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Social-cultural factors and girls' completion of primary education in Moyo sub-county, Moyo district. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

Background: The study examined the relationship between social-cultural factors and girls' completion of primary education in Moyo Sub-County, Moyo District, Uganda.

Methodology: A correlational, cross-sectional design with a mixed-methods approach was used in eight government-aided primary schools. Of the 169 targeted respondents, 160 took part (94.7%): 149 teachers and parents/guardians completed questionnaires and 11 head teachers, PTA and SMC chairpersons were interviewed. Completion indicators for 2021-2025 were calculated from school records. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and thematic analysis.

Results: Only 29.2% of girls who enrolled in Primary One sat the Primary Leaving Examination, compared with 38.4% of boys; girls' completion fell from 34.2% in 2021 to 27.2% in 2025, and their dropout rate in upper primary rose from 6.0% to 9.7%. At respondent level, gender roles ($r = -0.036$, $p = 0.660$), early marriage ($r = -0.119$, $p = 0.147$) and patriarchal household decisions ($r = 0.102$, $p = 0.218$) were not significantly related to girls' completion, and together explained 2.5% of its variation, although the questionnaire scales had low reliability. School records, however, showed early marriage (40.6%), pregnancy (28.1%) and domestic work (18.8%) as the main recorded reasons for girls' dropout, and schools whose communities more strongly endorsed traditional gender roles had lower completion ($r = -0.852$, $p = 0.007$). Interviews confirmed these barriers.

Conclusion: Girls' completion is low and declining, and that early marriage and girls' domestic roles are the main barriers, although the questionnaire did not establish a significant statistical relationship.

Recommendation: Enforcing laws against child marriage, implementing re-entry guidelines for pregnant girls, sensitising parents, especially fathers, on sharing domestic work and supporting girls' schooling, and keeping complete dropout records to guide planning.

Keywords: social-cultural factors, gender roles, early marriage, patriarchal household decisions, girls' completion, primary education.

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1. Background

Globally, substantial progress has been made in expanding access to and completion of primary education for girls. Between 2015 and 2024, the global primary school completion rate rose from approximately 85% to 88%, reflecting broader efforts to achieve universal basic education (UNESCO, 2025). Girls now complete primary education at rates that slightly exceed those of boys, indicating that gender gaps at this level have narrowed significantly over the past decade (United Nations Statistics Division [UNSD], 2024). Despite this progress, 122 million girls remain out of school worldwide, highlighting persistent disparities, especially in disadvantaged contexts (UNESCO, 2023).

In Asia, trends in primary completion are mixed but generally positive. Eastern and South-Eastern Asian countries experienced rapid growth, with primary completion rates climbing from around 63% in 2015 to approximately 74% by 2023 (UNSD, 2024). In South Asia, girls' primary completion has also improved markedly, and in many countries girls now achieve parity or near parity with boys at the primary level. In Central and Southern Asia, however, boys still maintain a slight advantage in completion, underscoring lingering gender and socio-economic barriers (UNSD, 2024), and countries such as Afghanistan continue to exhibit deep gender disparities in school participation and completion (UNESCO, 2024).

Africa represents the region with the most significant challenges in girls' completion of primary education. Although primary completion has risen from very low levels at the turn of the century, sub-Saharan Africa's primary completion rate still lags behind other regions, with about 67–68% of children completing primary school by 2024 (UNSD, 2025). Gender disparities are pronounced in many countries, where girls are less likely than boys to complete primary education because of poverty, early marriage and conflict (UNESCO, 2024).

In East Africa, considerable progress has been made in expanding access to primary education for girls, driven by the abolition of school fees and commitments to Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi have achieved near-universal enrolment at primary level, with gender parity largely attained at school entry (UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2024). Completion, however, remains a significant challenge. While Uganda and Tanzania report enrolment rates exceeding 95%, primary completion rates remain considerably lower, reflecting high dropout and repetition (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2023). Girls remain disproportionately affected by household poverty, early marriage, adolescent pregnancy,

domestic labour and school-related gender norms, especially in rural and marginalised communities (UNICEF, 2024).

In Uganda, formal education during the colonial period was limited in coverage and strongly gendered. Missionary and government schools prioritised boys' education, reflecting patriarchal norms that associated schooling with male wage employment, leadership and religious instruction, while girls' education, where available, was oriented toward domestic skills and moral training (Ssekamwa, 2000). After independence in 1962, the government expanded public education, but girls' participation remained constrained by poverty, early marriage, household labour demands and cultural beliefs that undervalued female education, so that girls' completion remained substantially lower than that of boys through the 1960s to the 1980s (Deininger, 2003).

Moyo District, in the West Nile sub-region, shares many of these structural challenges, including high poverty, limited educational infrastructure and dispersed rural settlement. Historically the district has recorded lower educational outcomes than the national average, particularly for girls (UBOS, 2017). Although girls' enrolment in Moyo increased significantly after UPE, completion has remained low, with household poverty, the gendered division of labour, early marriage and inadequate school resources identified as contributing factors (Maiku, 2014).

Social-cultural factors refer to the shared norms, values, beliefs, customs and power relations within a society that shape individuals' behaviour, roles and life opportunities. In education, they influence household decisions, gender expectations and community attitudes toward schooling, particularly for girls (UNESCO, 2023). Gender roles refer to socially constructed beliefs about the appropriate responsibilities, behaviours and duties of males and females (Connell, 2009). Patriarchal household decision-making refers to family structures in which authority and control over resources, including decisions on education, are held predominantly by male household heads (Kabeer, 2016). In such households, decisions on enrolment, continuation or withdrawal often favour boys because of cultural beliefs about gender roles and the perceived returns to education (UNESCO, 2022).

Despite the introduction of UPE in 1997, Moyo District continues to record low completion of primary education, particularly among girls. In the district, only about 35% of girls complete Primary Seven compared with about 45% of boys (World Bank & Government of Uganda, 2018). In Moyo Sub-County, only 32% of the girls who started Primary One completed Primary Seven in 2024, compared with 47% of the boys (Moyo Sub-County Education Office, 2024). These figures are consistent with patterns across the West Nile sub-region and Northern Uganda, where social and cultural barriers contribute to poor completion outcomes for girls (UNESCO Institute for Statistics & World Bank, 2024).

Dropout in the sub-county peaks between Primary Four and Primary Seven. Community-level studies in Moyo and adjacent sub-counties suggest that up to 30% of pupils drop out before P.7, with girls disproportionately represented among those who leave because of household responsibilities, early marriage and pregnancy (West Nile Profiling Report, 2023). Infrastructure challenges compound the problem: local primary schools report dilapidated classrooms and latrines, inadequate learning space and insufficient sanitary facilities, which particularly affect girls' attendance during menstruation (The Monitor, 2024). The eight government-aided primary schools covered by this study, namely Moyo Boys, Moyo Town Council, Fr. Bilbao Memorial, Logoba, Eria, Kolokolo, Toloro and Afoji primary schools, serve communities in which these conditions are common. The study examined the relationship between social-cultural factors and girls' completion of primary education in Moyo Sub-County, Moyo District, Uganda.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

The study adopted a correlational and cross-sectional research design within a mixed-methods approach. The correlational design was used because the study sought to establish the direction, strength and significance of the relationship between social-cultural factors (gender roles, early marriage and patriarchal household decisions) and girls' completion of primary education without manipulating any variable.

The mixed-methods approach combined quantitative data from structured questionnaires and school records with qualitative data from interviews. Questionnaires generated numerical data on stakeholders' views that could be analysed statistically; school records provided objective indicators of girls' completion for 2021-2025; and interviews with school leaders explained how social-cultural factors affect girls' schooling. Integrating the three sources allowed the findings to be triangulated, thereby enhancing their credibility.

2.2 Study population

The study was conducted in eight government-aided primary schools in Moyo Sub-County, namely Moyo Boys, Moyo Town Council, Fr. Bilbao Memorial, Logoba, Eria, Kolokolo, Toloro and Afoji primary schools. The target population comprised 300 people: 8 head teachers, 80 teachers, 8 PTA chairpersons, 8 SMC chairpersons and 196 parents/guardians whose children attended the eight schools (Moyo District Education Department, 2025). These categories were chosen because they are directly involved in, or knowledgeable about, girls' schooling and the social-cultural conditions in the community.

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Table 1

Study population, sample size and sampling techniques

Category of respondents	Population (N)	Sample size (S)	Sampling technique	Method of data collection
Head teachers	8	5	Purposive sampling	Interview
Teachers	80	45	Simple random sampling	Questionnaire
PTA chairpersons	8	5	Purposive sampling	Interview
SMC chairpersons	8	5	Purposive sampling	Interview
Parents/guardians	196	109	Simple random sampling	Questionnaire
Total	**300**	**169**		

Source: Moyo District Education Department (2025); Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

2.3 Sample size

The sample size of 169 respondents was determined from the target population of 300 using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table (Appendix V), which is based on the formula:

$$S = X^2NP(1 - P) \div [d^2(N - 1) + X^2P(1 - P)]$$

where S is the required sample size, X^2 is the chi-square value for one degree of freedom at the 95% confidence level (3.841), N is the population size, P is the population proportion (0.50) and d is the margin of error (0.05). The sample was distributed across categories approximately in proportion to their size, giving 5 head teachers, 45 teachers, 5 PTA chairpersons, 5 SMC chairpersons and 109 parents/guardians. Questionnaires were administered to the 154 sampled teachers and parents/guardians, and interviews were held with the 15 sampled school leaders. School records were reviewed for all eight schools.

2.4 Sampling techniques

2.4.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select head teachers, PTA chairpersons and SMC chairpersons. These respondents occupy leadership positions in the schools and have specialised knowledge of school management, pupils' attendance and dropout, and community attitudes toward girls' education. Five of each category were selected from the eight schools on the basis of their length of service and availability, ensuring that every school was represented by at least one leader.

