

INFLUENCE OF HOME-SCHOOL DISTANCE ON STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC DAY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

Jacinta Wayua Nzina¹, Dr. Redempta Kiilu² and Dr. Francis Muya³

Ph.D Candidate¹, Lecturer^{2,3}

School of Education, Department of Educational Administration and Planning South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the influence of home-school distance on students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. Concurrent research design of mixed methods methodology was used. The study targeted 250 principals, 380 Form 4 class teachers, 250 PA chair persons and 108 area chiefs. The sample size included 50 principals, 76 class teachers, 50 PA chairpersons and 20 chiefs, making a total of 196 participants. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used to collect data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis. The quantitative data was presented using frequency tables and graphs while qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented using narratives and appropriate verbatim quotes. Descriptive statistics used were mainly mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics used were both correlation and regression analyses. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine association /correlation between home-school distance and students' participation in public day secondary schools. Bivariate regression analysis was used to show the influence of home-school distance on the students' participation in public day secondary schools. The study established that home-school distance had an inverse significant influence on students' participation in these schools. The study called for construction of more public day secondary schools in strategic areas near communities and expansion of boarding facilities. The study recommended that school administrators should collaborate with local administrators to ensure safety of students to and from school among other recommendation.

Key words: Home-school Distance, Students' Participation, Public Secondary Schools, Makueni

County, Kenya.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a very vital part in the economic, social and political development of any nation. In all over the world, education is extremely regarded and recognized as a basic human right for every child (UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, despite the high cost of education many governments and families invest very much in all levels of education. Education helps in creation of human capital that contributes much in national development through; increased production and eliminate poverty, diseases and ignorance. Educational achievement has become economically more vital in productivity when compared to other factors of production. This is mainly because attainment of education leads to organization and transformation of other resources for better livelihood among people (Psacharopoulos & Patanos 2018).

Education is a stand-alone goal (SDG 4) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The target 4.1 states that; by 2030 ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education without discrimination.

It is against this background that most of the countries all over the world have tried to provide free education so that each and every child can participate regardless of individual socio-economic background. Home-school distance refers to the maximum distance which students should travel to reach school. Distance from school can be a major factor in preventing children from participating in secondary education or causing them to drop out (UNICEF, 2015). Long distance to and from school has been an area of interest to scholars in various countries such as America, Europe, Africa as well as Kenya as a factor that may affect students' participation in secondary school (World Bank, 2019). According to UNICEF (2015), building schools near students' home is one of the most cost-effective long-term solutions to increase access and retention in secondary schools. Also decreasing distance decreases the likelihood of dropping out of students by 50%.

Nikitas et al (2019) concluded that, improving security in the road, funding incentive scheme and involvement of schools were powerful facilitators for the maintained achievement of walking school buses. Baliyan and khama (2020) concluded that walking long distance to school indicated that students arrived at school with empty stomachs and often late hence low participation which affected performance in mathematics. Murunga (2011) identified several factors which lead to low students' participation and among them was long home-school distance. Onaya and Onyango (2021) concluded that long distance travelled by the students reduce teacher – student contact time, leads to stomach ulcers, headaches and related issues

which reduce school attendance and completion rates.

Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) was officially launched by His Excellence President Mwai Kibaki in 2008. Under normal circumstances, FDSE programme was launched so that the total numbers of learners who enroll in form 1 participate wholly in education and graduate after 4 years. However, the case is totally different in Makueni County. The data obtained from Makueni County Education Office between the years 2016 -2021 shows that; In 2019, a total of 4,891 students did not complete form 4 accounting for 16.94% of students who either dropped out or repeated. In 2020 a total of 3,731 students did not complete form 4 accounting for 12.98% of students who either dropped out or repeated. Also in 2021, a total of 3,674 students did not complete form 4 accounting for 12.38% of students who either dropped out or repeated. In Makueni County, most households are poor (KNBS Makueni County, 2020) and hence home-school distance play a big role in students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study was guided by the following objective

To determine the influence of home- school distance on students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted Mixed Methods research methodology specifically concurrent research design. The study targeted 250 public day secondary schools and 108 locations (KNBS MAKUENI COUNTY, 2020). Therefore, 250 principals, 380 form 4 class teachers (2022), 250 PTA chair persons and 108 area chiefs were targeted. Random sampling was used to sample; 50 principals, 76 form 4 class teachers (2022), 50 PA chairperson and 20 area chiefs making a total of 196 research participants. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were the research tools.

