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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS SES AND CHOICE TO ENROL IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORY IN BUSIA COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Every year the Ministry of Education places students in various categories of public secondary schools in Kenya. However, the final form one enrolment in these school categories may not adhere to the Ministry of Education's initial placements. This paper provides empirical data on the relationship between students' socio-economic status and choice to enrol in public secondary school category in Busia County, Kenya using data from a random sample of 495 form one students. The chi-square results indicate that a student's SES was significant in explaining variations in choice to enrol in public secondary school category in Busia County. There is need for the Ministry of Education and the County government of Busia to develop a policy framework that help incorporate students SES in admission procedure in the education placement so as to mitigate students from LSES from accessing high cost schools.

**Key Words:** Socioeconomic Status, School Category, Enrolment.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Government of Kenya's responsibility to undertake form one students' placement to Category of public secondary schools in Kenya has been for many years, centrally managed under the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2017). Contrarily, in the United States, students apply to the school districts they wish to attend, in case of public schools. It is up to the school districts to offer placement in the high school they feel most suitable for the students. However, for private schools, students apply directly to the specific schools ([www.umn.edu.us.education.com](http://www.umn.edu.us.education.com)). In the United Kingdom, students apply to the county they are interested in and the applications are handled by the local government authority for admissions to the state schools, while for independent school, applications are made directly to the specific schools ([www.m.edu.uk.org.com](http://www.m.edu.uk.org.com)).

However, in Kenya, like in many African states, students apply for public secondary schools to the Ministry of Education which in turn does placement of students to appropriate secondary school category based on merit criterion. For the purpose of selection, public secondary schools in Kenya are classified as National, Extra County, County and Sub-County schools (Ministry of Education, 2017). The selection of students into any of the school category is done under the supervision of the Education Cabinet Secretary but the output of the whole process is computer generated (Ministry of Education, 2017). However, it has been argued that this arrangement

infringes on the influence of other students characteristics on choice to enrol in the various categories of public secondary schools, other than merit as measured by the student score in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE).

In these arrangement students independence to choose schools that best suits their characteristics may be suppressed resulting to inequalities in secondary school enrolment. This is based on the fact that many students emerge from different levels of socio-economic status. Demi, Coleman-Jensen and Synder (2010), asserts that socioeconomic status, parental education, environmental and employment opportunities affects student enrolment. Likewise, different family structures influence student's choice to enrol in public secondary schools. Lauder (1999) demonstrates that students from professional and managerial middle class background are able to exercise greater choice and are more likely to travel greater distance to enter schools with high socioeconomic status mixes.

Entwisle and Alexander (1995), Teachman (2008) and Thompson et al (1995) asserts that household socioeconomic variables such as household income and assets, parental education and parental occupation correlate with children's' access to educational institutions. The argument is that household socioeconomic status corresponds to the capacity to secure essential goods and services and the stress associated with economic hardship which affects children's' ability to enrol or not enrol in a school placement (Magnuson & Berger, 2009). For instance, the report of the American Council on Education "The missing low-income students" indicates a significant drop in enrolment of low income household in colleges between 2010 and 2015 (Christopher & Terry, 2016). This clearly demonstrates the effect of SES on school placement.

Similarly, it has also been argued that different primary school type does affect student's choice to enrol in a particular category of public secondary school. This is on the basis that primary school outcome are likely to determine the ultimate destination of a student's academic future. According to Reay and Ball, working class decision making in education "is infused by ambivalence, fear and reluctance to invest too much in an area where failure is still a common working class experience" (Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 89). As a result of the foregoing, the government's projected enrolment patterns change causing inequalities in school enrolment. Deininger, 2003, Tooley & Dixon, 2005, Newhouse & Beegle, 2006, Hanushek (1995) argue that there are substantial variations in school enrolment based on primary school attended. Further, it has also been demonstrated that primary school attended affects students' progression in secondary and tertiary institutions (Mburu, 2013). This is likely to happen as high socioeconomic status and middle socioeconomic status parents will tend to secure chances in high status schools; namely, national and extra county secondary schools. Similarly, parents from middle socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status shun high cost boarding schools as they opt for low cadre, affordable County and sub county that are not burdensome in terms of additional educational costs introduced by school management teams to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of school machineries to achieve quality education and maintain competitive advantage over other schools nationwide.