2.4.2 Simple random sampling

Simple random sampling was used to select teachers and parents/guardians, giving every member of these groups an equal chance of selection and minimising selection bias. In each school, the names of eligible teachers, and of parents/guardians obtained from school registers, were written on identical pieces of paper, mixed and drawn by the lottery method until the required number was obtained, so that the sample was spread across all eight schools.

2.5 Data collection methods

2.5.1 Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire survey was used to collect quantitative data from teachers and parents/guardians. It enabled data to be collected from a relatively large number of respondents within a short time, promoted anonymity and produced standardised responses that could be coded and analysed statistically. For parents/guardians who could not read English, the researcher read the questions in the local language and recorded the responses.

2.5.2 Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were used to collect qualitative data from head teachers, PTA chairpersons and SMC chairpersons. Interviews allowed the researcher to probe for explanations of the patterns observed in the questionnaires and records, and to obtain detailed accounts of how social-cultural factors affect girls' schooling and what measures have been taken to address them.

2.5.3 Documentary review

Documentary review was used to collect secondary data from school and district records. The Primary One admission registers were reviewed for 2015-2019, class registers and promotion and repetition lists for Primary Four to Primary Six for 2021–2025, PLE registration lists with candidates' dates of birth for 2021-2025, dropout records, school returns to the District Education Office and district and ministry reports. These records provided the figures used to calculate the four completion indicators.

2.6 Data collection instruments

2.6.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used for teachers and parents/guardians. Section A captured background information. Sections B, C and D contained ten items each on gender roles, early marriage and patriarchal household decisions, and Section E contained nine items on girls' completion of primary education. All items in Sections B to E were rated on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.

2.6.2 Interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide with fourteen open-ended questions, organised by objective, was used for head teachers, PTA chairpersons and SMC chairpersons. The guide allowed follow-up questions to clarify and deepen responses.

2.6.3 Documentary review checklist

A documentary review checklist listed the documents to be examined and contained a data template on which the number of girls enrolled in Primary One, enrolled and promoted in Primary Four to Six, repeating, sitting the PLE and aged 12-14 at the PLE, and the number of boys sitting the PLE, were recorded for each school and year.

2.7 Data collection procedure

After approval of the proposal, an introductory letter was obtained from the School of Graduate Studies and Research of Team University and sought permission from the Moyo

District Education Officer and the head teachers of the eight schools. The instruments were pre-tested, revised and then administered. Questionnaires were delivered in person and collected after completion; interviews were held at times and places convenient to the informants and recorded in notes; and school records were reviewed with the assistance of head teachers and class teachers. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before entry.

2.8 Validity of instruments

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Content validity was established by developing questionnaire items in line with the study objectives and conceptual framework. The draft instruments were then submitted to the research supervisor and two experts in educational research, who assessed the relevance and clarity of each item in relation to the study objectives.

The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated by dividing the number of items rated as relevant by the experts by the total number of items assessed. The resulting CVI was 0.89, indicating that 89% of the assessed items were considered relevant.

2.9 Reliability of instruments

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient based on responses from 149 respondents. Negatively worded items (B5, B8, B9, C9, C10, D3, D5, D7 and D9) were reverse-scored before the reliability analysis so that higher scores consistently represented stronger restrictive sociocultural norms in Sections B-D and better completion of primary education in Section E.

According to Amin (2005), a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for research purposes. The reliability results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Reliability of the Questionnaire Using Cronbach's Alpha (n = 149)

Section	Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Remark
B	Gender roles	10	0.86	Acceptable
C	Early marriage	10	0.81	Acceptable
D	Patriarchal household decisions	10	0.94	Excellent internal consistency
E	Girls' completion of primary education	9	0.82	Acceptable
B-D	Sociocultural factors (combined)	30	0.86	Acceptable
	Source: Primary data (2026).			

Table 2 indicates that all questionnaire sections achieved Cronbach's alpha coefficients above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Section B, which measured gender roles, recorded a coefficient of 0.86, while Section C, which assessed early marriage, obtained 0.81. Section D, which examined patriarchal household decision-making, registered the highest coefficient of 0.94, indicating excellent internal consistency. Section E, which measured girls' completion of primary education, recorded a coefficient of 0.82. The combined sociocultural factors scale also demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a coefficient of 0.86.

These findings suggest that the questionnaire items within each section were sufficiently consistent to support the measurement of the respective study variables. However, the high coefficient of 0.94 for Section D should also be examined to determine whether some items are repetitive or measure nearly identical aspects of patriarchal household decision-making.

2.10 Measurement of variables

The independent variable, social-cultural factors, was measured using the questionnaire items in Sections B (gender roles), C (early marriage) and D (patriarchal household decisions). After reverse-scoring negatively worded items, a mean score was computed for each respondent on each section and for the three sections combined, so that higher scores represented stronger restrictive social-cultural norms.

The dependent variable, girls' completion of primary education, was measured in two ways. First, respondents' views were measured using the nine items in Section E, with higher scores representing better completion. Second, the actual level of completion was calculated from school records for 2021–2025 using the following formulae, adapted from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (2015).

2.10.1 Completion rate

The completion rate is the percentage of girls in a Primary One cohort who reach Primary Seven and sit the PLE. Because the primary cycle lasts seven years, girls who sat the PLE in year t were compared with girls who enrolled in Primary One in year t − 6:

$$\text{Completion rate} = (\text{Girls who sat the PLE in year } t \div \text{Girls enrolled in P.1 in year } t - 6) \times 100$$

2.10.2 Progression rate

The progression (promotion) rate is the percentage of girls in a class in one year who are promoted to the next class in the following year. It was calculated for Primary Four, Five and Six, where dropout is highest:

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Progression rate = (Girls promoted from class g to class g + 1 ÷ Girls enrolled in class g in year t) × 100

2.10.3 Age-Appropriate completion rate

Pupils in Uganda are expected to enter Primary One at age six and complete Primary Seven at age twelve. Girls who sat the PLE at age 12–14 were regarded as having completed at the appropriate age:

Age-appropriate completion rate = (Girls aged 12–14 who sat the PLE ÷ All girls who sat the PLE) × 100

2.10.4 Dropout rate

The dropout rate is the percentage of girls enrolled in a class in one year who are neither promoted nor repeating in the following year:

$$Dropout\ rate = [E_t - (P_{t+1} + R_{t+1})] \div E_t \times 100$$

where E_t is the number of girls enrolled in Primary Four to Six in year t, P_{t+1} is the number promoted and R_{t+1} the number repeating. The completion rate was also calculated for boys, so that the gender gap could be established.

Table 3

Indicators and measurement of girls' completion of primary education

Indicator	How it was calculated	Source of data
Completion rate	Girls who sat the PLE in year t ÷ girls enrolled in P.1 in year t − 6 × 100	P.1 admission registers; PLE registration lists
Progression rate	Girls promoted to the next class ÷ girls enrolled in the class × 100	Class registers; promotion lists
Age-appropriate completion rate	Girls aged 12–14 who sat the PLE ÷ all girls who sat the PLE × 100	PLE registration lists (dates of birth)
Dropout rate	[Girls enrolled − (promoted + repeaters)] ÷ girls enrolled × 100	Class registers; promotion and repetition records

Source: Adapted from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023) and Ministry of Education and Sports (2015).

2.11 Data analysis

2.11.1 Quantitative data analysis

Questionnaire data were checked for completeness, coded, entered and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were used to describe respondents' background characteristics and their responses to each item, and means and standard deviations were used to describe each variable. Mean scores were interpreted using the scale in Table 4.

Table 4

Interpretation of mean scores

Mean range	Response category	Interpretation
4.21–5.00	Strongly agree	Very high
3.41–4.20	Agree	High
2.61–3.40	Neutral	Moderate
1.81–2.60	Disagree	Low
1.00–1.80	Strongly disagree	Very low

Source: Adapted from Amin (2005).

Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to establish the direction and strength of the relationship between each social-cultural factor and girls' completion, and the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Following common practice, a coefficient below 0.30 in absolute value was regarded as weak, 0.30–0.69 as moderate and 0.70 or above as strong (Field, 2018). Multiple linear regression was used to establish the combined relationship of the three factors with girls' completion, using the model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

where Y is girls' completion of primary education, X_1 is gender roles, X_2 is early marriage, X_3 is patriarchal household decisions, β_0 is the constant, β_1–β_3 are the regression coefficients and ε is the error term. The assumptions of regression were checked using the variance inflation factor (VIF) for multicollinearity, the Durbin–Watson statistic for independence of errors and the Shapiro–Wilk test for normality of residuals. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to compare respondents' views on girls' completion across categories, gender and schools.

The completion indicators calculated from school records were summarised in tables by school, sex and year, and their trends over 2021–2025 were presented in tables and figures.

2.11.2 Qualitative data analysis

Interview data were analysed thematically following the steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006): the notes were read repeatedly, coded, and the codes grouped into themes under each objective. The findings are presented in narrative form with paraphrased views of informants, identified by codes (for example, HT01 for a head teacher, PTA01 for a PTA chairperson and SMC01 for an SMC chairperson) to protect their identity. Documentary evidence was used to corroborate the questionnaire and interview findings.

2.12 Ethical considerations

An introductory letter was obtained from Team University and permission from the Moyo District Education Department and the head teachers of the eight schools before collecting data. Participation was voluntary; respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, gave informed

consent and were free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by not recording names on questionnaires or interview notes and by reporting school records only in aggregate form, without identifying individual pupils. Questions on sensitive issues such as early marriage and pregnancy were framed respectfully, and no pupil was interviewed. The data were used only for academic purposes, and all sources were acknowledged.

3. Results

3.1 Response rate

The study targeted 169 respondents: 154 teachers and parents/guardians for the questionnaire and 15 head teachers, PTA chairpersons and SMC chairpersons for interviews.