IV. RESULTS

Home-School Distance

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of home-school distance on students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. First, the home-school distance in the study context was evaluated.

Distance between School Location and the Nearest Town

The principals and Form 4 class teachers' responses' are summarized in Table 1 shown below.

Table 1: Distance between School Location and the Nearest Town (KM)

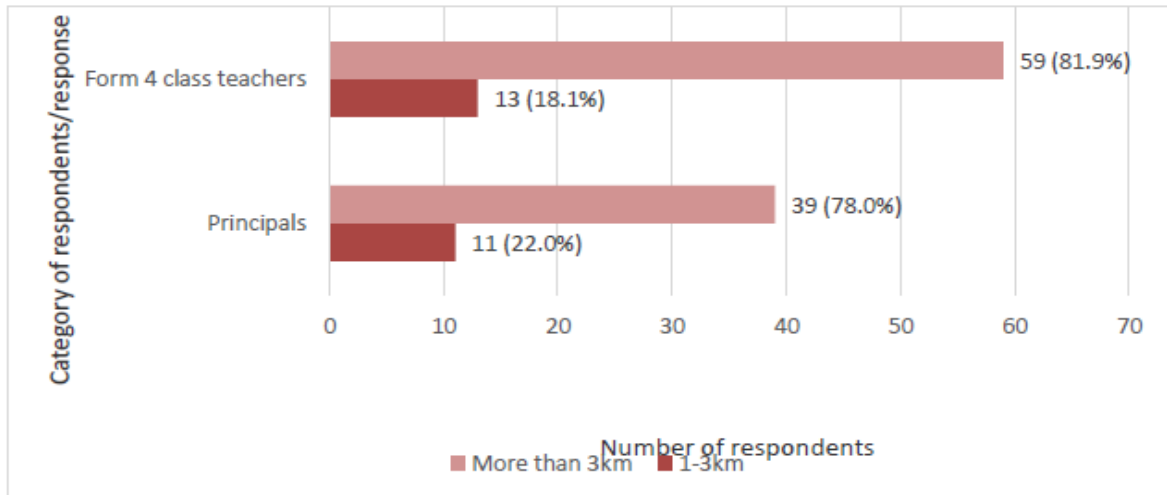
| | N | Range | Min | Max | Mean | SD |
|---|----------|--------------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| Distance between school and nearest town (principals) | 50 | 24.95 | 0.05 | 25 | 4.70 | 6.60 |
| Distance between school and nearest town (Form 4 class teachers') | 72 | 24.80 | 0.20 | 25 | 7.44 | 7.10 |

Based on the principals' responses as indicated by the results in Table 1, the average distance of the sampled schools from the nearest town was 4.70km where the schools located nearer to town were 50m away while those located far away were located 25km away. The standard deviation of 6.60km meant that there was great variability in the distance between the location of the sampled schools and the nearest towns. Focusing on the Form 4 class teachers' responses, the average distance between the sampled schools and the nearest towns was 7.44km. The schools located nearer to towns were 200m away while the furthest were located 25km away. The standard deviation also pointed to greater variability in the distance between the location of the sampled schools and the nearest towns. The majority of the interviewed PA chairpersons, 36 (72.0%), observed that the approximate distance covered by the majority of the students to reach school was more than 3km. The rest, 14 (28.0%) in number, reported that students in their schools covered approximately 1 to 3km to reach school. For the area chiefs, 7 (35.0%) of them indicated that students covered approximately 1-3km to reach school while 13 (65.0%), the majority, asserted that the distance covered by the students was more than 3km. The above findings suggested that on average, students in public day secondary schools in Makueni County covered relatively long distances to reach school.

Approximate Distance Covered by the Furthest Student to Reach School

Figure 1 provides the responses of the principals and Form 4 class teachers.

