



# Effect of Gender Roles on Boy-Child Retention in Public Primary Schools in Nzega District, Tanzania

Benisia Jackson Luhuha

University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya

Email: [benisialuhuha@gmail.com](mailto:benisialuhuha@gmail.com)

**Abstract** This study examined the effect of gender roles on boy-child retention in public primary schools in Nzega District Council, Tanzania. The problem addressed was the high dropout rate among boys, which remains under explored compared to girl-child education. The study aimed to investigate how societal and household gender roles affect boys' school retention. A mixed-methods approach using a descriptive survey design was employed. The population included teachers, pupils, and Ward Education Officers, with a sample of 94 teachers, 221 pupils selected through stratified and simple random sampling, and four WEOs selected purposively. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that while boys often receive preferential treatment at home, such as inheritance and assumed self-reliance, these factors contribute to early labour, poor supervision, and reduced school attendance. Regression results showed a significant negative relationship between gender roles and retention, with a standardized beta of -0.379. The study concludes that traditional gender expectations hinder boys' educational progress. It recommends that the Ministry of Education and Culture develop gender-sensitive policies, strengthen parental and community engagement, promote flexible learning options, and provide targeted support to improve the retention of boys in school.

**Keywords:** Boy-child retention, Gender roles, Primary education, Dropout

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## 1. Introduction

The retention of boys in primary education is a growing global concern, with significant implications for educational equity and socio-economic development (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2022). While recent decades have seen major efforts to improve girls' access to education, a troubling trend has emerged in which boys are increasingly at risk of dropping out. Globally, more than 132 million boys are out of school, making up over half of the out-of-school youth population (UNESCO, 2022).

Contributing factors include child labor, learning disabilities, economic hardship, and behavioral challenges (UNICEF, 2018a; International Labour Organization, 2020; Miller, 2023). In the United States, boys are more likely than girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and face greater challenges with school discipline, which negatively affects their retention (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

In countries such as Finland and the United Kingdom, boys' retention in primary education is relatively high but

varies significantly across regions and social groups. In Finland, about 93% of boys' complete primary education, although disparities persist in rural and marginalized communities (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). In the United Kingdom, only 75% of boys meet expected standards in primary assessments, compared to 83% of girls (Department for Education, 2023). Initiatives such as the "Raising Boys' Achievement" program and the promotion of positive male role models aim to close this gap (UK Government, 2023; Education Endowment Foundation, 2022). However, social and economic inequality, along with gender norms and emotional stigma, continue to limit progress (Baker, 2023).

Sub-Saharan Africa faces particularly serious challenges regarding boys' retention. In countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania, economic hardship, child labour, and cultural expectations often compel boys to leave school early (Njue, 2023; UNICEF, 2024; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In Tanzania, retention rates for boys in rural areas have declined, reaching 65% in 2021 and slightly improving to 67% in 2023 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023). Families often rely on boys for farming and other labour, while schools in these areas frequently lack basic facilities and learning materials (Education Development Trust, 2023). Cultural attitudes also affect retention, as some communities place less value on boys' education than on girls', reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes (TGDI, 2022).

Although countries such as Tanzania constitutionally guarantee equal education for all children, in practice, boys receive less targeted support compared to girls. Programs focused on girls' education are more widespread and better funded, while initiatives addressing boys' specific challenges, such as child labor and economic pressures, are limited (UNICEF, 2023; Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2005). Addressing low retention rates for boys requires focused strategies that respond to their unique challenges in education. Without effective action, boys from disadvantaged backgrounds will continue to fall behind, undermining broader goals for educational equity and national development (Smith & Jones, 2023). Creating an inclusive education system that supports all children equally is essential for achieving sustainable progress.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite national efforts such as fee-free education and support programs (UNICEF, 2018b), the retention of boys in primary schools remains low in Tanzania, particularly in rural areas like Nzega District Council. Retention rates have declined from 70% in 2019 to 67% in 2023 (Tanzania Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023), with only 66% of boys in Nzega District Council reaching Class VII by 2024 (District Education Director Office, Nzega, 2024). While most interventions focus on girls, boys face unique challenges, including cultural expectations that prioritize

their role as economic providers, which leads to school dropout (Baker, 2023; UNICEF, 2021). Despite these challenges, limited research exists on how gender roles within the household affect boys' retention. Most studies emphasize girls' education, leaving a gap in understanding the specific household factors influencing boys' continued participation in school (Smith & Jones, 2023). This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on how gender expectations at home affect boys' retention in Nzega District Council.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 School Retention

