

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN BODA-BODA BUSINESS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DROPOUT RATES IN PUBLIC DAY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN YATTA SUB-COUNTY, MACHAKOS COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

School dropout is a growing concern in Kenya, particularly in rural areas where economic hardship compels students to seek informal employment. Among these, the boda-boda (motorcycle transport) business has emerged as a significant factor contributing to student disengagement from education. The specific significance of the boda-boda business has received less attention in prior research that have looked at the wider implications of poverty on school dropout, particularly among students in public day secondary schools who have more freedom to participate in extracurricular activities. This research therefore, investigated the influence of students' participation in the boda-boda business on dropout rates in public day secondary schools in Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County. The specific objectives include: analyze the factors influencing students to leave school for the boda-boda business and assessing the impact of family socioeconomic status on students' participation and dropout. Guided by Tinto's Theory of Student Integration, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a concurrent triangulation research design. The target population included 460 Form Four students, 150 boda-boda operators, and 10 principals. A multi-stage sampling strategy was employed: 210 Form Four students were selected through proportionate random sampling, while 8 boda-boda operators and 4 principals were purposively sampled. Data collection tools included a questionnaire for quantitative data, interviews, and focus group discussions for qualitative data. Face and Content validity together with internal

consistency tests using Cronbach's alpha were applied to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, respectively. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 26, employing frequencies and percentages while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings of the study revealed that students' participation in the boda-boda industry significantly contributed to increased dropout rates in public day secondary schools within Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County. Factors such as economic pressures, peer influence, and attitudes towards education were identified as key drivers for students leaving school to join boda-boda activities. Many students cited the immediate financial benefits and peer encouragement as reasons for their participation, often at the expense of their academic commitments. The study also found that family socioeconomic status played a substantial role, with students from lower-income families more likely to engage in boda-boda business as an alternative livelihood. Most schools lacked targeted interventions to address the socioeconomic and social factors influencing students' decisions to dropout. Principals acknowledged the need for more comprehensive guidance and counseling services focused on career guidance and social support. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and local stakeholders should develop and implement targeted intervention programs, including financial assistance and peer mentoring, to reduce students' involvement in boda-boda activities and promote school retention.

Key words; Students' Participation In Boda-Boda Business And Dropout Rates In Public Day Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, education is acknowledged as a basic human right and a vital instrument for socioeconomic advancement. By 2030, everyone should have access to inclusive, egalitarian, and high-quality education, according to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) (United Nations, 2015). However, especially in developing nations, child labour continues to be one of the biggest obstacles to accomplishing this aim. According to projections from the International Labour Organization (ILO), 160 million youngsters worked as children worldwide in 2020; many of them were employed in dangerous jobs or unorganized industries that interfered with their education (ILO, 2021).

Studies from countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Brazil show that children engaged in labor experience poor academic performance, high absenteeism, and likely to drop out of school (Patrinos & Psacharopoulos, 1997; Ray, 2002). Children who participate in labor activities face significant educational challenges, including poor academic performance, absenteeism, and eventual dropout (Heady, 2003). In low-income countries where financial pressures push families to rely on their children's income, activities such as domestic work, agriculture, and transportation services exert a heavy burden on children's education and well-being (Bourdillon, 2021).

Approximately 72 million children are involved in work in the 21st century Sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for nearly one-fifth of all children in the region (ILO, 2017). This child labour is exacerbated by factors such as poverty, weak education systems, and economic inequalities. Ainembabazi (2012) posited that in Uganda and Tanzania children who engage in informal work, including motorcycle taxi (boda-boda) transport, often miss school or drop out entirely due to the challenging nature of the work.

In Kenya, despite legislations such as the Basic Education Act (2013) mandating free and compulsory primary and secondary education, child labor persists, particularly in rural areas. Approximately 35% of children in rural areas are engaged in some form of economic activity, often at the expense of their education (KNBS, 2019). The boda-boda sector in Kenya has experienced significant growth, employing an estimated 1.2 million people, many of whom are youth and students (KNBS, 2020).