Figure 1: Approximate Distance Covered by the Furthest Student to Reach School



From Figure 1 the distance covered by the furthest student to reach school was more than 3km as indicated by principals (78.0%) and Form 4 class teachers (81.9%). This finding affirms the conclusion that on average, students in public day secondary schools in Makueni County covered relatively long distances to reach school.

Means of Transport Used by Students to Reach School

The study also assessed the various means of transport used by students to reach the sampled schools. The responses of the principals and Form 4 class teachers are as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage of Students Using Various Means of Transport to Reach School

| Category of Respondent | Means of Transport | N | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|--------------------|----|-----|-----|------|----------------|
| Principals | Walking | 50 | 10 | 100 | 85.5 | 19.6 |
| | Bicycles | 25 | 1 | 40 | 12.5 | 11.9 |
| | Motorbikes | 17 | 1 | 20 | 3.9 | 4.6 |
| | Matatus | 13 | 1 | 50 | 10.3 | 13.8 |
| Form 4 class teachers | Walking | 68 | 10 | 100 | 85.5 | 20.1 |
| | Bicycles | 47 | 1 | 40 | 9.4 | 8.0 |
| | Motorbikes | 29 | 1 | 30 | 6.1 | 8.2 |
| | Matatus | 19 | 1 | 61 | 16.0 | 18.1 |

The findings presented in Table 2 showed that on average, 85.5% of the students in the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County reached school by walking. On average, the students reaching these schools using bicycles were 12.5% according to the principals and 9.4% based on the class teachers' responses. The students who used motorbikes were 3.9% and 6.1% on average based on the principals' and Form 4 class teachers' responses. The principals indicated that on average, 10.3% of the students reached school by boarding matatus while the Form 4 class teachers believed that on average, 16.0% of the students in their schools reached school using matatus. From the interviews conducted with the PA chairpersons and area chiefs, most students in the public secondary schools in Makueni County walked to school with a few using bicycles and motorbikes. Some of the PA chairpersons' responses were recorded as follows: -*"Majority of students walk on foot; some students are not safe on the way"* PA Chairperson 2 *"Almost all students walk to and from school"* PA Chairperson 17.. *"Majority walk, some use bicycles and others motorbikes"* PA Chairperson 50. The above findings suggested that the majority of students in public day secondary schools in Makueni County reached schools by walking.

Safety of Students on their Way to School

The safety of students on their way to school was also explored from the viewpoint of the PA chairpersons and the area chiefs. Majority of the PA chairpersons, 47 (94.0%), decried that these students were not safe. The main arguments was that, besides students arriving in school tired, some students indulged in alcohol, drug and substance abuse, indiscipline acts and others especially girls, were taken advantage sexually resulting to unwanted pregnancies. Some of the PA chairpersons explained that, *"Our learners are not safe on the way. Drug addicts influence them on the way"* PA Chairperson 8 ... *"Some students even walk 7km to attend the school. They arrive tired are not safe"* PA Chairperson 16 ... *"Our girls are not safe since we get reports that sometimes, some girls spent nights in local markets"* PA Chairperson 21 ... *"Some students are forced to use any means of transport including free lifts from motorbike riders some of whom take advantage of them"* PA Chairperson 49 According to 9 (45.0%) of the area chiefs, the students were not safe at all, 7 (35.0%) stated that the students were somehow safe while 3 (15.0%) believed that the students were safe on their way to school. Just like the PA chairpersons, the area chiefs who decried that students in the sampled schools were not safe on their way to school reiterated the issue of exposure to drug and substance abuse, engagement in indiscipline acts leading some to drop out of school, and girls who became pregnant after they were taken advantage by idle strangers along the way. Those who indicated that the students were somehow safe observed that only isolated cases of indiscipline had been reported. Thus, based on the responses of the PA chairpersons and area chiefs, it can be concluded that covering long distances to and from school greatly affected the safety of students in public day

secondary schools in Makueni County.

