schools to organize academic clinics, mentorship programmes, strengthen guidance and counseling and peer counseling in schools, and the government to address shortage of teachers, insecurity, government tuition subsidy remittance on time, provision of infrastructural facilities to enable learning, need for sensitization of the community on importance of school and alternate measures on when and how to go about their cultural traditional norms and avail basic resources like water in schools. These were the substratum influence affecting the learner's performance.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Norms, Student, Academic Performance*

©2024 by the Authors. This Article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a panacea for national development across the world. There is no society that does not give adequate attention to her educational growth and development. Whereas the need to provide education to all those eligible to get it remains a fundamental requirement to communities and governments, it is reported that 67 million children were out of school globally in 2009. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of out-of-school children was about 30 million while Kenya had about 1.059 million children out of school (UIS fact sheet, 2011). When a child is born there are a number of things and practices used to socialize him/her in order to fit well in the society. The child is expected to uphold the norms, values and the traditions of the society. Mazid (2010), says that home is the first school and mother is the first teacher. Parents are builders of children's character and minds. Manali (2011), culture is seen as a system of social control, wherein people shape their standards and behavior.

Research has shown that academic performance is influenced by various factors such as gender orientation from home, daily routines and cultural life. Some of these factors are presumed to be culturally-oriented (Sorensen, Iversen and Bonesronning, 2015). Their work put into perspective the influence of cultural background on student's school performance in Norway. It was established that test scores significantly differed in tandem with the country of origin. An example was the revelation that a background in an achievement-oriented culture was bound to improve test results. On the other hand, students coming from a traditional culture were found to have poorer scores. In addition, it is indicated that cultural background seemed to have similar effects on both boys and girls. The cultural effects were also found not to vary substantially by the ethnic densities of communities (Sorensen et al., 2015). The current study demonstrated the relation between the deep-rooted children (learner's) cultural orientation and its influence on their academic achievement, a gap to be filled.

The major parameter used to measure educational output is performance in examinations. Performance is achieved after various inputs are placed in an educational process. These inputs include the student, the teacher, teaching- learning resources, the school facilities and the school environment. A healthy interaction of the given inputs results into good performance. The cultural practices and their influence on academic performance of secondary school students in Marsabit Central Sub-County, however, this has been questioned owing to the poor performance in national examinations. This public outcry is what prompts this study to be carried out in order to determine the influence of the cultural practices and their influence on academic performance of secondary school students in Marsabit Central Sub-County, as indicated in Table 1.

Such a problem should be looked into, since the place of cultural practices in education cannot be over emphasized in the economic development of a nation. Marsabit Central Sub-County is inhabited by communities whose cultures are typically traditional; it would be interesting to unearth how their cultural practices impede student academic performance at secondary school level. Table 1 indicating previous KCSE year's performance in Marsabit central sub-county.

**Table 1: KCSE Mean Grades for Marsabit Central Sub-County between 2017 and 2021**

Year	Mean Score	Grade	Deviation
2017	3.69	C Plain	Nil
2018	4.97	C Plain	+1.28
2019	3.28	D Plus	-1.69
2020	3.85	C Plain	+0.57
2021	4.82	C Plain	+0.97

*Source: Marsabit County Education Office, Exam*

The poor low KCSE academic performance, as shown by the mean score of schools at mean grade D, causes many cries and concerns to the community, parents, stakeholders and students in particular. Poor academic performance in schools is a clear indication that problems exist in the cultural practices influence on academic performance of secondary school students. It is pertinent to note that the cultural practices are necessary to guarantee and instill discipline, collaboration, commitment and professional standards in the teaching profession. As such, researchers have focused on variables relating to the cultural practices and their influence on academic performance, with minimal emphasis to students' wellbeing. Without bringing in student's academic achievement the study will not be complete because school culture is only a means to an end that necessitates student's academic achievement.

The declaration of the free primary education (FPE) policy in 2003 by Kenya government (Republic of Kenya, 2005) was a move in the right direction to try and address some of the concerns raised in the Koech report. However, this policy lacks the affirmative action component to make it more relevant to areas that have been underdeveloped over long periods of time (Crosby, 2003). Despite the introduction of the FPE policy, Marsabit Central sub county just like other counties in Kenya has continued to lag behind in education participation of pupils with little care from the stakeholders to address them (Achoka, 2007). It is in the interest of Kenya as a country that education participation for the ASALs is given a fresh look and those factors that hinder students' participation in secondary education in Kenya be identified and tackled with haste so as to enhance the achievement of the EFA goal, a pillar that the current study will use to address student's enrollment and performance in schools in Marsabit Central sub county.