Table 5

Response rate by category of respondent

Category of respondents	Instrument	Sample size	Responses	Response rate (%)
Teachers	Questionnaire	45	43	95.6
Parents/guardians	Questionnaire	109	106	97.2
Sub-total (questionnaire)		**154**	**149**	**96.8**
Head teachers	Interview	5	4	80.0
PTA chairpersons	Interview	5	3	60.0
SMC chairpersons	Interview	5	4	80.0
Sub-total (interview)		**15**	**11**	**73.3**
Overall		**169**	**160**	**94.7**

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 5 shows that 149 of the 154 questionnaires were completed and returned, a response rate of 96.8%, and that 11 of the 15 targeted school leaders were interviewed (73.3%). The overall response rate was 94.7%. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) regard a response rate of 70% and above as very good for analysis and reporting; the response rate was therefore adequate. The questionnaire respondents were evenly spread across the eight schools, with 18 to 20 respondents per school. The four school leaders who were not interviewed were unavailable during the data collection period.

3.2 Background characteristics of respondents

Table 6

Background Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents (n = 149)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Category of respondent	Teacher	43	28.9
	Parent/Guardian	106	71.1
Gender	Male	81	54.4
	Female	68	45.6
Age group	20–29 years	17	11.4
	30–39 years	34	22.8
	40–49 years	45	30.2
	50–59 years	51	34.2
	60 years and above	2	1.3
Highest level of education	No formal education	18	12.1
	Primary	35	23.5
	Secondary	60	40.3
	Certificate/Diploma	25	16.8
	Bachelor's degree	11	7.4
Years served in or associated with the school	Less than 5 years	29	19.5
	5–10 years	32	21.5
	11–15 years	26	17.4
	16–20 years	28	18.8
	More than 20 years	34	22.8

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 6 shows that parents/guardians made up 71.1% of the questionnaire respondents and teachers 28.9%, reflecting the distribution of the sample. Male respondents (54.4%) slightly outnumbered female respondents (45.6%), which means that the views of both men and women on girls' schooling were captured. Most respondents (64.4%) were aged 40–59 years, an age at which many are parents of primary school children and have observed the community's

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practices over a long period. The largest group had secondary education (40.3%), followed by primary (23.5%), certificate or diploma (16.8%), no formal education (12.1%) and a bachelor's degree (7.4%). Respondents' association with their school was spread fairly evenly from less than five years (19.5%) to more than twenty years (22.8%), so that 80.5% had been associated with the school for five years or more and were therefore familiar with girls' progression and dropout over the study period.

3.3 Girls' completion of primary education

The dependent variable was measured using indicators calculated from school records and through respondents' views. The record-based indicators are presented first because they provide an objective measure of completion.

3.3.1 Completion rate of girls and boys

Table 7 presents the completion rates of girls and boys in the eight schools for the five PLE cohorts from 2021 to 2025.

Table 7

Completion rates of girls and boys in the eight schools, 2021–2025

PLE year	P.1 cohort year	Girls in P.1 cohort	Girls who sat PLE	Girls' completion rate (%)	Boys in P.1 cohort	Boys who sat PLE	Boys' completion rate (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
2021	2015	348	119	34.2	372	163	43.8	9.6
2022	2016	365	112	30.7	388	155	39.9	9.3
2023	2017	381	108	28.3	405	152	37.5	9.2
2024	2018	399	106	26.6	422	151	35.8	9.2
2025	2019	416	113	27.2	440	157	35.7	8.5
Total		**1,909**	**558**	**29.2**	**2,027**	**778**	**38.4**	**9.2**

Source: School records (P.1 admission registers and PLE registration lists), 2015–2025.

Table 7 shows that girls' completion of primary education in the eight schools was low and declined over the study period. Of the 1,909 girls who enrolled in Primary One between 2015 and 2019, only 558 (29.2%) sat the PLE between 2021 and 2025; in other words, about seven in every ten girls who started Primary One did not reach the end of the primary cycle on time. The girls' completion rate fell from 34.2% in 2021 to 26.6% in 2024 before rising slightly to 27.2% in 2025, a net decline of 7.0 percentage points. Although the number of girls enrolling in Primary One rose steadily from 348 to 416, the number sitting the PLE fell from 119 to 113, so that the growth in enrolment did not translate into more girls completing.

Boys' completion was also low, at 38.4% overall, and declined from 43.8% to 35.7%, but it was higher than that of girls in every year. The gender gap ranged from 9.6 percentage points in 2021 to 8.5 in 2025, averaging 9.2 points. Girls made up only 41.8% of the 1,336 pupils who sat the PLE in the five years, although they were 48.5% of the pupils who enrolled in Primary One. The 2024 figures (girls 26.6%, boys 35.8%) are lower than those reported by the Moyo Sub-County Education Office (2024) for the whole sub-county (32% and 47%), but they confirm the same pattern of low completion and a persistent gap in favour of boys. The trend is shown in Figure 1.

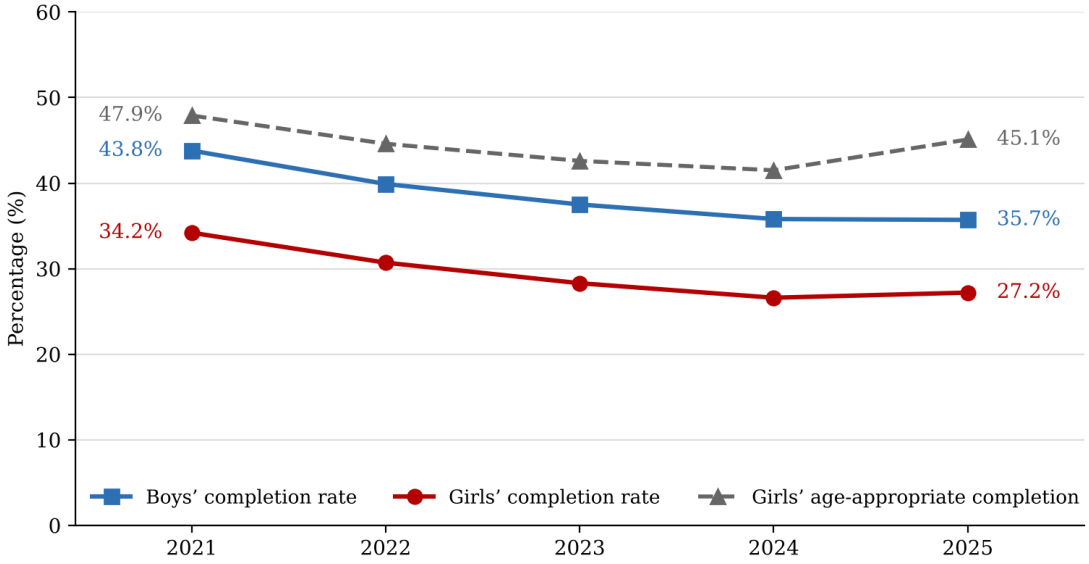


Figure 1 *Completion rates of girls and boys and girls' age-appropriate completion, 2021–2025*
Source: School records, 2015–2025.

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3.3.2 Progression rate

Table 8 presents the progression rates of girls from Primary Four to Primary Seven.

Table 8

Progression rates of girls in upper primary, 2021–2025 (%)

Year	P.4 to P.5	P.5 to P.6	P.6 to P.7	Average
2021	86.5	84.4	82.4	84.4
2022	85.9	83.6	81.5	83.7
2023	85.5	83.3	81.2	83.3
2024	85.2	82.9	80.8	82.9
2025	84.8	82.6	80.4	82.6

Source: School records (class registers and promotion lists), 2021–2025.

Table 8 shows that the progression rate of girls declined at every level of upper primary between 2021 and 2025, and that it was lowest at the transition from Primary Six to Primary Seven (80.4% in 2025). The average progression rate fell from 84.4% to 82.6%. This means that in 2025 almost one in five girls in Primary Six was not promoted to Primary Seven the following year, either because she repeated or because she left school. The progressively lower rates at each higher class indicate that the risk of leaving school rises as girls grow older, which is consistent with the onset of adolescence, when pressures related to marriage, pregnancy and domestic responsibility intensify.

3.3.3 Age-Appropriate completion and dropout rates

Table 9: Presents the age-appropriate completion rate and the dropout rate of girls.

Table 9

Age-Appropriate completion and dropout rates of girls, 2021–2025

Year	Girls who sat PLE	Girls aged 12–14 who sat PLE	Age-appropriate completion rate (%)	Girls enrolled in P.4–P.6	Promoted	Repeating	Dropouts (calculated)	Dropout rate (%)
2021	119	57	47.9	616	532	47	37	6.0
2022	112	50	44.6	642	550	47	45	7.0
2023	108	46	42.6	666	566	47	53	8.0
2024	106	44	41.5	690	582	47	61	8.8
2025	113	51	45.1	714	598	47	69	9.7
Total	**558**	**248**	**44.4**	**3,328**	**2,828**	**235**	**265**	**8.0**

Source: School records (PLE registration lists, class registers, promotion and repetition lists), 2021–2025.

Table 9 shows that fewer than half of the girls who sat the PLE did so at the appropriate age of 12–14 years. The age-appropriate completion rate fell from 47.9% in 2021 to 41.5% in 2024 before recovering to 45.1% in 2025; overall, 55.6% of girl candidates were aged 15 years or older. Late completion reflects late entry into Primary One and repetition, and it matters because girls who are still in primary school at 15 or older are more exposed to marriage and pregnancy before they complete.

The dropout rate of girls in Primary Four to Six rose every year, from 6.0% in 2021 to 9.7% in 2025, and the number of girls who dropped out nearly doubled from 37 to 69. Over the five years, 265 girls who were enrolled in upper primary left school without being promoted or repeating. The rising dropout rate and falling progression rate together explain why the completion rate declined even though enrolment grew. The trend is shown in Figure 2.