Retention refers to the ability of students to remain in school until they complete their intended educational program, often linked to persistence and goal attainment (Sudamath, 2020; Taylor, 2021). While retention is measured at the institutional level, persistence reflects individual effort (Taylor, 2021). In Tanzania, retention rates are calculated over a seven-year primary education cycle and serve as key indicators of student continuity (URT, 2019). Factors such as truancy, absenteeism, and socioeconomic challenges contribute to low retention rates (Gubbels et al., 2019; Alanko et al., 2023). Globally, about 30% of primary students do not complete school, with dropout rates rising to 42% in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2019; Mugume & Bulime, 2024). In Tanzania, although improvements were seen post-2016, retention for boys remains lower than for girls, highlighting a continuing concern (UNICEF, 2018a; URT, 2019).

### 2.2 Boy-child Gender Roles

Gender roles are the behaviors that society deems 'appropriate' for each gender. They provide indications about the kind of behaviors that are thought to be proper for each sex and are the result of interactions between people and their settings. The views of a culture on the differences between the sexes define appropriate gender roles. Children must learn roles that are appropriate for their gender. Gender roles can also be based on how the society perceives a certain gender (Çuhadaroğlu, 2021).

The way boys are natured may affect their school retention. In some society's girls are mostly encouraged to stay home, while boys are encouraged to spend time outside their homes. In families with no proper guidance, boys will be more interested in roaming in the streets, playing and sometimes involve themselves in undesirable behaviors which may negatively affect their retention in school (Nicolao, 2014; Baumgardner 2017).

Koskei et al. (2020) revealed that parental treatment of children was influenced by their gender. In poor families, parents/guardians consider boys more helpful in operating outside home activities due to their masculinity. Boys are

perceived to be stronger and more self-governing. These qualities are thought to be helpful in manual and agricultural activities. In families where formal education has low value, usually the boys are mostly used for these activities. They are pressurized to drop from school. The tendency is mostly practiced among the pastoral societies. Moreover, in some families within the pastoral societies, boys inherit family wealth such as cattle. This situation negatively affects the boy-child school retention.

Furthermore, Koskei et al. (2020) in a study conducted in Kenya on the effects of gender role on the boy-child retention in public primary schools, observed the rite of passage as the factor leading to the dropout of boys from school. The rite of passage takes a lot of school time. The values inculcated during this period were contrary to school values and boys emerged from seclusion unwilling to take instruction from teachers which negatively affected their school retention.

The study conducted in Kenya by Wainaina (2021) revealed how gender roles affected the boy-child's school retention. There were several boys who dropped from primary schools because of parents' perceptions that boys can take care of themselves as they are superior biologically and mentally. Most parents did not intervene in that situation.

Msuya and Ngowi (2023) conducted a study in the Kilimanjaro region and found that prevailing gender norms in rural communities pressured boys to prioritize herding and farming over schooling. Their research highlighted that during peak agricultural seasons, boys were often withdrawn from school to support family livelihoods, resulting in irregular attendance and ultimately increasing dropout rates. This situation reflects how deeply ingrained cultural expectations shape boys' roles within their families, often at the expense of their education. The need for boys to contribute economically to the household can overshadow the perceived value of formal schooling, making education seem less urgent or even optional.

Similarly, Mwakyusa and Lema (2024) explored gender expectations in the Dodoma region and reported that cultural beliefs emphasizing male independence and labour contributed to boys' disengagement from education. Their study noted that boys were socialized from an early age to assume adult responsibilities, such as managing livestock or working in family businesses, which diverted their focus and time away from school. This early transition into labour roles reinforces the societal view that boys should be providers and self-sufficient, often creating a conflict between schooling and fulfilling family duties. Both studies underscore the powerful influence of traditional gender roles on educational outcomes for boys, suggesting that addressing these cultural norms is crucial for improving boys' school

retention. Programs aiming to enhance education participation need to consider these socio-cultural dynamics by engaging communities to shift perceptions and support boys in balancing their responsibilities with continuing their education.