Muindi (2019) contends that the boda-boda business has grown rapidly across Kenya, particularly in rural areas where public transport services are limited. This enormous growth

is attributed to the low entry costs and the potential for immediate daily earnings that make this sector more attractive to young people, and more so the secondary school students. Empirical studies have shown that students who participate in boda-boda riding often miss school or attend irregularly, which leads to poor academic performance and ultimately school dropout (Kimani & Mwangi, 2021; Muindi, 2019).

The boda-boda business is appealing to students because it provides quick and relatively high earnings compared to other informal jobs. The majority of students in Yatta Sub-County work in trades to help pay for their education, including tuition and transport to and from school, as well as to supplement home income or meet personal needs. However, the boda-boda industry poses serious obstacles to schooling even though it provides instant cash comfort. According to Kioko (2020), Olima (2020), and Wamuyu (2019), students who engage in these revenue-generating activities are more likely to miss school, perform badly academically, and ultimately quit out.

Absenteeism and poor academic performance linked to participation in the boda-boda trade are increasingly becoming a concern for education stakeholders in Yatta. Ndungu and Mwangi (2021) postulate that students who prioritize the boda-boda business over schooling often struggle to balance their academic responsibilities with the demands of the boda-boda business such as the long working hours, physical fatigue, and risks associated with the business which further complicate their ability to focus on their education.

Despite the expansion and the growing attention of the boda-boda business, limited research has been done on the effect of participation in this business on secondary school performance in rural areas like Yatta Sub-County. Hence, understanding the extent of students' involvement in boda-boda activities and its effects on school dropout rates is essential for developing targeted interventions aimed at decreasing dropout rates and improving educational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

In an effort to align with national development goals articulated in Kenya Vision 2030 and global commitments under Sustainable Development Goal no. 4 (SDG 4), The Government of Kenya has intensified efforts to achieve universal access to secondary education through initiatives such as Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE), curriculum reforms, and community sensitization (MoE, 2019).

Despite these interventions the country continues to experience high dropout rates particularly in the rural public day secondary schools (Kamau & Wanjohi, 2023; KIPPRA, 2021). Recent empirical studies have shown that one of the emerging contributing factor to this trend, is the increasing involvement of students in the boda-boda business, an informal transport sector that promises quick financial returns (Ngugi & Mwaura, 2020; Omiti, 2021). Participation in this business by secondary school students disrupts their school's attendance, classroom concentration, and the overall academic engagement (Njenga et al., 2021).

In Yatta Sub-County, the boda-boda industry has evolved into a major source of income for many youths and has increasingly attracted school-going students, particularly in day secondary schools. Drawn by the allure of immediate income, economic independence, and elevated peer status, many students shift their focus from long-term educational goals to short-term financial gain (Kihoro & Githui, 2022; Machakos County Integrated Development Plan, 2018–2022). This growing trend raises concerns about the long-term impact of students' participation in this business on school dropout rates. Therefore, this study sought to explore the influence of students' participation in the boda-boda business on dropout rates in public day secondary schools in Yatta Sub-County.

Purpose of the Study

This research sought to explore the influence of students' participation in the boda-boda industry on dropout rates in public day secondary schools within Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To analyze the factors influencing students to leave school and join the boda-boda business in public day secondary schools in Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County.
- ii. To determine the influence of students' family socioeconomic status on their decision to participate in the boda-boda business and its effect on school dropout rates in Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section deliberates on an overview of the existing literature pertinent to the variables examined in this study. It presents theoretical review, empirical review, and conceptual framework adopted by the research.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's Theory of Student Integration (1975) served as the basis for this study about student retention and dropout. Vincent Tinto proposes that a student's level of engagement in school settings impacts how likely they are to stay in school. Initially, the theory was used in universities, but it is also used now in schools, primarily to study why students leave under-resourced places to study.