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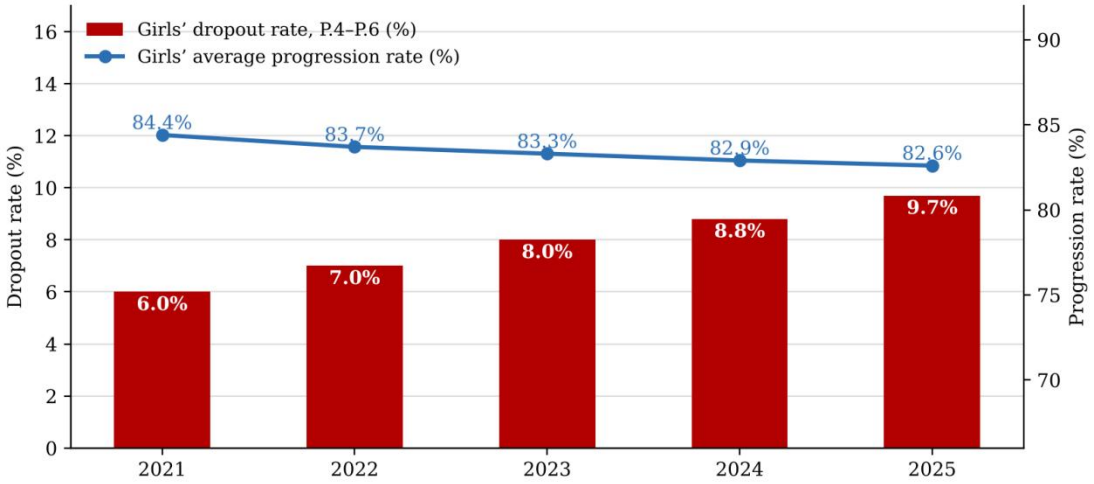


Figure 2 *Dropout and progression rates of girls in upper primary, 2021–2025*
Source: School records, 2021–2025.

3.3.4 Completion indicators by school

Table 10 presents the completion indicators for each of the eight schools over the five years combined.

Table 11

Completion indicators of girls by school, 2021–2025

School	Girls in P.1 cohorts (2015–2019)	Girls who sat PLE (2021–2025)	Completion rate (%)	Age-appropriate completion (%)	Average promotion rate, P.4–P.6 (%)	Average dropout rate, P.4–P.6 (%)	Boys who sat PLE (2021–2025)
Moyo Boys P/S	287	104	36.2	47.1	86.6	6.3	146
Moyo Town Council P/S	325	122	37.5	50.8	87.1	5.7	164
Fr. Bilbao Memorial P/S	263	84	31.9	46.4	85.5	7.2	116
Logoba P/S	242	70	28.9	42.9	84.5	8.3	95
Eria P/S	220	56	25.5	37.5	83.3	9.7	80
Kolokolo P/S	192	42	21.9	40.5	83.3	10.0	60
Toloro P/S	170	33	19.4	39.4	82.4	11.7	50
Afoji P/S	210	47	22.4	36.2	83.3	9.1	67
Total	**1,909**	**558**	**29.2**	**44.4**	**85.0**	**8.0**	**778**

Source: School records, 2015–2025. Promotion and dropout rates are calculated from the combined enrolment, promotion and repetition figures for P.4–P.6 in 2021–2025.

Table 11 shows wide differences between schools. Girls' completion was highest at Moyo Town Council (37.5%) and Moyo Boys (36.2%), the two schools closest to the town, and lowest at Toloro (19.4%), Kolokolo (21.9%) and Afoji (22.4%), the more rural schools. The same schools had the lowest age-appropriate completion, the lowest promotion rates and the highest dropout rates; at Toloro, the average dropout rate in upper primary was 11.7%, about twice that at Moyo Town Council (5.7%). In every school, boys who sat the PLE outnumbered girls, with girls making up between 39.8% (Toloro) and 42.7% (Moyo Town Council) of PLE candidates. The pattern suggests that girls in the rural parts of the sub-county, where traditional norms and household labour demands tend to be stronger, face greater barriers to completing primary school.

3.3.5 Respondents' views on girls' completion of primary education

Table 12 presents the views of teachers and parents/guardians on girls' completion of primary education.

Table 12

Respondents' views on girls' completion of primary education (n = 149)

Code	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
E1	Most girls who enrol in Primary One in this school complete Primary Seven	22.1	34.2	33.6	9.4	0.7	2.32	0.95	Low
E2	Girls complete primary education at the same rate as boys in my community	24.2	43.0	23.5	9.4	0.0	2.18	0.91	Low
E3	Most girls in upper primary (P.4–P.7) are promoted to the next class each year	20.1	45.6	28.9	5.4	0.0	2.19	0.82	Low

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Code	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
E4	Girls in my community complete Primary Seven at the expected age (12–14 years)	16.8	45.0	33.6	4.7	0.0	2.26	0.79	Low
E5	Few girls drop out of school before completing Primary Seven	26.2	38.9	30.2	4.7	0.0	2.13	0.86	Low
E6	Girls who become pregnant or marry return to school to complete Primary Seven	20.8	37.6	30.9	9.4	1.3	2.33	0.95	Low
E7	Girls attend school regularly up to Primary Seven	24.8	35.6	32.9	6.7	0.0	2.21	0.90	Low
E8	Most girls who reach Primary Seven register and sit the PLE	26.2	40.3	26.8	6.7	0.0	2.14	0.89	Low
E9	Completion of primary education by girls is valued by families in my community	10.7	42.3	36.9	9.4	0.7	2.47	0.83	Low
	Girls' completion of primary education (composite)						**2.25**	**0.30**	**Low**

Source: Primary data (2026). SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.

Table 12 shows that respondents rated girls' completion of primary education as low (overall mean = 2.25, SD = 0.30). All nine items had low means, ranging from 2.13 to 2.47. Most respondents disagreed that most girls who enrol in Primary One complete Primary Seven (56.4%, mean = 2.32) and that girls complete primary education at the same rate as boys (67.1%, mean = 2.18). Two-thirds disagreed that most girls in upper primary are promoted each year (65.8%, mean = 2.19), and 65.1% disagreed that few girls drop out before Primary Seven (mean = 2.13). Respondents also disagreed that girls complete at the expected age (61.7%), that girls who become pregnant or marry return to school (58.4%), that girls attend regularly up to Primary Seven (60.4%) and that most girls who reach Primary Seven sit the PLE (66.4%). Even the item on whether families value girls' completion received a low rating (mean = 2.47), with 53.0% disagreeing.

These views agree with the school records: both show that girls' completion is low, that girls lag behind boys, that many complete late and that dropout in upper primary is common. The very low proportion of respondents who agreed that girls who marry or become pregnant return to school (10.7%) is notable, as it indicates that re-entry, provided for under the national guidelines on teenage pregnancy in schools (MoES, 2020), is rare in practice.

3.3.6 Qualitative findings on girls' completion

All the school leaders interviewed described girls' completion as low and identified several barriers. One head teacher (HT01) reported that girls leave school because of marriage and pregnancy and recommended mentoring, provision of sanitary pads and stronger follow-up of absent girls. Another (HT04) described early marriage and pregnancy as the main barriers in the school and called for female role models and girl-friendly facilities. A PTA chairperson (PTA03) noted that girls miss school during the agricultural seasons and raised concerns about distance and safety on the way to school, recommending school meals, counselling and community awareness. The SMC chairpersons (SMC01, SMC02) linked withdrawal from school to domestic work, poverty, traditional expectations and early marriage. The qualitative evidence therefore confirms that girls' completion is low and points to the social-cultural factors examined under the three objectives.

3.4 Gender roles and girls' completion of primary education

3.4.1 Descriptive results on gender roles

Table 13

Respondents' Views on Gender Roles (n = 149)

Code	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
B1	Women are mainly responsible for household chores	1.3	5.4	22.8	46.3	24.2	3.87	0.89	High
B2	Men are expected to provide the main source of household income	0.0	2.7	30.2	36.2	30.9	3.95	0.85	High
B3	Girls are expected to perform more domestic work than boys	1.3	8.1	32.2	35.6	22.8	3.70	0.96	High
B4	Boys have more freedom than girls to participate in community activities	0.7	5.4	24.8	41.6	27.5	3.90	0.89	High
B5	Women participate equally with men in making household decisions (R)	0.0	6.0	24.2	43.0	26.8	3.91	0.86	High
B6	Men are expected to make the final decisions on important family matters	0.7	6.7	27.5	36.9	28.2	3.85	0.93	High
B7	Girls are expected to care for younger siblings more than boys	1.3	4.7	28.9	45.6	19.5	3.77	0.86	High
B8	Boys and girls are encouraged equally to pursue education (R)	0.0	3.4	17.4	35.6	43.6	4.19	0.84	High
B9	Women have equal opportunities with men to own or control family property (R)	1.3	1.3	32.9	43.6	20.8	3.81	0.83	High
B10	Traditional gender roles influence how responsibilities are shared within families	0.7	2.0	24.2	40.9	32.2	4.02	0.84	High

Code	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
	Gender roles (composite, R items reverse-scored)						**3.32**	**0.26**	**Moderate**

Source: Primary data (2026). (R) = negatively worded item, reverse-scored in the composite. Item means are shown before reverse-scoring.

Table 13 shows that most respondents agreed with the statements describing traditional gender roles. About seven in ten agreed that women are mainly responsible for household chores (70.5%, mean = 3.87) and that men are expected to provide the main household income (67.1%, mean = 3.95). A majority agreed that girls are expected to do more domestic work than boys (58.4%, mean = 3.70) and to care for younger siblings more than boys (65.1%, mean = 3.77), and that boys have more freedom than girls to take part in community activities (69.1%, mean = 3.90). Most respondents also agreed that men are expected to make the final decisions on important family matters (65.1%, mean = 3.85) and that traditional gender roles influence how responsibilities are shared in families (73.2%, mean = 4.02). At the same time, most respondents also agreed with the three statements describing equality: that women participate equally with men in household decisions (69.8%, mean = 3.91), that boys and girls are encouraged equally to pursue education (79.2%, mean = 4.19, the highest-rated item) and that women have equal opportunities to own or control family property (64.4%, mean = 3.81). When these three items were reverse-scored, the composite score for gender roles was 3.32 (SD = 0.26), which is moderate.