Despite the insights from existing studies on how gender roles influence boys' school retention, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which these cultural expectations interact with other socio-economic factors within Tanzanian communities. Most studies highlight the general impact of gender norms but do not sufficiently explore how these roles intersect with family dynamics, poverty levels, and local education policies to affect boys' sustained participation in school (Koskei et al., 2020; Msuya & Ngowi, 2023; Mwakyusa & Lema, 2024). Additionally, there is limited research on effective interventions that can simultaneously address deeply rooted cultural beliefs and economic pressures that lead to boys dropping out. The current study aims to fill this gap by investigating the complex relationship between gender roles and boy-child retention in schools in Tanzanian contexts, focusing on practical strategies to support boys' retention in primary education through community engagement and policy recommendations. This approach will provide a more holistic understanding and actionable insights to improve boys' educational outcomes.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a cause-effect research design to systemically examine the effect of boy-child's gender roles on boy-child retention in primary schools within Nzega District. This design was deemed appropriate as it facilitates the identification and analysis of causal relationships between independent variables (boy-child's gender roles) the dependent variable, boy-child retention (Creswell, 2014). It further enables the researcher to draw inferences on how variation in boy-child's gender roles contribute to patterns of absenteeism, dropout, and continued enrollment among male pupils in a rural educational context (Bryman, 2016).

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from pupils and teachers with qualitative data from Ward Education Officers to enhance the depth and credibility of findings through triangulation. The quantitative component allowed for statistical analysis of patterns related to boy-child retention, while the qualitative insights provided contextual understanding of the underlying boy-child's gender roles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This methodological integration ensures a more comprehensive exploration of the research problem by capturing both measurable trends and subjective experiences, which strengthens the validity and reliability of the study outcomes (Brayman, 2016).

The study targeted 727 individuals from twelve mixed public primary schools in Nzega District Council with retention rates below 75%, including 123 government teachers, 600 Standard VII boys, and 4 Ward Education Officers (DED, 2024). Teachers provided insights into boy-child's gender roles as a household factor affecting retention due to their teaching and mentoring roles (Said & Nyanda, 2023). Standard VII boys offered firsthand perspectives on challenges impacting their schooling at a critical transition point (Thompson, 2017; Lundberg, 2016). Ward Education Officers contributed administrative and policy-level views, given their local oversight responsibilities (Chisholm, 2015). This diverse sample ensured a comprehensive understanding of boy-child's gender roles as a factor influencing boy-child retention in Nzega District Council.

To determine the sample size of pupils and teachers, this study used Yamane's (1967) formula where  $N$  signifies the size of the population.  $n$  signifies the size of the sample;  $e$  signifies the level of precision (0.05)

#### Sample Size for Teachers

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \\
 &= \frac{123}{1 + 123(0.05)^2} \\
 &= \frac{123}{1 + 0.03075} \\
 &= \frac{123}{1.03075} \\
 &= 94
 \end{aligned}$$

Table 1. Stratified Sampling for Teachers

#### b. Sample Size for Pupils

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \\
 &= \frac{600}{1 + 600(0.05)^2} \\
 &= \frac{600}{1 + 1.5} \\
 &= \frac{600}{2.5} \\
 &= 240
 \end{aligned}$$

To ensure fair representation from each school, the study employed stratified sampling using the formula

$$ni = \frac{Ni}{N} \times n$$

where  $ni$  is the sample size from each school,  $Ni$  is the population of respondents in a specific school,  $N$  is the total population, and  $n$  is the total sample size. Each of the twelve schools (School A to L) was treated as a separate stratum, with the 123 teachers and 600 pupils proportionally distributed. From these, 94 teachers and 240 pupils were selected based on their population share within each school. This approach ensured balanced representation, enhanced validity, and improved the generalization of the findings.