Tinto believes that people drop out of school gradually, as they are unable to integrate into the learning community. Academic integration includes a student's achievements and sense of confidence in school subjects, while social integration is about how a student feels part of the community and their relationships during school life. If students do not relate to what they are taught, they frequently quit school before completing it.

In context of this study, Tinto's theory offers a lens to explore how disengagement from academic and social life in school may push students toward alternative economic activities.

Some students turn to the boda-boda sector to earn easy money and to feel like they belong, because they were not receiving what they need or expect in school.

Researchers have also adopted Tinto's theory to investigate why students may drop out or stay in school. One way this happened is with Braxton et al. (2004) modifying Tinto's model by considering how community elements from the outside can matter significantly in rural and informal economies. They found that students' participation in their community and interactions with economics can shape the decisions they make in school. A similar study by Thomas (2002) investigated the effects of social capital and groups of friends on dropping out from school in UK schools.

According to Mugisha's study in 2006, students who struggled in school or did not have much support from their peers had a higher chance of dropping out in Uganda. The scholars noted in their study (Ngware, Ciera and Musyoka 2013) that the main reasons for low retention included poverty, poor connections between schools and communities and insufficient academic support for students. According to Simiyu (2010), using the social mixing theory, the chance to engage in alternative activities (sugarcane cutting and boda-boda) was a main reason for boys dropping out of school in Western Kenya. There are good reasons for using Tinto's theory in this study. First, it admits that dropping out of school is a process that develops slowly. Secondly, it notes that school climate and the backing of teachers are as significant as outside influences, like poverty or working in informal markets. Third, it outlines why students who cannot integrate well at school are more likely to consider economic activities like becoming boda-boda riders. Here, we will use this theory to discover how students' decisions and attitudes are formed due to their academic and social struggles along with social and economic issues. It will help find the reasons behind dropping out, so that stakeholders can take steps to support students. Tinto's Theory of Student Integration was a helpful tool for this research, explaining how different aspects influence students' decision to leave school. It explains that dropout is not just the student's fault but also happens due to schools not offering enough support and inspiration to their students in areas where boda-boda work is a quick alternative.

Factors Influencing Students to Join the Boda-Boda Business

Many low-income families rely on this business, encouraging young people to leave school to make money. According to Wamukoya et al. (2019), students decide to leave school because it is easy to start a boda-boda business and they quickly earn money. Because there isn't enough money for lunch or other school materials, pupils in Yatta Sub-County tend to seek out ways to make money such as by driving boda-boda (Munyiva et al., 2020).

Children in economically weak families living in the countryside often have to decide between earning money early on and gaining a proper education. Nzioka (2019) argues that the lack of money forces students to find jobs such as riding boda-boda to help support their families. Because of these factors, a lot of young people quit school and look for jobs in the boda-boda business (Howe & Davis, 2021).

Because of struggles related to finances, limited educational help and not enough money-earning possibilities, students choose to work in the informal labor market. Since starting a boda-boda business is cheaper than finding formal work, many poor students are drawn to this occupation (Wamukoya et al., 2019; Munyiva et al., 2020).

However, even though reports highlight the economic reasons behind students joining the boda-boda business, more work could be done to study the impact locally in Yatta Sub-County. Many of the studies do not focus on how the community and local economies impact the existence of these businesses. There is a limited of research on the specific reasons in Yatta Sub-County that push students to quit school and begin working on motorcycles. More could be explored into how the jobs available locally in farming or commerce can influence students securing informal employment.