The apparently contradictory responses suggest two things. First, respondents readily acknowledged that domestic work, sibling care and decision-making are divided along traditional gender lines. Second, they also endorsed statements expressing the official position that boys and girls should be treated equally, which may reflect awareness of government campaigns for girls' education rather than practice in households. The fact that 79.2% agreed that boys and girls are encouraged equally while 58.4% agreed that girls do more domestic work suggests that girls are formally encouraged to attend school but in practice carry a heavier workload at home.

3.4.2 Documentary and qualitative evidence on gender roles

School dropout records identified domestic work as the reason for leaving school for 12 of the 64 girls who dropped out in 2025 (18.8%), making it the third most frequent recorded reason after marriage and pregnancy. Attendance registers, which would have shown absenteeism linked to domestic work, were incomplete for 2021–2022 in the schools visited.

Interview findings strongly supported the influence of gender roles. Head teachers reported that girls do substantial domestic work before coming to school (HT01) and that domestic duties cause lateness and absence (HT02). Another head teacher noted that girls are asked to do household and farm work (HT03) and that gender expectations limit girls' participation in class (HT04). A PTA chairperson described girls' heavy domestic workload (PTA02), and another explained that girls miss school during the planting and harvesting seasons (PTA03). These accounts show that the domestic responsibilities assigned to girls reduce their attendance and study time, which over time leads to repetition, late completion and dropout.

3.4.3 School-Level evidence on gender roles

Table 14 compares the mean scores of the questionnaire respondents in each school with the girls' completion rate of that school calculated from records.

Table 14

Mean scores and girls' completion rate by school

School	n	Gender roles	Early marriage	Patriarchal decisions	Social-cultural factors	Views on completion	Completion rate, 2021–2025 (%)
Moyo Town Council P/S	18	3.26	3.38	3.16	3.26	2.35	37.5
Moyo Boys P/S	18	3.25	3.47	3.23	3.32	2.23	36.2
Fr. Bilbao Memorial P/S	18	3.26	3.49	3.22	3.32	2.21	31.9
Logoba P/S	18	3.23	3.53	3.17	3.31	2.36	28.9
Eria P/S	19	3.36	3.53	3.14	3.34	2.30	25.5
Afoji P/S	19	3.37	3.44	3.07	3.29	2.26	22.4
Kolokolo P/S	19	3.40	3.42	3.30	3.37	2.18	21.9
Toloro P/S	20	3.37	3.50	3.14	3.33	2.12	19.4
r with completion rate		**−0.852**	**−0.237**	**0.203**	**−0.583**	**0.527**	
Sig. (2-tailed)		**0.007**	**0.571**	**0.629**	**0.129**	**0.180**	

Source: Primary data (2026); school records, 2015–2025. Schools are arranged from the highest to the lowest completion rate.

Table 14 shows that the three schools with the highest completion rates (Moyo Town Council, Moyo Boys and Fr. Bilbao Memorial) had the lowest mean scores on gender roles (3.25–3.26), while the four schools with the lowest completion rates (Eria, Afoji, Kolokolo and Toloro) had the highest scores (3.36–3.40). Across the eight schools, the gender roles score had a strong, negative and significant correlation with girls' completion rate ($r = -0.852$, $p = 0.007$). This means that in schools whose communities more

strongly endorsed traditional gender roles, a smaller proportion of girls completed primary school. However, because this correlation is based on only eight schools, it should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive. Early marriage ($r = -0.237$, $p = 0.571$) and patriarchal decisions ($r = 0.203$, $p = 0.629$) were not significantly related to completion at school level.

3.4.4 Correlation between gender roles and girls' completion

To test the first hypothesis, Pearson's correlation was computed between respondents' composite scores on gender roles and on girls' completion. The results are presented in Table 15.

Table 15

Correlation between gender roles and girls' completion of primary education (n = 149)

Variable	Statistic	Girls' completion of primary education
Gender roles	Pearson correlation (r)	−0.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.660
	n	149

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 15 shows a very weak, negative and non-significant correlation between gender roles and girls' completion at the level of individual respondents ($r = -0.036$, $p = 0.660$). The negative sign is in the expected direction, meaning that respondents who more strongly endorsed traditional gender roles tended to rate girls' completion slightly lower, but the relationship was too weak to be distinguished from chance. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.001$) indicates that gender roles accounted for only 0.1% of the variation in respondents' views on completion.

Hypothesis testing. The first null hypothesis (H_{01}) stated that there is no significant relationship between gender roles and girls' completion of primary education in Moyo Sub-County. Since $p = 0.660 > 0.05$, H_{01} was not rejected on the basis of the questionnaire data. The weak result should, however, be read together with the low reliability of the scale ($\alpha = -0.116$), which greatly reduces the ability of the correlation to detect a relationship, and with the school-level and interview evidence, which both indicate that traditional gender roles are associated with lower completion.

3.5 Early marriage and girls' completion of primary education

3.5.1 Descriptive results on early marriage

Table 16

Respondents' Views on Early Marriage (n = 149)

Code	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
C1	Early marriage is common in my community	0.7	4.0	26.8	42.3	26.2	3.89	0.86	High
C2	Girls below the age of 18 are frequently married in my community	1.3	4.7	33.6	45.0	15.4	3.68	0.84	High
C3	Parents in my community encourage early marriage for their daughters	0.0	6.7	28.2	45.6	19.5	3.78	0.84	High
C4	Community members generally accept early marriage	0.0	5.4	24.2	51.7	18.8	3.84	0.79	High
C5	Early marriage is viewed as a normal practice in my community	0.7	10.7	31.5	38.3	18.8	3.64	0.93	High
C6	Girls are expected to marry before completing secondary education	2.0	4.0	29.5	46.3	18.1	3.74	0.87	High
C7	Families arrange marriages for girls before they reach 18 years of age	2.0	6.0	30.2	39.6	22.1	3.74	0.94	High
C8	Poverty contributes to the occurrence of early marriage in my community	0.0	4.0	26.8	42.3	26.8	3.92	0.83	High
C9	Early marriage has reduced in my community over the past five years (R)	1.3	6.0	22.8	45.0	24.8	3.86	0.91	High
C10	Community leaders actively discourage early marriage (R)	0.7	7.4	33.6	38.3	20.1	3.70	0.90	High
	Early marriage (composite, R items reverse-scored)						**3.47**	**0.26**	**High**

Source: Primary data (2026). (R) = negatively worded item, reverse-scored in the composite. Item means are shown before reverse-scoring.

Table 16 shows that most respondents regarded early marriage as common and accepted in their communities. A majority agreed that early marriage is common (68.5%, mean = 3.89), that girls below 18 are frequently married (60.4%, mean = 3.68), that parents encourage early marriage for their daughters (65.1%, mean = 3.78) and that community members generally accept it (70.5%, mean = 3.84). More than half agreed that early marriage is viewed as normal (57.0%, mean = 3.64), that girls are expected to marry before completing secondary education (64.4%, mean = 3.74) and that families arrange marriages for girls below 18 (61.7%, mean = 3.74). Poverty received the highest agreement among the early marriage items, with 69.1% agreeing that it contributes to early marriage (mean = 3.92).

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Most respondents also agreed that early marriage has reduced in the past five years (69.8%) and that community leaders actively discourage it (58.4%). After these two items were reverse-scored, the composite score for early marriage was 3.47 (SD = 0.26), which is high, and the highest of the three social-cultural factors. The responses suggest that early marriage remains widespread and socially accepted, although respondents perceive efforts by leaders to discourage it.

3.5.2 Documentary evidence on early marriage and pregnancy

Table 17 presents the early marriage and teenage pregnancy cases recorded by the schools and the reasons recorded for girls' dropout.

Table 17

Recorded early marriage and pregnancy cases and reasons for girls' dropout

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change, 2021–2025
Early marriage cases recorded	12	14	15	17	18	+50.0%
Teenage pregnancy cases recorded	8	9	10	11	12	+50.0%
Girls recorded as dropouts in school registers	48	56	56	64	64	+33.3%
Girls' dropout rate, P.4–P.6 (%)	6.0	7.0	8.0	8.8	9.7	+3.7 points

Recorded reason for dropout (2025)	Number of girls	Percentage (%)
Early marriage	26	40.6
Pregnancy	18	28.1
Domestic work	12	18.8
School fees	8	12.5
Total	**64**	**100.0**

Source: School dropout records and records on early marriage and teenage pregnancy, 2021–2025.

Table 17 shows that the early marriage and teenage pregnancy cases recorded by the schools each rose by 50% between 2021 and 2025, from 12 to 18 marriages and from 8 to 12 pregnancies. Over the same period, the number of girls recorded as dropouts in school registers rose by a third, and the dropout rate rose from 6.0% to 9.7%. The upward trend in marriage and pregnancy cases therefore moved together with the upward trend in dropout.

The dropout records for 2025 show that early marriage was the most frequent recorded reason for girls leaving school (40.6%), followed by pregnancy (28.1%). Together, marriage and pregnancy accounted for 68.8% of the girls who dropped out, while domestic work accounted for 18.8% and school fees for 12.5%. Early marriage was the most frequent, or joint most frequent, recorded reason in every school. Because records on marriage and pregnancy were available in only four of the eight schools and are known to be under-reported, the true number of cases is likely to be higher. The distribution of reasons is shown in Figure 3.