Measures of Home-School Distance

The principals and Form 4 class teachers were further presented with six (6) items related to home school distance for which they were expected to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with them on a five-point Likert scale. The reaction of the principals to these items is reflected in the results outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Principals’ Responses on Measures of Home-School Distance

| Statements | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|--------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Walking long distances subject students to tiredness and fatigue | 0.00% | 10.00% | 2.00% | 44.00% | 44.00% | 4.220 | 0.910 |
| Walking long distances exposes students to insecurity | 2.00% | 6.00% | 14.00% | 38.00% | 40.00% | 4.100 | 0.931 |
| The movement of students to/from school encourage drug and substance abuse in day secondary schools | 4.00% | 4.00% | 6.00% | 52.00% | 34.00% | 4.080 | 0.966 |
| Due to long distances, some students arrive at school late. | 4.00% | 12.00% | 6.00% | 52.00% | 26.00% | 3.840 | 1.076 |
| Most students in this school walk long distances to school | 2.00% | 16.00% | 10.00% | 46.00% | 26.00% | 3.780 | 1.075 |
| Use of motorbikes/matatus exposes students to harassments | 8.00% | 18.00% | 24.00% | 36.00% | 14.00% | 3.300 | 1.165 |
| Composite Mean and Standard Deviation | | | | | | 3.887 | 0.675 |
| Valid N=50 | | | | | | | |

As shown in Table 3, the principals on average agreed that walking long distances not only subjected students to tiredness and fatigue, but also exposed them to insecurity as supported by the means of responses of 4.220 and 4.100 respectively. On average, the principals also agreed that the movement of students to/from school encouraged drug and substance abuse in day secondary schools, that due to long distances, some students arrived at school late and that most students in their schools walked long distances to school as demonstrated by the means of responses of 4.080, 3.840 and 3.780 respectively. The principals nevertheless, on average had a neutral view regarding whether the use of motorbikes/matatus exposed students to harassments. The composite mean value of responses of 3.887 for this construct suggested that on average, the principals agreed with the statements presented on home-school distance. Table 4 contains the results that show how the Form 4 class teachers reacted to the statements presented on home-school distance.

Table 4: Form 4 Class Teachers’ Responses on Measures of Home-School Distance

| Statement | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | SD |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------|--------|----------------|-------|-------|
| The movement of students to/from school encourage drug and substance abuse in day secondary schools | 0.00% | 1.40% | 6.90% | 33.30% | 58.30% | 4.486 | 0.692 |
| Walking long distances subject students to tiredness and fatigue | 1.40% | 9.70% | 1.40% | 52.80% | 34.70% | 4.097 | 0.937 |
| Due to long distances, some students arrive at school late | 1.40% | 8.30% | 13.90% | 40.30% | 36.10% | 4.014 | 0.986 |
| Walking long distances exposes | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------------|--------------|
| students to insecurity | 0.00% | 12.50% | 15.30% | 38.90% | 33.30% | 3.931 | 0.998 |
| Most students in this school walk long distances to school | 4.20% | 12.50% | 5.60% | 48.60% | 29.20% | 3.861 | 1.104 |
| Use of motorbikes/ matatus exposes students to harassments | 12.50% | 15.30% | 36.10% | 30.60% | 5.60% | 3.014 | 1.094 |
| Composite Mean and Standard Deviation | | | | | | 3.901 | 0.587 |

