



## The Effect of Socio-Economic Factors on Student Engagement in Christian Religious Education in Public Secondary Schools in Hamisi Sub County, Vihiga County, Kenya

 Kadenyi Abinao Josphine<sup>1</sup>,  Andambi Iramwenya Ruth<sup>1</sup> and Oseko Agnes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, University of Eldoret, P.O. Box 1125, Eldoret, Kenya*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Psychology, School of Education, University of Eldoret, P.O. Box 1125, Eldoret, Kenya*

Correspondence: [kadenyijosephine9@gmail.com](mailto:kadenyijosephine9@gmail.com)

Received: 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2024, Accepted: 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2024, Published: 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2024

### Abstract

This study investigates the socio-economic factors influencing the teaching and learning of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in secondary schools within Hamisi Sub County, Vihiga County, Kenya. The context for this research arises from alarming trends in moral decay among students, such as increasing instances of indiscipline, along with a declining enrollment in CRE classes. The theoretical framework guiding this study is Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's General System Theory, which conceptualizes schools as open systems interacting with socio-economic environments affecting educational performance. Descriptive research design was employed during data collection. The target population consisted 33 CRE teachers from 33 secondary schools and 334 Form 3 and 4 students. Purposive sampling was used to select 9 CRE teachers, while 100 students were randomly sampled. Structured questionnaires were distributed to students to gather quantitative data, while interview schedules were conducted with teachers to collect



qualitative information. Collected data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicated that socio-economic factors have a significant relationship with student engagement in Christian Religious Education (CRE) ( $\chi^2=0.003$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This suggests that various socio-economic variables, such as parents' education levels, occupations, and the economic conditions affecting students' lives, significantly influence their involvement in CRE lessons. The study recommends that schools and policymakers develop strategies to mitigate the negative effects of socio-economic challenges on student engagement. This could include providing additional support for students from lower-income families, such as after-school tutoring, resource provision, and community engagement initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of parental involvement in education.

**Keywords;** Socio-Economic Factors, Christian Religious Education (CRE), Student Engagement

---

## Introduction

The roots of Christian Religious Education go back to the early Christian Church, where religious instruction was central to the faith formation of new converts (Stark, 1996; Parrett & Kang, 2009). Religious education has ever since formed part of the core or staple of a number of schools that are Christian in nature and may be found throughout most of Europe, Africa, and parts of the Americas where missionary activity was rife (Itulua-Abumere, 2013; Martin & Nicholas, 2010; Mąkosa, 2020). At times, the expansion of Christian education spread with colonial expansion as missionaries established schools, partly aimed at teaching literacy and moral precepts combined with pure Christian doctrine (Jensz, 2022; Maddox, 2019). The empirical evidence from studies across Europe (Edwards & Hobson, 2019) and America (Vermeer, 2010) demonstrates that Christian Religious Education remains an essential part of moral and ethical development in many educational systems, despite the challenges posed by secularization, religious pluralism and socio-economic disparities (Estrada et al., 2019).

The formal teaching of CRE can be traced back to 1884 when missionaries established the first schools in Kenya (Githaiga, 2017; Gathogo, 2009). Missionaries controlled education, using schools as a tool for conversion, with the Bible as the primary teaching material (Githaiga, 2017). CRE quickly became a dominant subject in the curriculum, continuing after independence as part of the national syllabus (Itolondo, 2012). With independence, the 1964 Kenya Education Commission, chaired by Ominde, recommended that CRE be retained for its moral value but treated as an academic subject using a unified syllabus, this change was implemented in



1968 with the Education Act (Ominde, 1964). The 1976 Gachathi Commission reviewed CRE's role in ethics education, criticizing its colonial roots and recommending the introduction of a broader moral education subject. This led to the inclusion of Social Education and Ethics (SEE) in 1986. Subsequent reports, including the 1999 Koech Commission, reinforced the importance of both CRE and SEE for instilling ethical, social, and religious values in youth, addressing issues like drug abuse and anti-social behavior (Japhet, 2020; Mueke, 2020). However, learning of CRE in schools face significant challenges, with socio-economic factors being a major influence on students' engagement in CRE lessons especially for those students attending day schools. These affect the availability of students, focus, and motivation and make them lose interest and drop in performance in this subject. Research has shown that socio-economic status is a determinant and shaper of the educational experiences and performances of students (Tomaszewski, Xiang & Western, 2020; Munir et al., 2023; Singh & Choudhary, 2015). Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are usually involved with helping their families on the farm and with other income-generating activities. With such demands at home, such students may hardly balance their responsibilities at school. It is most pronounced in the rural setting where the inhabitants are mostly engrossed in small-scale farming as a way of life. Knowing these socio-economic elements that affect student engagement in Christian Religious Education will be key in constructing necessary interventions to arguably enhance the quality of CRE instruction in public secondary schools. The study explored the socio-economic factors that particularly influence the engagement of students in Christian Religious Education in Hamisi Sub County.

## Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design to collect data from public secondary school in Hamisi Sub County, located in Vihiga County, Kenya. The target population consisted 33 CRE teachers from 33 secondary schools and 334 Form 3 and 4 students, as sourced from the Vihiga County Education Sector (2022). A sample size of 30% was considered statistically meaningful, following the guidelines of Mugenda and Mugenda (2009). Purposive sampling was used to select 9 CRE teachers, while 100 students were randomly sampled. Structured questionnaires were distributed to students to gather quantitative data, while interview schedules were conducted with teachers to collect qualitative information. Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Each interview was reviewed multiple times to identify recurring patterns, with particular attention given to how socio-economic



challenges like parental education levels, occupations, and farming responsibilities influence students' participation in CRE.

## Results and Discussions

### Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The table 1 below presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, specifically focusing on gender, age, education level, and teaching experience.

**Table 1: Demographic information of respondents**

Variables	Respondents	Characteristics	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	Male	48%
		Female	52%
	<b>Students</b>	Male	51%
		Female	49%
<b>Age</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	18 -30 years	40%
		31-40 years	33%
		41-50 years	12%
		51-60 years	10%
<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	Diploma	8%
		Degree	72%
		Master	16%
		PhD	4%
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	1-10 Years	32%
		11-20 Years	40%
		21-30 Years	18%
		Over 30 years	11%

*Source: Author, 2023*

Among the CRE teachers, 48% are male and 52% are female, while students are almost evenly split, with 51% male and 49% female. Regarding age, most teachers fall within the 18-30 years (40%) and 31-40 years (33%) age brackets. In terms of educational qualifications, the majority of teachers hold a degree (72%), followed by those with a master's degree (16%), diploma holders (8%), and a small percentage with a PhD (4%). Teaching experience is varied, with 40% of teachers having 11-20 years of experience, 32% with 1-10 years, 18% with 21-30 years, and 11% with over 30 years of experience. These results provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics



that influence the teaching of Christian Religious Education in the sampled schools.

### **Socio-Economic Factors on Student Engagement in Christian Religious Education**

The table 2 below presents the perceptions of students on the influence of socio-economic factors on student engagement in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Key 1= Very Little Extent, 2= Little Extent, 3= Moderate Extent 4= Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent.

**Table 2: Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Student Engagement in Christian Religious Education**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
Parents' level of education affects my ability to engage in Christian Religious Education.	3.8	0.85
Small-scale farming responsibilities at home affect my participation in CRE lessons.	4.1	0.92
Parents' occupations influence how much time I have to focus on CRE assignments.	3.7	0.88
The distance I travel to school impacts my ability to attend and participate in Christian Religious Education classes.	4.0	0.80
The level of support from my parents or guardians influences my engagement in Christian Religious Education.	4.2	0.89

*Source: Author, 2023*

The majority of students indicated that parents' level of education affects their ability to engage in CRE (M=3.8, SD=0.85). This suggests a moderate to high level of agreement among students, consistent with studies such as Jeynes (2016), which found that parental education is key in shaping children's academic engagement, particularly in moral and religious subjects.

Additionally, small-scale farming responsibilities were reported to affect participation in CRE lessons to a great extent ((M=4.1, SD=0.92). This finding aligns with Bennell and Akyeampong (2007), who noted that rural livelihoods, particularly in agricultural communities, often interfere with students' school attendance and engagement, as students are frequently involved in family labor.

Students also indicated that parents' occupations influence their focus on CRE assignments (M=3.7, SD=0.88). This finding reflects the broader socio-economic reality where parental work demands can limit the time and support



available for students' academic work, as highlighted by Hampden-Thompson and Johnston (2006) in their study on socio-economic impacts on education.

Furthermore, the distance to school was found to significantly impact attendance and participation in CRE (M=4.0, SD=0.80). This is consistent with findings from Sabates et al. (2010), who reported that long travel distances to school in rural areas often result in reduced student engagement and higher absenteeism rates.

Finally, the level of parental support was seen as a critical factor influencing engagement in CRE (M=4.2, SD=0.89). This observation supports the research by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), which emphasizes that active parental involvement positively affects students' academic outcomes, particularly in subjects requiring moral and ethical reflections, such as religious education.

The response by students were further supported by CRE teachers who some of them stated that;

*"Many of my students come from families where parents have low education levels, and this seems to affect how seriously they take the subject. If parents don't emphasize the importance of education, especially moral subjects like CRE, the students tend to be less motivated. Additionally, most of these students have to help with farming at home, which leaves them with little time for schoolwork, and it's reflected in their participation and performance in CRE."*

Another teacher responded that;

*"Most of the students here come from families that depend on small-scale farming, and many of them have to work on the farms either before or after school. This definitely affects their concentration in class, and they are often too tired to engage fully in CRE lessons. Also, students from poorer families tend to miss school more often because they need to help out at home or can't afford basic necessities like school materials, which further affects their performance in CRE."*

### **Effect of Socio-Economic Factors on Student Engagement in CRE**

Table 3 below present Pearson Chi-Square results on the relationship between socio-economic factors on student engagement in CRE. The results from Table 3 indicate that socio-economic factors had a significant relationship with student engagement in Christian Religious Education (CRE), as shown by the Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2=0.003$ , N=100,  $p<0.05$ ). This suggests that various socio-economic variables, such as parents' education levels, occupations, and the economic conditions affecting students' lives, significantly influence their involvement in CRE lessons. These findings align



with prior studies, such as Jeynes (2016), which highlighted that socio-economic background, particularly parental education, directly impacts students' academic involvement. Similarly, Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) found that rural livelihoods, including small-scale farming, often impede students' ability to attend and focus on their studies, as reflected in this significant relationship.