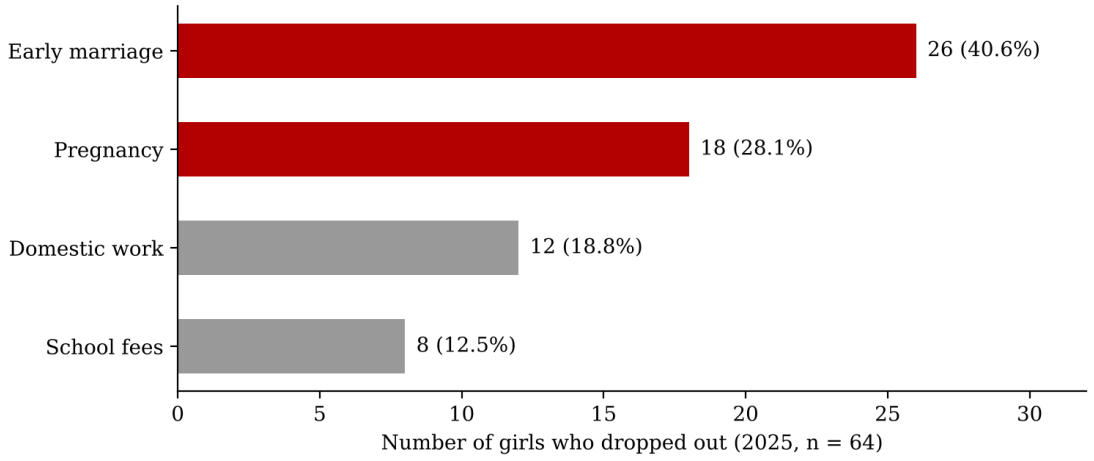


Figure 3 *Recorded reasons for girls' dropout, 2025*
Source: School dropout records, 2025.

3.5.3 Qualitative findings on early marriage

The interviews confirmed that early marriage is a major barrier to girls' completion. Head teachers reported marriage- and pregnancy-related exits from school (HT01, HT04) and identified poverty and bride-price expectations as drivers of early marriage (HT02). One head teacher cited poverty and cultural expectations and recommended scholarships, counselling and collaboration with probation officers (HT03). A PTA chairperson explained that bride price may influence parents' decisions to marry off their daughters (PTA01). An SMC chairperson described puberty-related restrictions on girls and early marriage, and recommended girls' clubs, referral pathways for cases of child marriage and engagement with religious leaders

(SMC03). Another SMC chairperson identified early marriage, together with poverty and traditional expectations, as a barrier and called for enforcement of the law and community dialogue (SMC02). The interviews thus showed that early marriage is driven by poverty, bride price and cultural expectations surrounding puberty, and that it leads directly to girls' withdrawal from school.

3.5.4 Corre lation between early marriage and girls' completion

Table 18

Correlation between early marriage and girls' completion of primary education (n = 149)

Variable	Statistic	Girls' completion of primary education
Early marriage	Pearson correlation (r)	−0.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.147
	n	149

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 18 shows a weak, negative and non-significant correlation between early marriage and girls' completion ($r = -0.119$, $p = 0.147$). The negative sign is in the expected direction: respondents who perceived early marriage as more common and accepted tended to rate girls' completion lower. Of the three factors, early marriage had the strongest correlation with completion at respondent level, but it explained only 1.4% of the variation ($r^2 = 0.014$).

Hypothesis testing. The second null hypothesis (H_{02}) stated that there is no significant relationship between early marriage and girls' completion of primary education in Moyo Sub-County. Since $p = 0.147 > 0.05$, H_{02} was not rejected on the basis of the questionnaire data. Nevertheless, the documentary evidence shows that early marriage and pregnancy were the recorded reasons for more than two-thirds of girls' dropout, and that recorded cases rose together with the dropout rate, while all the informants identified early marriage as a major barrier. The weak questionnaire correlation therefore reflects the limitations of the scale ($\alpha = -0.101$) rather than an absence of a link between early marriage and completion.

3.6 Patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion of primary education

3.6.1 Descriptive results on patriarchal household decisions

Table 19

Respondents' views on patriarchal household decisions (n = 149)

Code	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
D1	The male household head makes most important family decisions	0.0	2.0	24.8	49.7	23.5	3.95	0.75	High
D2	Fathers have the final say on children's education	0.7	4.7	20.8	41.6	32.2	4.00	0.89	High
D3	Mothers participate equally in major household decisions (R)	0.0	3.4	25.5	43.0	28.2	3.96	0.82	High
D4	Men decide how household income is spent	0.0	4.0	26.2	38.9	30.9	3.97	0.86	High
D5	Women can make major financial decisions without consulting their husbands (R)	0.0	4.0	25.5	48.3	22.1	3.89	0.79	High
D6	Men decide when household assets are sold	0.0	6.0	20.1	43.0	30.9	3.99	0.87	High
D7	Women are encouraged to express their opinions during family decision-making (R)	0.7	2.7	18.1	38.9	39.6	4.14	0.85	High
D8	Men determine children's participation in school activities	0.0	4.0	26.2	38.9	30.9	3.97	0.86	High
D9	Household decisions are usually made jointly by husbands and wives (R)	0.0	3.4	16.1	45.6	34.9	4.12	0.80	High
D10	Cultural traditions give men greater authority over household decisions	0.0	0.7	25.5	44.3	29.5	4.03	0.76	High
	Patriarchal household decisions (composite, R items reverse-scored)						**3.18**	**0.29**	**Moderate**

Source: Primary data (2026). (R) = negatively worded item, reverse-scored in the composite. Item means are shown before reverse-scoring.

Table 19 shows that most respondents agreed that men dominate household decisions. About three-quarters agreed that the male household head makes most important family decisions (73.2%, mean = 3.95), that fathers have the final say on children's education (73.8%, mean = 4.00), that men decide when household assets are sold (73.8%, mean = 3.99) and that cultural traditions give men greater authority over household decisions (73.8%, mean = 4.03); only one respondent (0.7%) disagreed with the last statement. About seven in ten agreed that men decide how household income is spent (69.8%) and determine children's participation in school activities (69.8%).

However, most respondents also agreed with the statements describing shared decision-making: that household decisions are usually made jointly by husbands and wives (80.5%, mean = 4.12), that women are encouraged to

express their opinions (78.5%, mean = 4.14), that mothers participate equally in major decisions (71.1%) and that women can make major financial decisions without consulting their husbands (70.5%). After these four items were reverse-scored, the composite score for patriarchal household decisions was 3.18 (SD = 0.29), which is moderate and the lowest of the three factors.

The results suggest that, in the communities served by the eight schools, men retain final authority over major decisions, including children's education, but that women are consulted and participate in discussions. In other words, decision-making may be consultative in form while final authority remains with men.

3.6.2 Qualitative and documentary evidence on patriarchal decisions

The interviews supported the view that male household heads control decisions on schooling. An SMC chairperson described male household heads as influential in education decisions and linked their decisions to girls' withdrawal from school (SMC01). A PTA chairperson perceived a preference for boys' education where household resources are limited, and recommended parent sensitisation and support funds (PTA01). Another PTA chairperson described girls' limited influence in family decisions and recommended women's economic empowerment (PTA02), and an SMC chairperson identified household decisions, together with gender expectations, as constraints on girls' schooling (SMC04).

The school records do not directly record who made the decision to withdraw a girl from school. However, school fees and related costs were recorded as the reason for 12.5% of girls' dropout in 2025, and informants explained that when money is short it is the household head who decides which children continue in school. In addition, girls' share of PLE candidates (41.8%) was well below their share of Primary One entrants (48.5%), and boys outnumbered girls among PLE candidates in every school, which is consistent with household decisions that favour keeping boys in school.

3.6.3 Correlation between patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion

Table 20

Correlation between patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion of primary education (n = 149)

Variable	Statistic	Girls' completion of primary education
Patriarchal household decisions	Pearson correlation (r)	0.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.218
	n	149

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 20 shows a weak, positive and non-significant correlation between patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion ($r = 0.102$, $p = 0.218$). The positive sign is contrary to the expectation that stronger patriarchal decision-making would be associated with lower completion; however, because the correlation is not significant, it cannot be interpreted as evidence of a positive relationship. Patriarchal decisions accounted for only 1.0% of the variation in respondents' views on completion.

Hypothesis testing. The third null hypothesis (H_{03}) stated that there is no significant relationship between patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion of primary education in Moyo Sub-County. Since $p = 0.218 > 0.05$, H_{03} was not rejected. As with the other factors, the scale had low reliability ($\alpha = 0.194$), and the qualitative evidence indicates that male control over decisions on schooling is a constraint on girls' completion, particularly when household resources are limited.

3.7 Combined relationship of social-cultural factors with girls' completion

3.7.1 Summary of composite scores and correlation matrix

Table 21

Summary of Composite Scores (n = 149)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Gender roles	3.32	0.26	Moderate
Early marriage	3.47	0.26	High
Patriarchal household decisions	3.18	0.29	Moderate
Social-cultural factors (overall)	**3.32**	**0.15**	**Moderate**
Girls' completion of primary education	2.25	0.30	Low

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 22 shows that, overall, respondents perceived restrictive social-cultural norms to be present to a moderate extent (mean = 3.32), with early marriage rated highest (3.47) and patriarchal decisions lowest (3.18), while girls' completion was rated low (2.25). The small standard deviations (0.15–0.30) show that respondents gave very similar overall scores, which limits the variation available for correlation analysis.

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Table 22

Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (n = 149)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender roles	1				
2. Early marriage	−0.113	1			
3. Patriarchal household decisions	−0.025	−0.071	1		
4. Social-cultural factors (overall)	0.518	0.488	0.599	1	
5. Girls' completion of primary education	−0.036	−0.119	0.102	−0.027	1

Source: Primary data (2026). The correlations of the overall score with its three components are significant ($p < 0.001$) because the overall score is computed from them; none of the other correlations was significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 22 shows that the overall social-cultural factors score had a very weak, negative and non-significant correlation with girls' completion ($r = −0.027$, $p = 0.742$). The three factors were also not correlated with one another ($r = −0.113$ to $−0.025$), although the literature suggests that they reinforce each other. This lack of association between conceptually related measures is consistent with the low reliability of the scales.

3.7.2 Regression analysis

Multiple linear regression was used to establish the combined relationship of the three factors with girls' completion. Before the regression was run, its assumptions were checked. The variance inflation factors ranged from 1.01 to 1.02, well below the threshold of 10, showing no multicollinearity. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.84, close to 2, indicating that the residuals were independent. The Shapiro–Wilk test showed that the residuals were normally distributed ($W = 0.990$, $p = 0.409$).