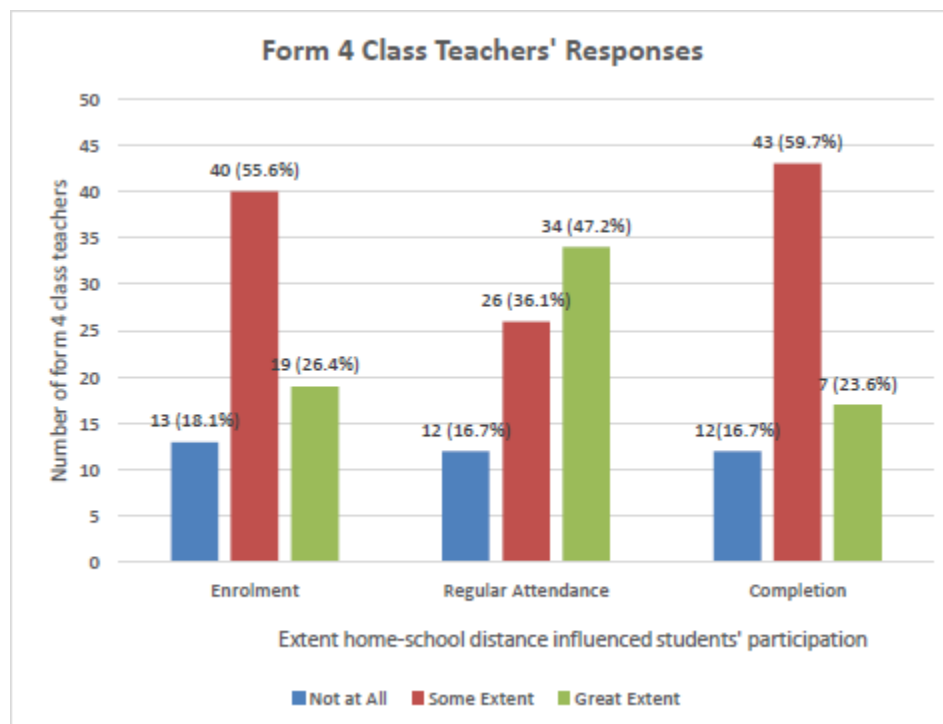
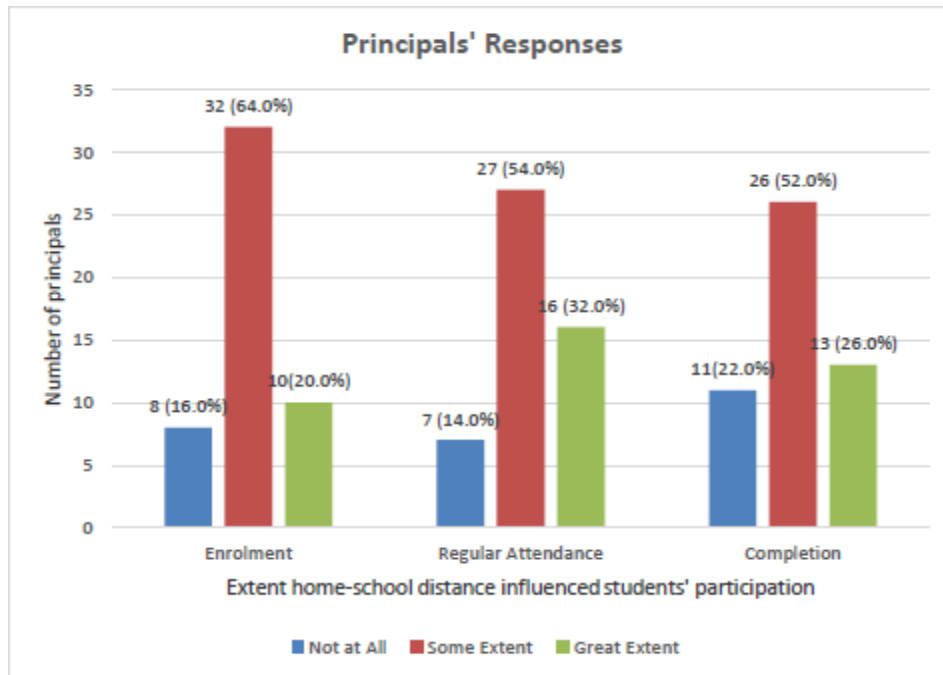
Valid N=72

The study results outlined in Table 4 revealed that on average, the Form 4 class teachers agreed that the movement of students to/from school encouraged drug and substance abuse in day secondary schools, that walking long distances subjected students to tiredness and fatigue and that due to long distances, some students arrived at school late as supported by the means of responses of 4.486, 4.097 and 4.014 respectively. The study also established that the Form 4 class teachers on average agreed that walking long distances exposed students to insecurity and that most students in their schools walked long distances to school as demonstrated by the means of responses of 3.931 and 3.861 respectively. The Form 4 class teachers nonetheless on average indicated that the use of motorbikes/matatus exposed students to harassments given the mean value of 3.014. The overall mean value of 3.901 for the construct was an indication that the Form 4 class teachers on average agreed with the statements presented on home-school distance. The general views of the principals and Form 4 class teachers regarding home school distance with reference to the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County were consistent.