Most schools in these marginalized areas register high dropout rates due to insecurity reasons and mass failure in Kenya certificate of primary education as indicated above. Teachers on the other hand have been forced to desert duty and relocate to other places. Poor academic achievement of students raises concern as to whether cultural practices have any influence on the student's academic achievement. Culture can significantly contribute to the life of members of the society and this can include students' academic life. It is therefore essential for schools to realize how culture influence or enhance academic performance. In this case, a good environment is created and the productivity of the teachers and students is likely to improve guaranteeing the organization a competitive advantage. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to investigate on how cultural practices influence academic performance of secondary school students in Marsabit Central Sub County, Kenya.

Despite efforts to achieve universal primary education through Universal Free Primary Education (UFPE), significant disparities persist in Kenya, especially in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) like Marsabit County. Enrollment remains below 50%, with Marsabit Central Sub-County showing consistently poor academic performance (Njoka et al., 2016; Marsabit

County Government, 2013). High illiteracy, driven by cultural practices, hampers socio-economic development, necessitating further investigation and recommendations to improve education outcomes.

### Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

- i. To what extent have the cultural norms influence student academic performance in Marsabit central Sub-County?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

#### Cognitive Theory of Motivation

The study, based on Nona Tollefson's Cognitive Theory of Motivation (2000), explores how teachers' and students' implicit beliefs about success shape their interactions and influence academic achievement. Teachers develop outcome expectations regarding whether all students can learn and efficacy expectations about their ability to help diverse students meet academic standards (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Attribution theories by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1967, 1972) are crucial in understanding how individuals, including teachers, explain successes and failures, affecting motivation. Teachers can use these theories to improve student engagement by fostering positive interactions. The study also highlights the importance of teacher-student bonding and communication, suggesting that professionally developed teachers enhance student achievement. The cognitive psychological perspective emphasizes the impact of beliefs on teacher-student dynamics, particularly in understanding cultural influences on academic performance in Marsabit Central Sub-County

#### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework represents a diagrammatic relationship between the dependent and the independent variables (Kothari, 2004).

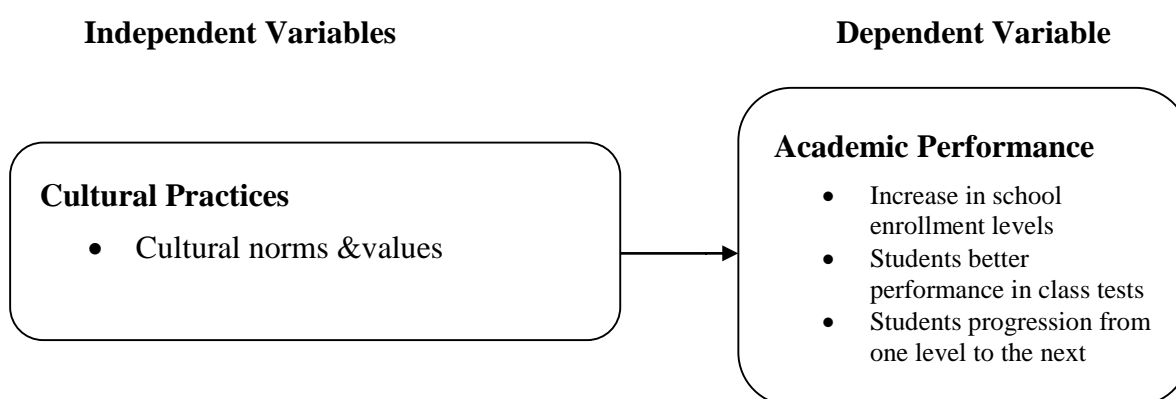


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed method design enabled the researcher to adopt a cross-sectional survey research design for quantitative data and a phenomenological research design for qualitative data. The study targeted around 700 participants: 1 Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO), 6 Principals, 60 teachers, and 600 students

(Marsabit Central Sub-County Education Report, 2018). However, the study obtained 336 participants: 1 Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO), 3 Principals, 23 teachers, and 309 students from the target population who were picked using both stratified and simple random sampling. The study adopted a mixed sampling technique of probability (Stratified random sampling) sampling and non-probabilistic (purposive sampling) sampling. Data collection method was by use of questionnaires. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Descriptive data was analyzed through measures of central tendency including means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. Data was coded using SPSS, version 23 for windows. Results were then presented in tables, diagrams and charts.

## RESULTS

### Response Rate

Table 2 shows that 1 Quality Assurance Officer, 3 principals, 23 teachers, and 309 students resulting in an aggregate sum of 336 participated in the study. This translated to 100%, 50%, 76.67%, and 91.96% response rate for Quality Assurance Officer, principals, teachers, and students respectively. The aggregate response rate was thus established to be 84.63% which according to Kothari (2014) was deemed sufficient. Further, Baruch and Holtom (2008) suggested that a response of significantly or equivalent to 80% was adequate for information investigation.