Table 23

Model summary and ANOVA

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin–Watson
0.159	0.025	0.005	0.295	1.843

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	0.325	3	0.108	1.246	0.295
Residual	12.611	145	0.087		
Total	12.936	148			

Source: Primary data (2026). Predictors: (constant), gender roles, early marriage, patriarchal household decisions. Dependent variable: girls' completion of primary education.

Table 23 shows that the three social-cultural factors together explained only 2.5% of the variation in respondents' views on girls' completion ($R^2 = 0.025$), and the adjusted R^2 of 0.005 indicates that, after accounting for the number of predictors, the model explained almost none of the variation. The ANOVA shows that the model was not statistically significant ($F(3, 145) = 1.246$, $p = 0.295$). The remaining 97.5% of the variation is attributable to other factors not captured by the model and to measurement error.

Table 24

Regression coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.	VIF
(Constant)	2.584	0.558		4.630	0.000	
Gender roles	−0.053	0.093	−0.047	−0.574	0.567	1.014
Early marriage	−0.132	0.093	−0.118	−1.427	0.156	1.019
Patriarchal household decisions	0.095	0.085	0.092	1.117	0.266	1.006

Source: Primary data (2026). Dependent variable: girls' completion of primary education.

Table 24 shows that none of the three factors made a significant unique contribution to girls' completion (all $p > 0.05$). Early marriage had the largest standardised coefficient ($\beta = −0.118$), followed by patriarchal household decisions ($\beta = 0.092$) and gender roles ($\beta = −0.047$). The fitted model was:

$$\hat{Y} = 2.584 − 0.053X_1 − 0.132X_2 + 0.095X_3$$

where $\hat{Y}$ is the predicted score on girls' completion, X_1 is gender roles, X_2 is early marriage and X_3 is patriarchal household decisions. Consistent with the correlation results, the regression did not provide evidence of a significant combined relationship between the questionnaire measures of social-cultural factors and respondents' views on girls' completion.

3.8 Differences in views on girls' completion between groups

Table 25 compares respondents' views on girls' completion by category, gender and school.

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Table 25

Views on girls' completion by category, gender and school

Group	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Test statistic	Sig.
Teachers	43	2.32	0.24	t(147) = 1.73	0.085
Parents/guardians	106	2.22	0.31		
Male	81	2.23	0.28	t(147) = −0.87	0.385
Female	68	2.27	0.32		
Eight schools (range of means 2.12–2.36)	149	2.25	0.30	F(7, 141) = 1.52	0.166

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 25 shows that teachers rated girls' completion slightly higher than parents/guardians (2.32 against 2.22), but the difference was not significant (p = 0.085). There was no significant difference between male and female respondents (p = 0.385) or between schools (p = 0.166). Respondents across groups thus shared a common view that girls' completion is low. Although the differences between schools were not significant, respondents at Toloro gave the lowest rating (2.12), consistent with that school's lowest recorded completion rate (19.4%), while respondents at Logoba and Moyo Town Council gave the highest ratings (2.36 and 2.35).

3.9 Summary of qualitative and documentary findings

Table 26

Availability of documents in the eight schools

No.	Document	Availability	Remarks
1	Primary One admission registers (2015–2025)	Yes (8/8)	Complete for all schools
2	Class registers for P.4–P.7 (2021–2025)	Yes (8/8)	Gaps in 2021 for two schools
3	Promotion and repetition lists (2021–2025)	Yes (7/8)	Missing for Toloro P/S in 2021
4	PLE registration lists with dates of birth (2021–2025)	Yes (8/8)	Complete
5	Pupils' attendance registers	Yes (8/8)	Incomplete for 2021–2022
6	Records of pupils who dropped out and reasons	Partial (5/8)	Three schools lack proper records
7	School annual reports and returns to the DEO	Yes (8/8)	Complete
8	Moyo District Education Department reports	Yes	Available at the district office
9	MoES sector performance reports	Yes	Available online and at the district office
10	Records on early marriage and teenage pregnancy	Partial (4/8)	Under-reported; community records scarce

Source: Documentary review (2026).

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Table 27

Main themes raised by key informants (n = 11)

Theme	Informants raising the theme	Summary of views	Recommended interventions
Domestic and farm work	HT01, HT02, HT03, PTA02, PTA03, SMC01	Girls do household and farm work before and after school; they come late, miss school in planting and harvest seasons and eventually drop out	Parent sensitisation; school meals; counselling
Early marriage and pregnancy	HT01, HT02, HT03, HT04, PTA01, SMC02, SMC03, SMC04	Poverty, bride price and expectations at puberty lead to marriage; marriage and pregnancy lead to exit from school	Enforcement of the law; girls' clubs; referral pathways; probation officers; religious leaders
Male control of decisions	PTA01, PTA02, SMC01, SMC04	Male household heads decide on schooling; boys are preferred when resources are limited; girls have little say	Women's economic empowerment; support funds; community dialogue
Poverty	HT02, HT03, SMC02	Poverty underlies early marriage and withdrawal from school	Scholarships; support for vulnerable girls
School environment	HT01, HT04, PTA02, PTA03, SMC04	Lack of sanitary facilities and pads; distance and safety concerns	Sanitary pads and facilities; female role models; mentoring

Source: Interview data (2026).

Table 27 shows that the records needed to calculate the completion indicators were largely available, but records of dropouts and their reasons were kept by only five schools, and records on early marriage and pregnancy by only four. This weakness in record-keeping limits the ability of schools and the district to follow up girls at risk of leaving school.

Table 28

Triangulation of findings by objective

Objective	Questionnaire	Interviews	School records	Overall interpretation
Gender roles	Traditional division of labour widely acknowledged (composite mean 3.32, moderate); r = −0.036, p = 0.660	Domestic and farm work cause lateness, absence and dropout	Domestic work recorded for 18.8% of dropouts; school-level r = −0.852 with completion rate	Qualitative and school-level evidence indicate a negative relationship; not confirmed at respondent level
Early marriage	Early marriage perceived as common and accepted (mean 3.47, high); r = −0.119, p = 0.147	Poverty, bride price and puberty norms drive marriage, which leads to exit from school	Marriage and pregnancy recorded for 68.8% of dropouts; cases rose 50% as dropout rose	Strong convergent qualitative and documentary evidence; not confirmed at respondent level
Patriarchal decisions	Men hold final authority but women are consulted (mean 3.18, moderate); r = 0.102, p = 0.218	Male heads decide on schooling and favour boys when resources are short	Girls 48.5% of P.1 entrants but 41.8% of PLE candidates; fees recorded for 12.5% of dropouts	Indirect evidence of a constraint; not confirmed statistically
Girls' completion	Rated low (mean 2.25)	Described as low by all informants	Completion rate 29.2% (girls) against 38.4% (boys), declining; dropout rising	Strong convergence: completion is low and declining

Source: Primary data (2026).

Table 28 shows that the three sources converge strongly on the level of girls' completion, which is low and declining, and on the identification of early marriage, pregnancy and domestic work as the main reasons why girls leave school. The questionnaire correlations, however, did not show significant relationships between the three factors and girls' completion at the level of individual respondents, which is attributable mainly to the low reliability and limited variation of the questionnaire scales.

4. Discussion

4.1 Girls' completion of primary education

School records showed that girls' completion of primary education in the eight schools was low and declining. Only 558 (29.2%) of the 1,909 girls who enrolled in Primary One in 2015-2019 sat the PLE in 2021–2025, compared with 38.4% of boys. The girls' completion rate fell from 34.2% in 2021 to 27.2% in 2025, and the gender gap averaged 9.2 percentage points. Girls' average progression rate in upper primary fell from 84.4% to 82.6%, the dropout rate rose from 6.0% to 9.7%, and fewer than half of the girls who sat the PLE (44.4%) did so at the appropriate age of 12–14 years. Completion was lowest in the rural schools of Toloro (19.4%), Kolokolo (21.9%) and Afoji (22.4%) and highest at Moyo Town Council (37.5%). Respondents rated girls' completion as low (mean = 2.25), with no significant differences by category, gender or school.

4.2 Gender roles and girls' completion of primary education

Most respondents acknowledged a traditional division of labour, agreeing that women are mainly responsible for household chores (70.5%), that girls do more domestic work (58.4%) and care for siblings more than boys (65.1%), and that traditional roles shape how responsibilities are shared (73.2%); at the same time, 79.2% agreed that boys and girls are equally encouraged to pursue education. The composite score for gender roles was moderate (mean = 3.32). The correlation between gender roles and girls' completion at respondent level was very weak, negative and non-significant (r = −0.036, p = 0.660), so H_{01} was not rejected. However, at school level, schools whose communities more strongly endorsed traditional gender roles had lower completion rates (r = −0.852, p = 0.007, n = 8). Domestic work was recorded as the reason for 18.8% of girls' dropout, and informants consistently described domestic and farm work as causing lateness, absence and withdrawal.

4.3 Early marriage and girls' completion of primary education

Respondents perceived early marriage as common and accepted (composite mean = 3.47, high), with 68.5% agreeing that it is common, 70.5% that the community accepts it and 69.1% that poverty contributes to it. The correlation between early marriage and girls' completion was weak, negative and non-significant (r = −0.119, p = 0.147), so H_{02} was not rejected. Documentary evidence, however, showed that early marriage (40.6%) and pregnancy (28.1%) together accounted for 68.8% of recorded dropout, and that recorded marriage and pregnancy cases each rose by 50% between 2021 and 2025 as the dropout rate rose. Informants identified poverty, bride price and expectations surrounding puberty as the drivers of early marriage.

4.4 Patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion of primary education

About three-quarters of respondents agreed that the male household head makes most important decisions (73.2%), that fathers have the final say on children's education

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(73.8%) and that tradition gives men greater authority (73.8%), but most also agreed that decisions are usually made jointly (80.5%) and that women's opinions are encouraged (78.5%). The composite score was moderate (mean = 3.18). The correlation with girls' completion was weak, positive and non-significant ($r = 0.102$, $p = 0.218$), so H_{03} was not rejected. Informants reported that male household heads decide on schooling and favour boys when resources are limited, and girls made up 48.5% of Primary One entrants but only 41.8% of PLE candidates.