Students' Family Socioeconomic Status and School Dropouts

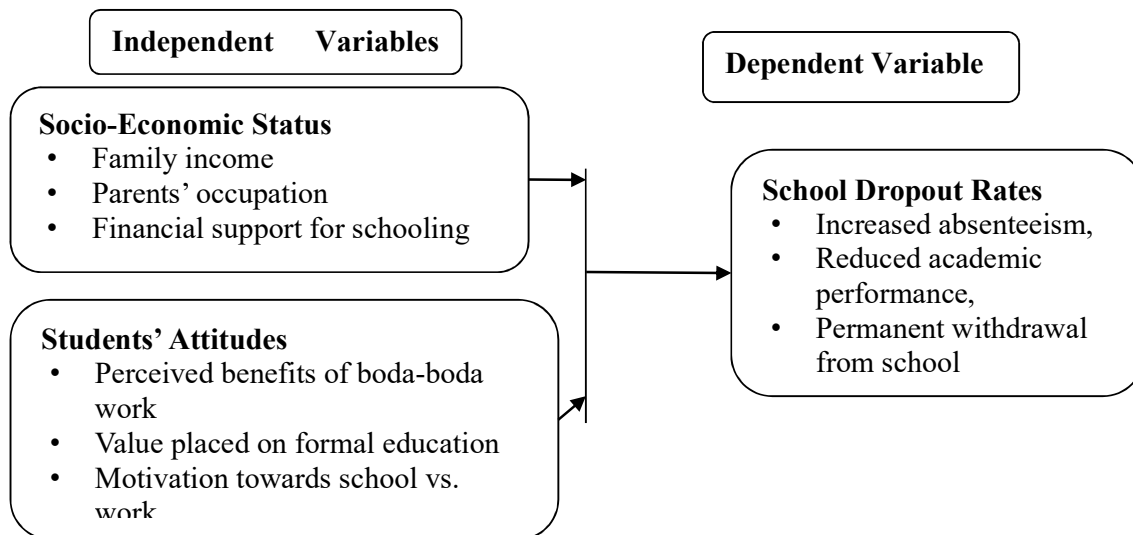
Socioeconomic status has consistently been linked to people's education levels. Those who belong to poorer families often struggle with the need to juggle their studies and their work in boda-boda. In times of financial hardship, earning from boda-boda is usually preferred over investing in education (Malmberg-Calvo, 2016; Bhalotra et al., 2017). Research has shown that students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to abandon school to support their families through informal work (Ngugi, 2019).

Students' decision to do the boda-boda business often depends on their socioeconomic situation. In Yatta Sub-County and elsewhere in rural areas, financial problems in families often affect students' choices. Having a job on a boda-boda is a good alternative for those who face economic difficulties in Uganda (Malmberg-Calvo, 2016). It has been shown that many learners from poor families make money by riding boda-boda and supporting their families, mainly during holidays (Ngugi, 2019).

Due to their financial difficulties, many students decide to drop out rather than continue their studies in school. The research by Bhalotra et al. (2017) uncovered that learners who hold a boda-boda job while attending school tend to perform poorly in their studies and are more prone to drop out. Students in rural areas are often forced to make money instead of going to school because schools are inferior in these regions (Howe & Davis, 2021). Many students from low SES backgrounds are more likely to drop out because they can help out financially and gain their own income.

While it is known that poverty relates to school dropouts, there has not been much research considering other factors such as family hopes, poverty in rural areas and the price of education in Kenya, within Yatta Sub-County. There is a lack of evidence on why students in this area choose to work as boda-boda riders rather than attend school.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach and employed concurrent triangulation research design. This design was chosen because it allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data at a single point in time from a sample of participants to describe their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors regarding a research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research design was deemed appropriate to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' participation in boda-boda business and their impact on school dropout.

The research was done in Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya, which comprised several public day secondary schools. Yatta Sub-County was chosen because students regularly engaged in the boda-boda business and dropped out more frequently. Learning was done on public day secondary schools as their students had a strong tendency to earn money by working informally. The research was focused on public day secondary schools found in Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County.

The study focused on students, principals, from selected public day secondary schools. Additionally, insights from the boda-boda operators who dropped out of school and engaged in the boda-boda business were also included in the sampling frame. These groups had been identified as the most directly involved and informed about the factors leading to school dropout, particularly as it related to engagement in the boda-boda sector.