**Table 2: Response Rate**

	Quality Assurance Officer	Principals	Teachers	Students	Aggregated Sum
Targeted Respondents	1	6	30	360	397
Participated Respondents	1	3	23	309	336
Response Rate (%)	100	50	76.67	91.96	84.63

*Source Author: 2024*

### Types of Cultural Practices

The study sought to find out the types of cultural practices that the students in secondary schools from Marsabit County engaged.

**Table 3: Types of Cultural Practices**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Female Genital Mutilation and peer pressure</b>		
Female circumcision is highly valued in this District	201	65.04
Fear of being insulted make uncircumcised teenage girls not go to school	59	19.09
As a rite of passage girls feel that they are women after circumcision	24	7.76
Parents circumcise their daughters preparing them for marriage	25	8.09
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	
<b>Early Marriages</b>		
Early marriage is common in Marsabit district	250	80.90
Parents look at their daughters as a source of wealth in terms of bride wealth	49	15.85
parents prefer their daughters to be married than to join secondary schools	10	3.23
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	
<b>Gender Discrimination</b>		
Parents prefer educating boys as a security for old age	283	91.58
Parents believe that boosting in girl's education will finally benefit another clan/family	26	8.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	
<b>Gender roles</b>		
Girls are assigned more household than boys	61	19.74
Boys are required to look after cattle's than be in school	36	11.65
Girls are usually given duties of family care.	212	68.60
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	

*Source Author: 2024*

The study highlights significant cultural influences on education in Marsabit County, Kenya, particularly gender discrimination. Parents prioritize educating boys over girls (91.58%), assigning girls more household duties, child labor, and care responsibilities, which limits their access to secondary education. Traditional practices, such as female circumcision (ranked at 65.04%), are deeply rooted and serve as rites of passage, often leading to early marriages and further hindering girls' education. Despite existing laws against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the practice persists due to cultural values and inadequate enforcement. These cultural practices adversely affect both boys' and girls' academic performance. The study also identifies additional challenges, including learner-related issues like absenteeism and lack of commitment, and government-related problems such as teacher shortages, insecurity, and poor infrastructure. The findings align with previous research, underscoring the entrenched nature of these practices and the need for broader sensitization and government intervention.

### **The Extent Cultural Practices Have Influenced Academic Performance**

This phenomenon unravels the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables under study in this research. Table 4 below from the learners, gives statistics from a Likert scale on the extent to which these cultural practices have influenced academic performance.

**Table 4: The Extent to Which Cultural Practices Have Influenced Academic Performance**

Statement	Responses in %				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
Students giving high priority to cultural practices	19.3	28.8	5.8	26.8	19.3
Many students leave school to attend cultural practices and come back	24.2	30.6	5.4	23.9	15.8
Cultural practices like early marriage led to poor academic performance	62.4	21.1	1.8	3.2	11.5
Parents have a negative attitude towards students' education	13.9	14.6	9.5	29.6	32.3
Cultural practices like FGM and early marriage affect student's performance due to time wasted during these practices	68.0	18.0	3.0	6.3	4.7
Home chores make students have little time to study leading to low academic performance	33.4	32.1	9.3	16.2	8.9
Peer pressure causes absenteeism among students leading to low academic performance	54.2	31.6	2.7	5.3	6.3

*Source Author: 2024*

The study highlights the significant impact of cultural practices on secondary school students' academic performance, with nearly equal responses from those agreeing and disagreeing on the issue. Approximately 28.8% agreed that students prioritize cultural practices, leading to absenteeism and poor performance, while 26.7% disagreed. The study identifies early marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), and other cultural rituals as key contributors to absenteeism, particularly affecting female students. Poverty is also a major factor, driving early marriages and further hindering education. Although some respondents believe that parental attitudes towards education are positive, cultural practices continue to pose challenges. The study suggests that policies on learner retention and community sensitization are crucial to addressing these issues. Additionally, home chores and peer pressure are identified as other factors contributing to low academic performance. The findings emphasize the need for stakeholders to collaborate in mitigating the adverse effects of cultural practices on education.

**Table 5: Distribution of Students on whether they are affected by Listed Cultural Practices**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	22	95.7
No	1	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source Author: 2024*

95.7% of teachers confirmed awareness of students affected by cultural practices, suggesting these practices occur locally, as evidenced by lower KCSE participation in 2020-2021 compared to other regions.



**Table 6: Students Results in the Last Two Years in Marsabit**

Gender	2021		2020	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	1,220	0.147 %	1,131	0.150 %
Female	1,091	0.131 %	902	0.120 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,311</b>	<b>0.278 %</b>	<b>2,033</b>	<b>0.270 %</b>

Source: KNEC 2021 and 2020 KCSE Results Statistics

The slight increase in KCSE candidates from 2020 (2,033 students) to 2021 (2,311 students) remains low compared to other counties. This underperformance is attributed to factors like lack of learner commitment, absenteeism due to cultural practices, illiterate parents, poor primary education foundations, language barriers, and indiscipline. Cultural influences such as circumcision, insecurity, low value on education, drug abuse, and inadequate parental guidance further hinder academic success.