**Table 1: Stratified sampling for Teachers**

School	Number of Teachers	Sample Size
School A	10	$10 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School B	11	$11 \div 123 \times 94 = 10$
School C	10	$10 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School D	9	$9 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School E	10	$10 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School F	11	$11 \div 123 \times 94 = 10$
School G	10	$10 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School H	10	$10 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School I	10	$10 \div 123 \times 94 = 8$
School J	8	$8 \div 123 \times 94 = 6$
School K	7	$7 \div 123 \times 94 = 6$
School L	7	$7 \div 123 \times 94 = 6$
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>94</b>

**Table 2: Stratified Sampling for Pupils**

School	Number of Pupils (Standard VII Boys)	Sample Size
School A	48	$48 \div 600 \times 240 = 19$
School B	52	$52 \div 600 \times 240 = 21$
School C	44	$44 \div 600 \times 240 = 18$
School D	53	$53 \div 600 \times 240 = 21$
School E	45	$45 \div 600 \times 240 = 18$
School F	51	$51 \div 600 \times 240 = 20$
School G	50	$50 \div 600 \times 240 = 20$
School H	43	$43 \div 600 \times 240 = 17$
School I	49	$49 \div 600 \times 240 = 20$
School J	54	$54 \div 600 \times 240 = 22$
School K	56	$56 \div 600 \times 240 = 22$
School L	55	$55 \div 600 \times 240 = 22$
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>240</b>

Stratified sampling was followed by simple random sampling using the ballot method within each school to select 94 teachers and 240 Standard VII boy-pupils. Teachers' and pupils' names were drawn randomly from slips to ensure each had an equal chance of selection, thus minimizing bias and maintaining representativeness. In contrast, four Ward Education Officers were selected purposively based on their administrative roles, experience, and insights into school retention issues in their respective wards. This combination of sampling techniques ensured both statistical rigor and the inclusion of informed perspectives, enriching the study's understanding of factors affecting boy-child retention.

This study employed questionnaires and both phone and face-to-face interviews to collect comprehensive data on

boy-child retention in Nzega District. Questionnaires, translated into Kiswahili to ensure clarity, cultural relevance, and improved data quality, included both closed-ended Likert scale items and open-ended questions to capture quantitative trends and qualitative insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Teachers and pupils completed these to reflect their views on boy-child's gender roles. Face-to-face and phone interviews were conducted with Ward Education Officers to gain policy-level perspectives. Phone interviews allowed flexibility and broader geographical reach, while face-to-face interviews provided richer data through observation of non-verbal cues, fostering deeper engagement (Creswell, 2014; Kothari, 2014). These tools, designed through literature review and expert consultation, enabled data

triangulation, enhancing the reliability and depth of findings.

Independent Linear Regression (ILR) was used in this study to analyze the effect of boy-child's gender roles as a household factor on boy-child retention in primary schools. The model took the form:

$$Retention = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{boy-child's gender roles}) + \varepsilon$$

Where retention is the dependent variable, and boy-child's gender roles is the independent variable. This approach enabled the researcher to assess the individual effect of boy-child's gender roles on retention, as well as its statistical significance and effect sizes (Field, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018).

In line with ILR, content analysis was employed as the qualitative data analysis technique in this study to systematically interpret and categorize responses from Ward Education Officers (WEOs). This method involved coding and organizing interview data into themes related to boy-child retention, allowing for an in-depth understanding of underlying patterns and insights. Direct

quotations from the WEOs were used to illustrate key points and provide authentic, rich evidence that supported the study's findings, enhancing credibility and giving voice to participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2014).

Validity in this study was ensured by expert reviews and pilot testing to confirm that the research instruments accurately measured intended concepts. Face validity was established through assessments by supervisors from the University of Eastern Africa-Baraton for clarity, cultural, and linguistic appropriateness (Bhandari, 2022; Taherdoost, 2016). Construct validity was confirmed by supervisors aligning instruments with study objective (Strauss & Smith, 2021), while content validity was achieved via literature review and pilot testing to cover all relevant aspects of boy-child retention (Polit & Beck, 2006; Creswell, 2014). Reliability was tested through a pilot study involving teachers and pupils from four schools outside the main area, with Cronbach's alpha scores indicating high internal consistency: boy-child's gender roles (0.936), and Boy-Child Retention (0.912), all exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Kothari, 2014; Cohen & Swerdlik, 2018). Minor adjustments were made based on pilot feedback to enhance clarity and relevance.

**Table 3: Reliability for the Variables**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Boy-child's gender roles	0.936
Boy-Child Retention	0.912

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Respondents comprised teachers, pupils and Ward Education Officers (WEO's). The demographic information pursued in this part include the respondents' gender, age, family status, education qualification, teaching experience and marital status of teachers and pupils where applicable.