The research targeted a population of 620, comprising 460 form four students, 150 boda-boda operators, and 10 principals from 10 public day secondary schools in Yatta Sub county,

Machakos County. All form four students in the 31 schools were considered part of the target population. However, for data collection, 10 schools, which had high cases of student dropouts, had close proximity to known boda-boda operation zones such as trading centers or market hubs, and had available data on dropout incidences, were targeted.

The research adopted both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to accommodate the mixed methods design. For the quantitative part of the study, proportionate stratified random sampling picked the 210 Form Four students among the ten schools. In this way, all the selected schools reflected the national Form Four population which was important for the study's fairness and accuracy.

To gather data qualitatively, 4 principals and 8 boda-boda operators were picked using the purposive sampling method. Those responsible for school dropouts were chosen based on their experience and duties as administrators. Those chosen to be boda-boda operators were previous school dropouts or students who had shifted to working in this trade. As a result, the participants had the proper experience needed to provide the study with good, meaningful data connected to its objectives.

Under the qualitative approach, the researcher purposefully invited 4 secondary school principals and 8 boda-boda operators to take part. Data from the principals was gathered until there was nothing more to learn.

The researcher utilized a questionnaire to gather numbers from four learners. They used questions that allowed only limited responses to collect information about students' backgrounds, their involvement in boda-boda and their experiences with attending and dropping out of school. A pilot study was done to make sure the survey was both valid and reliable.

The quantitative data was processed and analyzed by means of SPSS software version 26. The data was analyzed using percentages, frequencies, standard deviations and means and presented in frequency tables, graphs, and charts.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A look at the response rate indicate that out of 210 questionnaires administered to learners, 180 were returned, representing a return rate of 85.7%. Only 30 questionnaires (14.3%) were not returned. In addition, all selected 4 principals participated in the interview schedules and all chosen 8 boda-boda operators took part in focus group discussion reflecting 100% participation among these two respondent groups. A response rate of 85.7% is considered exceptionally high in social science research. According to Bryman (2016), a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting, 60% is good, and above 70% is very good. This implies that the obtained rate far exceeds the generally accepted threshold, ensuring that the data collected is representative of the target population.

Data collected indicated that gender distribution was 58.3% (105) male, while 41.7% (75) were female. This indicates that a higher proportion of students involved in or affected by boda-boda activities are males, aligning with broader research findings that suggest males are more likely to participate in informal transportation industries such as boda-boda (Kibui & Muathe, 2020). A review of age distribution indicated that 66.7% (120), are aged between 16 and 18 years, followed by 19.4% (35) above 18 years, and 13.9% (25) below 16 years. This suggests that most students involved or influenced by boda-boda activities are in the late adolescent stage, which is critical for their educational trajectory. The prominence of students aged 16-18 aligns with previous studies indicating that older students are more likely to participate in income-generating activities outside school, including boda-boda businesses (Kilonzo & Muinde, 2021). A review on participation in boda-boda businesses indicated that 41.7% (75) of respondents reported involvement in boda-boda activities, while 58.3% (105) did not participate. The relatively high participation rate indicates that boda-boda business is a significant economic activity among students within the study area. This aligns with other research showing that boda-boda involvement is a common livelihood strategy among youth in rural and peri-urban settings, often undertaken to supplement household income or fund personal needs (Kibui & Muathe, 2020).

Factors influencing students to leave school and join the boda-boda business

The first objective of the study was to analyze the factors influencing students to leave school and join the boda-boda business. The respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement with statements on the factors influencing students to leave school and join the boda-boda business on a 5-point scale, with SA denoting Strongly Agree, A denoting Agreement, N denoting Neutral, D denoting Disagreement, and SD denoting Strongly Disagree. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Factors Influencing Students' Entry into Boda-Boda Business