### **Challenges facing Schools in Addressing the Cultural Practices That influence Academic Performance**

In Marsabit Central Sub-County, learners' academic performance is hindered by cultural practices, insecurity, poor parental support, and teacher shortages. Tribal conflicts cause school closures, disrupting education and leading to poor syllabus coverage. Poverty, lack of resources, and language barriers contribute to high absenteeism and dropout rates. Poor parenting and inadequate discipline exacerbate issues like drug abuse, affecting both primary and secondary schools, resulting in poor national examination results.

### **Measures to Overcome Cultural Practices Influence on Academic Performance**

Students must change their attitudes toward learning to improve academic performance, reduce absenteeism, and positively engage with cultural practices. Peer counseling and termly academic clinics should be strengthened to boost self-esteem, foster a reading culture, and involve parents in academic progress. Additionally, students need to be sensitized on the importance of peace to avoid tribal clashes, guided by parents, schools, government, and NGOs to promote safe communities.

Parents play a crucial role in their children's education by instilling traditional knowledge, supporting teachers, and aligning cultural events with school schedules to minimize absenteeism. They should ensure timely payment of tuition fees, provide necessary learning materials, attend academic clinics, and engage in disciplinary matters. Additionally, community sensitization on the negative impact of early marriages is essential to prevent disruptions in education, with government policies needed to support children's schooling.

The study emphasizes enhancing student performance through consistent counseling, mentorship, and academic engagement. It suggests initiatives like peer counseling, peace talks, and cultural events to promote harmony. Regular assessments and parental involvement are recommended to improve academic focus and attendance. The school should mix students from different communities to foster cultural integration and effective communication. Collaboration with local government and NGOs is advised to support needy students and reduce absenteeism.

Despite the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, Marsabit Central Sub County lags in educational participation due to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teachers, and security issues. The government needs to improve infrastructure, teacher allocation, and funding to

address absenteeism and poor performance. Collaborations with missionaries have helped, but more partnership and fair allocation of bursaries are essential to support vulnerable learners and ensure a conducive learning environment.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The study identified several factors contributing to poor academic performance, including cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriages, child labor, and tribalism, as well as learner-related issues like absenteeism, lack of commitment, illiteracy among parents, and indiscipline. Government-related challenges included teacher shortages, insecurity, lack of water, and inadequate infrastructure. The study emphasized the need for a collective effort involving the government, NGOs, community members, parents, and neighboring communities to address these issues. It highlighted that schools play a crucial role in the community's livelihood and must be strengthened to improve academic outcomes. A settled and conducive environment is essential for learning, and resolving societal, economic, and social challenges can significantly enhance students' academic performance.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations urge the Ministry of Education, Quality Assurance Officers, schools, teachers, and parents to address teacher shortages, improve school infrastructure, ensure timely tuition subsidies, and promote cultural sensitivity. Schools should foster mentorship programs, peer counseling, and cultural inclusivity to enhance student engagement and academic performance. Additionally, the community should be educated on the importance of consistent school attendance, and cultural practices should be aligned with the school calendar to minimize absenteeism.

## REFERENCES

- Achoka, J.& Maiyo, M. (2007). *Access to basic education in Kenya: Inherent concerns*. KAEAM Conference, Eldoret Kenya
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology Methods and Techniques (second revised Edition*, New Age International Publishers, and New Delhi
- Kothari, C. R. (2014). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques (2nd rev ed.)*. New Delhi:
- Manali O. (2011). Importance of culture. An article in Buzzle.com
- Mazid S.K. (2010). Home as the first school. Paris. Poemshunter.com
- Njoka, J. T., et al. (2016). Centre for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies: Report on the Status of Education in ASAL Areas of Kenya. *University of Nairobi*.
- Njoka, J.T., Yanda, P., Maganga, F., Liwenga, E., Kateka, A., Henku, A., Mabhuye, E., Malik, N., & Bavo, C. (2016). *Kenya: Country Situation Assessment*. Accessed on May 20, 2018 from [http://prise.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Low-Res\\_Kenya-CSA.pdf](http://prise.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Low-Res_Kenya-CSA.pdf)
- Tollefson, N. (2000). *Classroom Applications of Cognitive Theories of Motivation*. Classroom Applications of Cognitive Theories of Motivation. Plenum Publishing Corporation
- Udo B. (1992). Culture and environment in primary education. Bonn. German foundation for development (DSE) Education. Science and documentation centre.
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2013). *Kenya: Statistics*. Retrieved on May 20, 2018 from [https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kenya\\_statistics.html](https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kenya_statistics.html)