In view of the above mentioned discrepancies there is dire need to establish the relationship between students' SES and category of public secondary school enrolled in Busia County, Kenya. Statistics indicate that at least 68% of students placed to various categories of public secondary schools seek admission to new category of public secondary schools that suit their characteristics or drop out of school after a few terms of study (Busia County Education Office, 2017). For instance, students of high socioeconomic status placed in sub-county schools are more likely to opt for either Extra-County or National schools while students from low socioeconomic status placed in National and Extra-county schools opt for Sub-county schools due to fear of incurring additional costs associated with such schools. O'Neill's (1992) contents that voluntary contributions, books, uniform and transport are barriers for most parents and influences their ability to choose certain schools.

Besides, students who schooled in high cost primary schools may have a competitive academic advantage over their counterparts in low cost schools. Such students may be deprived of opportunities to excel academically thus diminishing their chances of being selected in certain school categories. However, empirical studies on the effect of student SES on school placement in public secondary school categories are lacking. Yet, student SES may result to skewed enrolments in certain school categories. This paper provides empirical data on enrolment patterns in the various public secondary school categories in Busia County, as a function of student SES.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The paper utilizes stratified and simple random sampling techniques to draw a sample of 495 from 8,400 form one students cohort of 2017 enrolled in the public secondary school categories in Busia County, Kenya. The study modified the 2008-09 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) questionnaire to reflect the relevant issues of the study so as to collect data on form one students SES using their asset ownership and sanitation data and their category of public secondary school enrolled (National, Extra-County, County and Sub-County schools). Face and content analysis was used to validate the form one student's questionnaire (FOSQ) while the split-half test technique was used to test its reliability. The obtained ( $r$ ) coefficient of 0.897 was large enough to surpass the set threshold of  $r = 0.7$  (Kathuri & Pals, 1993, Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). To construct the SES tertiles of form one students, the paper employs Principal Component Analysis (PCA) (Seema & Lilani, 2006; Booysen et al., 2008; Howe et al., 2008) using data on student's household asset ownership and sanitation. The results in the first principal component explaining the most variability were used to develop the form one student's socio-economic index (Cortinovis et al., 1993; Filmer & Pritchett, 2001; Howe et al., 2008 and Booysen et al., 2008). The SES tertiles (Low SES, Middle SES and High SES) constitute the explanatory variable. The paper also utilises information obtained from form one students on their enrolment in public secondary school category in Busia County. Data on form one students SES and school category enrolled is used to establish whether student's socioeconomic status has a statistically significant relationship with choice to enrol in the category of public secondary school in Busia County, Kenya using a chi-square test statistics.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the paper provides description of the distribution of students' enrolment in the sampled school categories based on form one student's socioeconomic status. This data was important in establishing the relationship between the students' socioeconomic statuses and choice to enrol in the public secondary school category. The students' enrolment in the public secondary school category by their SES is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Students SES and Category of Secondary School Enrolled**

SES	Category of Secondary School Enrolled					Total
	National	Extra county	County	Sub County		
High	Frequency	26	27	22	35	110
	Expected Count	12.7	12.4	13.3	71.6	110
	Percentage within SES	23.60%	24.50%	20.00%	31.80%	100.00%
Middle	Frequency	19	15	16	132	182
	Expected Count	21	20.6	22.1	118.4	182
	Percentage within SES	10.40%	8.20a%	8.80%	72.50%	100.00%
Low	Frequency	12	14	22	155	203
	Expected Count	23.4	23	24.6	132.1	203
	Percentage within SES	5.90%	6.90%	10.80%	76.40%	100.00%
Total	Frequency	57	56	60	322	495
	Expected Count	57	56	60	322	495
	% within SES	11.50%	11.30%	12.10%	65.10%	100.00%

Source: SPSS Output, 2017

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that a large proportion of students (23.6%) of high SES were enrolled in national school category compared to those in the middle (10.4%) and low (5.9%) statuses respectively. The statistics also indicate that enrolment of students in the middle

SES in national schools is higher than those in the low SES. The data in Table 1 further shows that the enrolment in Extra County and county schools replicates enrolment in national schools. The statistics in Table 1 suggest that the decision to enrol in Extra County or county schools depends on a student’s SES. The results in Table 1 indicate that enrolment in Extra County and county schools are dominated by students from high SES followed by those from middle and low SES respectively. However, the results in Table 1 indicate a reverse in enrolment in sub-county schools for the three SES categories. The results in Table 1 therefore suggest that the decision to enrol in the school category highly depends on a student SES.