Factors	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
Lack of school fees pushes students to join boda-boda	75 (41.7%)	55 (30.6%)	20 (11.1%)	18 (10.0%)	12 (6.7%)	3.91	1.23
Boda-boda business offers quick money	80 (44.4%)	60 (33.3%)	15 (8.3%)	15 (8.3%)	10 (5.6%)	4.03	1.17
Poor academic performance makes students prefer boda-boda jobs	55 (30.6%)	65 (36.1%)	25 (13.9%)	20 (11.1%)	15 (8.3%)	3.69	1.24
Family responsibilities push students to work as boda-boda riders	70 (38.9%)	50 (27.8%)	25 (13.9%)	20 (11.1%)	15 (8.3%)	3.78	1.29
Parental neglect encourages students' dropout	65 (36.1%)	55 (30.6%)	25 (13.9%)	20 (11.1%)	15 (8.3%)	3.75	1.28

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings presented in Table 1 offer valuable insights into the various factors that influence students' entry into the boda-boda business within Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County. These factors are closely linked to the broader issue of dropout rates in secondary schools, as students often resort to boda-boda activities due to underlying socio-economic challenges. One of the most prominent factors influencing students' entry into boda-boda is the lack of school fees, as indicated by 41.7% of respondents who strongly agree (SA) and 30.6% who agree (A) with the statement. The mean score of 3.91 and a standard deviation of 1.23 suggest that this factor is highly influential. This finding corroborates the work of Kinyua (2020), who argued that financial constraints are a primary driver for students engaging in boda-boda activities as a means to finance their education or meet basic needs. The inability to afford school fees often compels students to seek alternative income-generating activities, which may lead to increased dropout rates. This aligns with studies by Otieno et al. (2022), emphasizing that economic hardship significantly contributes to school attrition among Kenyan secondary students.

Another critical factor is the perception that boda-boda offers quick money, with 44.4% strongly agreeing and 33.3% agreeing. The high mean score of 4.03 and a low standard deviation of 1.17 indicate a strong consensus among respondents. This finding aligns with the research by Mutua and Mutiso (2021), which highlighted that the immediate financial gains from boda-boda work are a major attraction for students, often at the expense of their education. Such financial incentives can overshadow the long-term benefits of schooling, leading students to prioritize boda-boda activities over academic commitments, thus increasing the risk of dropout.

The influence of poor academic performance on students' preference for boda-boda jobs is also evident, with 36.1% strongly agreeing and 30.6% agreeing. The mean score of 3.69 and a standard deviation of 1.24 suggest that poor academic results motivate students to seek alternative income sources, including boda-boda. This observation is consistent with the findings of Wambua (2021), who argued that students struggling academically may feel discouraged and resort to boda-boda as a way of coping financially while perceiving limited prospects in their academic pursuits. It indicates a cyclical relationship where poor academic performance may lead to dropout, further exacerbated by boda-boda involvement.

Family responsibilities emerge as another significant factor, with 38.9% strongly agreeing and 27.8% agreeing that family duties push students into boda-boda work. The mean score of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.29 reflect the influence of familial obligations on students' decision to work as boda-boda riders. This aligns with research by Njoroge (2023), which found that students from economically challenged households often take up boda-boda activities to support their families, thereby compromising their school attendance and increasing dropout risks. The findings underscore the importance of social support programs to alleviate the burden of family responsibilities on students.

Lastly, the finding shows that parental neglect encourages dropout, with 36.1% strongly agreeing and 30.6% agreeing. The mean score of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.28 suggest that family dynamics significantly influence students' decisions to join boda-boda. This finding supports studies by Otieno et al. (2022), who emphasized that parental neglect or lack of supervision contributes to risky behaviors among adolescents, including engagement in boda-boda activities, which can lead to dropout. It highlights the importance of parental involvement and community support in mitigating such influences.

One of the principal noted:

“Many students engage in boda-boda riding primarily due to economic hardships faced by their families. The principal explained that students from low-income backgrounds often see boda-boda work as a quick way to earn money and support their basic needs, including school fees and personal expenses”.

Another principal noted:

“Furthermore, the principal highlighted that some students are motivated by the immediate financial rewards, especially when they face difficulties in paying school fees or affording basic necessities.”