4.5 Combined relationship

The three factors together explained only 2.5% of the variation in respondents' views on girls' completion ($R^2 = 0.025$, $F(3, 145) = 1.246$, $p = 0.295$), and none was a significant predictor. The questionnaire scales had low reliability (Cronbach's alpha from −0.160 to 0.194), largely because of acquiescent responding, which limited their ability to detect relationships.

4.6 Girls' completion of primary education

The finding that fewer than three in ten girls who entered Primary One reached the PLE confirms the problem stated in Chapter One and is consistent with the figures reported for Moyo District (World Bank & Government of Uganda, 2018) and Moyo Sub-County (Moyo Sub-County Education Office, 2024). It is far below the national and East African averages and the sub-Saharan African average of about 67–68% (UNSD, 2025), placing the sub-county among the areas where, as UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023) observed, high enrolment has not translated into completion. The finding that Primary One enrolment of girls rose by 19.5% between 2015 and 2019 while the number sitting the PLE fell supports the conclusion of the World Bank (2018) that the gains in access under UPE have not been matched by gains in retention.

The persistent gap of about nine percentage points in favour of boys contrasts with the national pattern, in which girls' completion has at times equalled or exceeded that of boys (UNICEF, 2020), and confirms that national averages mask substantial disadvantages for girls in rural Northern Uganda. The rising dropout rate and falling progression rate at each higher class are consistent with the observation of Lloyd and Mensch (2008) that girls' risk of leaving school rises with age, and the finding that more than half of the girls who complete do so at age 15 or above highlights a particular vulnerability: girls who are still in primary school during adolescence are exposed to marriage and pregnancy before they complete. The lower completion in the more rural schools is consistent with Oketch and Rolleston (2007), who found that rural girls are most affected by poverty, household labour and cultural expectations.

4.7 Gender roles and girls' completion of primary education

The widespread acknowledgement that girls do more domestic work and care for younger siblings, together with informants' accounts of girls arriving late, missing school in the farming seasons and eventually dropping out, is consistent with the findings of Ndyomugyenyi and Kyohairwe (2018) and Matovu (2025) in Uganda and of Lloyd and Mensch (2008) and Unterhalter (2007) in the wider region. The strong school-level association, in which the schools whose communities endorsed traditional gender roles most strongly had the lowest completion, is consistent with Psaki, Mensch and Soler-Hampejsek (2014), who found that communities with stronger traditional gender expectations experience greater inequalities in girls' schooling.

The finding that most respondents also agreed that boys and girls are equally encouraged to study suggests that the official message on girls' education has been widely received, but that it coexists with practices that place the burden of household work on girls. This is in line with Social Reproduction Theory, which holds that inequality is reproduced through taken-for-granted dispositions and everyday practices, even where formal rules promote equality (Bourdieu, 1977). Girls are formally sent to school, but the domestic expectations reproduced in the household reduce their time and energy for learning, leading to repetition, late completion and dropout.

The absence of a significant correlation at respondent level does not contradict this evidence. It differs from the many studies that report a negative relationship, but it is explained by the very low reliability of the gender roles scale and the small variation in respondents' scores, both of which weaken correlations (Field, 2018). In addition, a respondent's general views on gender roles in the community are not necessarily linked to his or her assessment of girls' completion in the school, whereas the school-level comparison relates community norms to the actual completion of girls in that community.

4.8 Early marriage and girls' completion of primary education

The finding that early marriage and pregnancy together accounted for more than two-thirds of recorded dropout among girls, and that recorded cases rose as dropout rose, strongly supports the literature that identifies early marriage and pregnancy as major causes of girls leaving school (Mensch, Singh, & Casterline, 2005; Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; World Bank, 2017). The identification of poverty and bride price as drivers of early marriage agrees with the Government of Uganda and UNICEF (2015) and Brock and Cammish (1997), who found that where girls are expected to marry early, their education is regarded as having limited value. The finding that very few respondents (10.7%) agreed that girls who marry or become pregnant return to school agrees with Psaki, Mensch and Soler-Hampejsek (2014) and Mensch et al. (2017), who found that stigma, childcare and social expectations prevent re-entry, despite national guidelines that allow pregnant girls and young mothers to continue their education (MoES, 2020).

In terms of Social Reproduction Theory, early marriage reproduces educational and economic disadvantage across generations: girls who leave primary school to marry have fewer opportunities and limited autonomy, which perpetuates poverty and low attainment into the next generation (Nour, 2009). The high perceived acceptance of early marriage in the community, alongside the perception

that leaders discourage it, suggests that efforts against child marriage have begun but have not yet changed household practice. As with gender roles, the weak correlation at respondent level reflects the limitations of the questionnaire rather than an absence of a relationship, since the direct evidence from records and interviews is strong and consistent.

4.9 Patriarchal household decisions and girls' completion of primary education

The finding that most respondents agreed that fathers have the final say on children's education and that tradition gives men greater authority is consistent with Kabeer (2005), Sen (1990) and Okello (2023), who found that male control over household resources and decisions limits girls' educational opportunities. The informants' reports that boys are preferred when resources are limited agree with Deininger (2003) and Lloyd, Mete and Grant (2009). The fact that girls' share of PLE candidates was well below their share of Primary One entrants is consistent with household decisions that keep boys in school longer than girls.

At the same time, the high agreement that decisions are made jointly and that women's opinions are encouraged suggests that household decision-making is becoming more consultative, as Kabeer (2016) observed in communities where women gain greater voice and economic resources. The combination of male final authority and consultative discussion may explain why patriarchal decisions had the lowest composite score of the three factors and why their relationship with completion was not significant. The influence of patriarchal decisions on girls' completion in Moyo Sub-County therefore appears to operate mainly indirectly, through decisions on spending when the household is under financial pressure and through decisions on marriage, rather than as a direct and general bias against girls' schooling.

4.10 Social-Cultural factors and girls' completion

Taken together, the findings support the central proposition of Social Reproduction Theory that social-cultural norms reproduced in families and communities limit girls' educational attainment: the records and interviews show that the main recorded reasons for girls' dropout are social-cultural (marriage, pregnancy and domestic work account for 87.5% of recorded dropout), and that completion is lowest in the rural communities where traditional norms are strongest. The questionnaire, however, did not provide statistical confirmation of this relationship at respondent level. The methodological lesson is that Likert-type scales of social norms administered to community members, many of whom have limited formal education, are vulnerable to acquiescence and may not discriminate between respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future studies of social-cultural factors should use balanced and carefully piloted scales, behavioural questions about actual household practices and, where possible, data on individual girls.

5. Limitations

Records of pupils who dropped out and the reasons for leaving were available in only five of the eight schools, records on early marriage and pregnancy cases were available in only four, and promotion lists for one school were missing for 2021. Counts of marriage and pregnancy are therefore likely to be under-reported. The completion rate compares the number of girls sitting the PLE with the number enrolled in Primary One six years earlier, rather than tracking individual pupils. Transfers, repetition and late entry can therefore affect the rates.

Data on stakeholders' views were collected at one point in time, so the study could establish association but not cause and effect.

6. Conclusion

Girls' primary school completion in Moyo sub-county is low and declining, primarily driven by early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and heavy domestic workloads, requiring targeted socio-cultural interventions and improved data tracking.

7. Recommendations

Head teachers, PTAs and SMCs should hold regular parents' meetings and community dialogues on sharing domestic work between girls and boys, emphasising that girls need time before and after school for attendance and study.

Schools should monitor girls' attendance and lateness, particularly during the planting and harvesting seasons, and follow up girls with irregular attendance through home visits by teachers and SMC members.

The Moyo District Education Department, with development partners, should support school feeding and girls' mentoring and clubs, so that girls have additional reasons and support to remain in school. Community sensitisation programmes should target fathers and male household heads specifically, emphasising the returns to girls' education and the costs of withdrawing girls from school.

Women's economic empowerment programmes, such as savings groups and livelihood support, should be expanded so that mothers have greater influence over spending on children's education. SMCs and PTAs should encourage both parents to attend school meetings and to take joint responsibility for decisions on their children's schooling.

All primary schools should keep complete records of pupils who drop out and the reasons for leaving, as well as cases of early marriage and pregnancy, and submit them to the District Education Department each term. The District Education Department should calculate and publish the completion, progression, age-appropriate completion and dropout rates of girls and boys for each school annually, so that schools with low completion can be targeted.

Schools should enforce enrolment at the official age of six and reduce repetition, so that more girls complete primary school before adolescence.

7.1 Areas for further research

A study using individual-level data that tracks a cohort of girls from Primary One to Primary Seven, to establish more precisely how domestic work, marriage, pregnancy and household decisions relate to each girl's progression and completion.

A study using improved and piloted measures of social-cultural factors, such a balanced scales, questions on actual household practices and interviews with girls themselves, to re-examine the relationships tested in this study.

A study on the re-entry of girls into school after pregnancy or marriage in the West Nile sub-region, and the factors that enable or prevent it.

A comparative study of girls' completion in rural and urban primary schools in Moyo District, to explain the large differences between schools found in this study.

List of abbreviations

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance
CVI: Content Validity Index
DEO: District Education Officer
EFA: Education for All
HT: Head Teacher
IDP: Internally Displaced Persons
LRA: Lord's Resistance Army
MoES: Ministry of Education and Sports
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
P.1, P.7: Primary One, Primary Seven
PLE: Primary Leaving Examination
PTA: Parent-Teacher Association
SD: Standard Deviation
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
SMC: School Management Committee
SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UBOS: Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UIS: UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
UNSD: United Nations Statistics Division
UPE: Universal Primary Education
VIF: Variance Inflation Factor

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Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest declared.

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Author contributions

GFA: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing-original draft.
EB: Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization.
DA: Writing-review and editing, Supervision, Validation.
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Data availability statement

Data is available upon request.

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