To establish whether this relationship was statistically significant we tested the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between students’ socioeconomic status and choice to enrol in the category of public secondary school in Busia County, Kenya using a chi-square test statistics. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Chi Square Test Results for the Relationship between Student SES and Category of Secondary School Enrolled**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	73.598 <sup>a</sup>	6	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	71.295	6	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	52.423	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	495		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count < 5. The minimum expected count is 12.44.

b. Cramér's V =0.273, p<0.001; Cramer's V: weak association=<0.20, moderate association=0.20-0.49; strong association=>0.49

Source: SPSS Output, 2017

The chi-square results ( $\chi^2(495, 6) = 73.598, p < 0.001$ ) at  $\alpha = 0.05$  in Table 2 show that there is a statistically significant relationship between a student’s socioeconomic status and choice to enrol in the category of public secondary school in Busia County, Kenya. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between a student’s socioeconomic status and choice to enrol in the category of public secondary school in Busia County, Kenya. Indeed, the results indicate that a student’s SES explains variations in the enrolment patterns in the secondary school categories in Busia County. The chi-square post hoc results (Cramér's V =0.273, p<0.001) further indicate a moderate relationship between a student’s socioeconomic status and choice to enrol in the category of public secondary school.

Therefore, the results in Table 2 clearly demonstrate that students from high SES have a competitive advantage of choice of secondary school category and are more likely to enrol in national and extra county schools while those in the middle and low SES are more likely to enrol in county and sub-county schools respectively irrespective of the Ministry of Education

placements. Sub-county schools are considered low cost schools hence are more affordable while national and extra county schools are high cost schools. The results in Table 2 imply that enrolment in the secondary school categories in Busia County highly depends on the ability of households to meet the secondary school category requirements rather than the government placement based on students' scores in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (Ayodo & Too, 2010; Makori, Onyura, Chebiwo, Yegon & Kandie, 2015). These disparities may have adverse effect on students' progression in tertiary levels further exacerbating the already existing disparities in enrolment in tertiary level in favour of those in HSE status. National unlike sub county schools have been recognized for having better facilities and resources, broader courses variety and better performance in KCSE. In addition, national schools have higher quality peer groups (Onderi & Makori, 2014).

The findings are similar to a number of studies. For example, Lutz (1996), Godwin, Kemere et.al (1996) and Mc Ewan (2001) studies indicate that both socioeconomic status of parents and school composition play a crucial role in the selection of a private verses a public school. Similarly, Redman, Khan, Triq and Taslee, (2010) study indicates a strong correlation between parental occupational prestige and a higher choice of selecting private over public schools for their children. Redman et.al (2010) also asserts that a household income level is important in explaining differences in parental choice for their children education. This they attribute to monetary contribution towards school quality assurance.

Similarly, Demi, Coleman-Jensen and Synder (2010) study clearly demonstrates the role of parental socioeconomic status in influencing student's enrolment into a learning institution. Besides, Lyons et. al. (2003) study on education markets in Ireland, has also demonstrated that parental choice and experiences of school is closely related to social class, and those from working class background are most likely to make active decisions concerning choice of school. The Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) posit that socioeconomic background is more of an obstacle to education success than in systems without such socioeconomic difference between schools. This is true especially in an education sector like one in Kenya where schools are categorized into high, middle and low status schools spurring rational selection of school categories based on student's parental socioeconomic status.

A number of studies in Kenya have also shown similar results. For example, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy and Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, 2006) asserted that the decision on secondary schooling is determined by socioeconomic characteristics such as income levels, education of the head of the household, location and cost of secondary education. Bulimo (2009) study asserts that despite the government effort to enhance equity in selection and access to 'good' secondary schools, enrolments in such schools are still skewed in favour of the few with financial muscles and that pupils who learn in private primary schools had an upper hand in joining national schools compared with those in public primary schools. However, Wakwabubi (2014) study has contrary findings. Wakwabubi findings indicate that the advantageous effects of the probability of enrolling in either county or national schools other than sub county schools for students from the Middle or High Socioeconomic status was insignificant.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The chi square results showed that a student's SES was significantly associated with their choice to enrol in category of public secondary school at the 95% level. The empirical findings therefore indicate that the choice to enrol in category of public secondary school highly depends on a student's SES and not necessarily the Ministry of Education placement based on KCPE scores. Besides, the findings indicate that students from HSES are more likely to enrol in national, extra county and county public secondary schools while those from LSES are likely to enrol in low cost sub-county public secondary schools. This clearly shows inequalities in enrolment in secondary school categories. It therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education and the County government of Busia should develop a policy framework that help incorporate students SES in admission procedure in the education placement so as to mitigate students from LSES from accessing high cost schools.

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