From the focus group discussion, it was established that student participation in the boda-boda business is highly common and visible. Most participants acknowledged that a significant number of secondary school students engage in boda-boda riding alongside their schooling or as a substitute for formal education. Motivations for joining the business revolve around the immediate financial incentives, flexible working hours, and the perceived independence associated with the trade. Riders noted that student participation tends to peak during weekends and school holidays when students are more available. These findings align with research by Mutua et al. (2021) who observed that the informal transportation sector attracts youth seeking quick income and autonomy.

Family Socioeconomic Status and Participation in Boda-Boda Business

The second objective of the study was to determine the influence of students' family socioeconomic status on their decision to participate in the boda-boda business and its effect on school dropout rates. The respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement with statements on the influence of students' family socioeconomic status on their decision to participate in the boda-boda business and its effect on school dropout rates on a 5-point scale, with SA denoting Strongly Agree, A denoting Agreement, N denoting Neutral, D denoting Disagreement, and SD denoting Strongly Disagree. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Socio-economic Factor Influencing Students' Participation in the Boda-Boda Business

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Low-income learners are more likely to quit school and work in the boda-boda industry.	70 (38.9%)	60 (33.3%)	20 (11.1%)	15 (8.3%)	15 (8.3%)	3.86	1.26
Lack of basic needs at home motivates students to seek income through boda-boda.	75 (41.7%)	55 (30.6%)	25 (13.9%)	15 (8.3%)	10 (5.6%)	3.94	1.20
Parents encourage students to support the family through boda-boda income.	60 (33.3%)	65 (36.1%)	25 (13.9%)	20 (11.1%)	10 (5.6%)	3.84	1.18
Financial struggles in my family have affected my academic focus.	80 (44.4%)	55 (30.6%)	20 (11.1%)	15 (8.3%)	10 (5.6%)	3.97	1.20
My family cannot afford to support my continued schooling.	65 (36.1%)	60 (33.3%)	25 (13.9%)	20 (11.1%)	10 (5.6%)	3.83	1.21

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings in Table 2 highlight the significant role that financial factors play in influencing students' participation in the boda-boda industry within Yatta Sub-County, and how these factors contribute to school dropout rates. The first statement, which indicates that low-income learners are more likely to quit school and join boda-boda, received strong agreement, with 38.9% strongly agreeing and 33.3% agreeing, resulting in a mean score of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 1.26. This aligns with the broader understanding that economic hardship is a primary driver pushing students toward boda-boda work as an alternative livelihood (Kariuki & Mutua, 2020). Similar findings by Wekesa (2021) support this, noting that poverty and lack of financial resources are major barriers to continued schooling, forcing students to seek quick income sources such as boda-boda. This scenario worsens dropout rates, especially in economically marginalized communities, confirming that financial instability directly influences educational disengagement.

The second statement, which asserts that the lack of basic needs at home motivates students to seek income through boda-boda, also garnered high agreement, with 41.7% strongly agreeing and 30.6% agreeing. The mean score of 3.94 and a low standard deviation of 1.20 indicate a strong consensus among respondents. This finding is consistent with research by Otieno et al. (2022), who argued that unmet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter compel students to engage in boda-boda activities to supplement family income. The urgency to meet personal and household needs often overrides the importance of schooling,

leading to increased dropout rates (Kinyua, 2021). These financial pressures create a cycle where students prioritize immediate survival over long-term educational benefits.

The third statement, which suggests that parental encouragement to support the family through boda-boda income influences students' participation, received a mixed but generally positive response, with 33.3% strongly agreeing and 36.1% agreeing. The mean score of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 1.18 reflect that many students perceive parental influence as a motivating factor. This corroborates findings by Mutua and Mutiso (2021), who highlighted that in households experiencing financial difficulties, parents often encourage their children to participate in boda-boda as a way to support family livelihoods. Such parental support, although well-intentioned, may inadvertently contribute to increased dropout rates if students prioritize boda-boda over their education, aligning with concerns raised by Wambua (2021) about the influence of family dynamics on youth employment and schooling.