Perceived Link between Home-School Distance and Students' Participation

The study further evaluated the association between home school distance and students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County in terms of enrolment, regular attendance and completion of studies by seeking the views of the principals and Form 4 class teachers. Their responses are provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Home-School Distance and Enrolment, Regular School Attendance and Completion of Studies



As shown in Figure 2, the study found that the larger proportion of the principals, 64.0%, 54.0% and 52.0% were of the view that home-school distance to some extent influenced student enrolment, regular school attendance and completion of studies in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County respectively. It was also noted that the larger proportion of the Form 4 class teachers, 55.6% and 59.7%, indicated that home-school distance to some extent influenced student enrolment and completion of studies in these schools respectively. The larger percentage of these class teachers, 47.2%, argued that students' regular school attendance in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County was to a great extent influenced by home-school distance. From the responses of the PA chairpersons interviewed, majority of them, 30 (60.0%), reported that home -school distance influenced student enrolment in these schools. The majority of the PA chairpersons, 47 (94.0%), also observed that students' regular school attendance in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County was to a great extent affected by home-school distance as some students arrived in school late. Moreover, majority of the PA chairpersons, 35 (70.0%), asserted that completion of studies in the said schools was influenced by home-school distance citing cases of drug and substance abuse and indiscipline acts along the way and which were induced by peer pressure. Hence, based on the above findings, it can be argued that home-school distance was perceived to influence students' participation in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County.

V. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Home-School Distance and Students' Participation

The study found that on average, the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County were located far from towns, approximately more than 4km away. Moreover, students in these schools on average covered relatively long distances to reach school. The study observed that majority of the students in these schools walked to school with a few using bicycles, motorbikes and matatus. Similar observations were also made in the study by Williams (2011) who established that many day scholars walk for several hours to get to school.

The study also established that walking long distances to and from school was found to subject students to tiredness and fatigue, forcing some students to reach school late. This finding concurred with Muruga (2011) who concluded that long home- school distance is a factor that leads to low participation among the students. In addition, covering long distances to reach school compromised the safety of students attending public day secondary schools in Makueni County as some students were influenced to indulge in alcohol, drug and substance abuse and other indiscipline acts due to peer pressure. It was also noted that the safety of girls in these schools was greatly affected as they were highly exposed to sexual predators who took advantage of some, leading to unwanted pregnancies. Due to the above safety concerns, some students

dropped out of school while others were terminated from school as revealed by the data collected from academic registers. The findings are supported Nikitas, Wang and Knamiller (2019) view that students walking long distances to schools may face additional parental concerns about safety and were also consistent with Baliyan and Khama (2020) assertion that travelling or walking long distances to school also distracted students in a way that facilitated pregnancies in girls and juvenile behaviours in boys. The study further discovered that home-school distance to some extent influenced student enrolment, regular school attendance and completion of studies. The correlation test results confirmed a significant inverse association between home-school distance and students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. The regression analysis further revealed that in deed, home- school distance negatively and significantly influenced students' participation in the said schools. This finding can be explained by the earlier observation that due to walking long distance to school, most students arrived in school late, tired and fatigued, others engaged in alcohol drug and substance abuse and other indiscipline acts while some girls were taken advantage of sexually resulting to unwanted pregnancies. Consequently, some students missed classes while others were terminated from school, an indication of constrained students' participation. This is in consistence with Onaya and Onyango (2021) study which established that long distance travelled by students to reach home led to headaches and related issues which reduced school attendance and completion rates.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that school administrations should have active and well- staffed guidance and counselling departments to sensitize students on the need for staying focused in their learning and not falling in to traps that threaten their participation in school such as indulging in drugs and substance abuse and indiscipline acts along the way to and from school.

There is need for sensitizing girls on how to identify and avoid sexual predators along the way so as to prevent unwanted teenage pregnancies that disrupt their regular school attendance and completion of studies. School administrators should also collaborate with local administrators such as area chiefs to sensitize the community members on the need for looking out for students' safety to and from school.

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