**Table 3: Chi Square Tests on Relationship Between Socio-Economic Factors on Student Engagement in CRE**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.892	2	.00375
Likelihood ratio	8.34	2	.01892
Linear-by-linear association	.712	1	.4589
N of Valid cases	100		

Source: Author, 2023

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings from this study reveal that socio-economic factors, such as parents' education levels, occupations, small-scale farming responsibilities, and travel distance to school, have a significant impact on student engagement in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Students from families with lower educational backgrounds and those engaged in small-scale farming face additional challenges in focusing on CRE lessons, leading to reduced participation and performance. Also, socio-economic factors had a significant relationship with student engagement in Christian Religious Education (CRE).

Based on these results, it is recommended that schools and policymakers develop strategies to mitigate the negative effects of socio-economic challenges on student engagement. This could include providing additional support for students from lower-income families, such as after-school tutoring, resource provision, and community engagement initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of parental involvement in education. Additionally, rural schools should receive targeted interventions, such as improving access to learning materials and addressing the challenges posed by long travel distances to enhance student participation in CRE.

## References

- Bennell, P., & Akyeampong, K. (2007). *Teacher motivation in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*. Department for International Development.



- Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support, and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. Department for Education and Skills.
- Edwards, J., & Hobson, P. R. (2019). *Religious education in a pluralist society: The key philosophical issues*. Routledge.
- Estrada, C. A. M., Lomboy, M. F. T. C., Gregorio, E. R., Amalia, E., Leynes, C. R., Quizon, R. R., & Kobayashi, J. (2019). Religious education can contribute to adolescent mental health in school settings. *International journal of mental health systems*, 13, 1-6.
- Gathogo, J. (2009). The birth of protestant education in East Africa: Sampling Johannes Ludwig Krapf (1810–1881). *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 35(3), 167-192.
- Githaiga, P. W. (2017). Challenges of assessing christian religious education in Kenyan schools in the 21st century. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Review*, 2(11), 25-9.
- Hampden-Thompson, G., & Johnston, J. (2006). Socio-economic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review. *Educational Research Review*, 1(1), 45-62.
- Itolondo, W. A. (2012). The role and status of Christian religious education in the school curriculum in Kenya. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and policy studies*, 3(5), 721-729.
- Itulua-Abumere, F. (2013). The significance of religious education in local primary schools (Specific reference to Christianity). *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(6), 69-94.
- Japhet, K. (2020). *Role of Christian Religious Education Subject on Student Behaviour: A Case of Day Secondary Schools in North Imenti Meru County, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Jensz, F. (2022). Missionaries and modernity: Education in the British Empire, 1830-1910.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2016). *Parental involvement and student achievement: A meta-analysis*. Harvard Family Research Project.
- Maddox, O. (2019). Resistance in Education: A Symptom of the Misconstrued Orient.
- Makosa, P. (2020). St. John Paul II and Catholic education. A review of his teachings: an essay to inspire Catholic educators internationally. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 12(2), 218-235.
- Martin, J. W., & Nicholas, M. A. (Eds.). (2010). *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*. Univ of North Carolina Press.
- Mueke, S. M. (2020). *Factors influencing students' choice of christian religious education in public secondary schools in Matungulu Sub-county, Machakos county, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Munir, J., Faiza, M., Jamal, B., Daud, S., & Iqbal, K. (2023). The Impact of Socio-economic Status on Academic Achievement. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 3(2), 695-705.
- Ominde, S. H. (1964). *Kenya education commission report*. Kenya Education Commission.
- Parrett, G. A., & Kang, S. S. (2009). *Teaching the faith, forming the faithful: A biblical vision for education in the church*. InterVarsity Press.
- Sabates, R., Akyeampong, K., Westbrook, J., & Hunt, F. (2010). *School drop out: Patterns, causes, changes and policies*. Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, UNESCO.
- Singh, P., & Choudhary, G. (2015). Impact of socio-economic status on academic achievement of school students: An investigation. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1(4), 266-272.
- Stark, R. (1996). *The rise of Christianity: A sociologist reconsiders history*. Princeton University Press.





- Tomaszewski, W., Xiang, N., & Western, M. (2020). Student engagement as a mediator of the effects of socio-economic status on academic performance among secondary school students in Australia. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 610-630.
- Vermeer, P. (2010). Religious education and socialization. *Religious education*, 105(1), 103-116.