The fourth statement, which emphasizes that financial struggles within families impact students' academic focus, received the highest agreement, with 44.4% strongly agreeing and 30.6% agreeing, reflected in a mean score of 3.97 and a standard deviation of 1.20. This indicates that financial hardship not only motivates students to join boda-boda but also affects their ability to concentrate on academics. Such findings are supported by Njoroge (2023), who argued that economic struggles often lead students to view boda-boda as both a coping mechanism and a means to sustain their education, although it ultimately distracts from academic pursuits. The financial strain within families thus acts as a catalyst for dropout, emphasizing the need for socio-economic interventions to address these underlying issues.

Finally, the statement that families unable to support students' continued schooling influence participation in boda-boda received a high agreement, with 36.1% strongly agreeing and 33.3% agreeing, with a mean score of 3.83 and a standard deviation of 1.21. This finding underscores the direct link between household financial capacity and school dropout rates, aligning with the work of Kariuki and Mutua (2020), who noted that economic deprivation is a significant factor in students' decision to leave school for boda-boda work. When families lack the resources to support education costs, students are more likely to seek alternative income sources, which often leads to dropout. This highlights the importance of financial support programs and policies aimed at reducing the economic burden on students and families to promote continued schooling.

From the interview, one principal noted that;

“Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more prone to dropout to join the boda-boda business, citing financial hardship as a primary motivation. The principal explained that families with limited income often struggle to support their children's education, leading students to seek immediate income through boda-boda riding. The principal

emphasized that discussions with families of students who had dropped out revealed concerns about the inability to afford school fees and the lure of quick cash from boda-boda work, which often outweighs the perceived benefits of continuing education.”

The findings from focus group discussion revealed that many students entering the boda-boda sector often come from financially constrained backgrounds. Several riders shared that some parents or guardians tacitly or explicitly encourage their children to pursue boda-boda work to supplement family income, especially where poverty is acute. The financial need is a critical driver for students dropping out of school; boda-boda riding is viewed as an accessible means to immediate earnings, contrasting with the longer-term benefits of education. These insights corroborate findings by Ochieng and Mwangi (2020), who linked economic hardships and parental encouragement to increased youth participation in informal sector activities such as boda-boda.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, several key conclusions were drawn regarding the influence of students' participation in the boda-boda industry on school dropout rates within Yatta Sub-County, Machakos County.

Economic factors and the perception of boda-boda as a lucrative livelihood significantly influence students' decisions to leave school and join the industry. Many students see boda-boda as a quick and accessible means of earning income, especially in contexts where household economic hardships limit their ability to continue education. Peer influence further reinforces this decision, with students often motivated or encouraged by friends who are already engaged in boda-boda activities. This peer dynamic creates a social environment where dropout and participation in boda-boda are perceived as normative and desirable.

The socioeconomic status of students plays a crucial role in their participation in boda-boda activities. Students from lower-income families are more likely to leave school to join boda-boda as a strategy to address immediate financial needs. The lack of sufficient economic support and resources at the household level pushes students towards alternative income-generating activities outside formal schooling. This economic necessity, combined with limited access to other livelihood opportunities, contributes to higher dropout rates among this demographic.

Students' attitudes towards boda-boda participation significantly impact their engagement

Recommendation of the Study

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed.

- i. Schools should incorporate comprehensive career guidance programs that highlight the long-term benefits of formal education and alternative livelihood options. By

promoting positive attitudes towards schooling and addressing misconceptions about boda-boda as the only viable livelihood, students can develop more motivation to stay in school. Engaging alumni and local entrepreneurs to share success stories can also help reshape perceptions.

- ii. The government and relevant stakeholders should implement targeted economic empowerment programs for students and their families. Initiatives such as bursaries, vocational training, and income-generating activities may alleviate financial pressures that drive students to join boda-boda activities. Providing financial support and alternative livelihood opportunities will reduce the economic need to leave school prematurely.

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