#### Teachers' Demographic Profile

The teachers' demographic profile included: age, gender marital status, level of education and teaching experience.

The sample included 54 male teachers (58.5%) and 40 female teachers (41.5%), indicating that males slightly outnumber females in Nzega District public primary schools. The presence of male role models can positively influence boy-child retention, while female teachers

contribute nurturing qualities that support holistic student development (Christov-Moore et al., 2014).

Among the 94 teachers sampled, the majority (54.3%) were aged between 26 and 35 years, followed by 28.7% aged 36 to 45 years. Only 11.7% were between 20 and 25 years, while 5.3% were above 45 years. This distribution shows that most teachers are young to middle-aged, bringing both vitality and experience to their roles.

Most teachers (67%) held teaching certificates, which is the minimum qualification for primary school educators in Tanzania. Diploma holders accounted for 29.8%, while only 3.2% held bachelor's degrees. Higher qualifications generally correspond with greater subject knowledge and ability to support pupil retention (Chiappella, 2015).

A significant majority (61%) had up to 10 years of teaching experience, 31.9% had between 11 and 20 years, and only 3.2% had over 20 years of experience. Overall, 96.8% had taught for 20 years or less, reflecting a relatively experienced teaching workforce capable of addressing factors influencing boy-child retention (Njue, 2023). Table

4.1 below presents a summary of the teachers' demographic profiles.

**Table 4: Teachers' Demographic Profile**

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	54	58.5
	Female	40	41.5
Age	20-25 years	11	11.7
	26-35 years	51	54.3
	36-45 years	27	28.7
	Above 45 years	5	5.3
	Certificate	63	67
Level of Education	Diploma	28	29.8
	Bachelor's Degree	3	3.2
	1-10 years	61	64.9
Teaching Experience	11-20 years	30	31.9
	Over 20 years	3	3.2

Source: Field Data (2024)

## 4.2 Pupils' Demographic profiles

Among the 221 pupils surveyed, 72.4% were aged between 13 and 15 years, which corresponds to the typical age range for Standard Seven students in Nzega District Council. Smaller proportions included 12.2% aged 10 to 12 years and 15.4% aged 16 to 18 years. The majority being in the expected age group suggests they were well-positioned to understand reasons for boy-child dropout.

Most pupils (57%) lived with both parents, while 26% lived with a single parent, 16% with grandparents, and 1% with siblings. This majority living with both parents aligns

with Ruxton (2015), who emphasized that dual parental support fosters better guidance and mentorship for children, strengthening the link between home and school.

The largest group of pupils (57%) had parents with primary school education, followed by 27% whose parents completed secondary education. Those with non-formal education and college-level education were each 8%. These findings support Mwandunga (2016), who noted that lower parental education often correlates with reduced parental involvement and higher dropout rates among children. Table 4.2 presents a summary of the pupils' demographic profiles.

**Table 4: Pupils' Demographic Profiles**

Variable	Categories	Frequency	%age (%)
Pupils' Age	10-12 years	27	12.2
	13-15 years	160	72.4
	16-18 years	34	15.4
Family Status	Both parents	126	57
	Single parent	58	26
	Grandparents	35	16
	Siblings	2	1
Parents' Education	Non-formal education	18	8
	Primary education	126	57
	Secondary education	59	27
	College education	18	8

Source: Field Data (2024)

## 4.3 Perceptions Towards boy-child Retention in Public Primary Schools

Prior to ILR analysis, this study sought to find out the prevailing status of boy-child retention in public primary schools in Nzega District Council as perceived by teachers,

pupils and Ward Education Officers. The data was analyzed using means and standard deviations.

A four-point scale for interpreting the data was used as follows: 00 -1. 49 = Disagree; 50 - 2. 49 = Tend to disagree; 50 -3. 49 = Tend to Agree; and 3. 50 - 4. 00 = Agree. Means below 2. 49 is equivalent to disagree and means above 2. 49 is equal to agree.

The findings indicated that respondents generally agree that boy-child dropout in public primary schools is a concern (M = 3.61, SD = 0.591) and that the dropout rate is high (M = 3.52, SD = 0.635). The relatively low standard deviations suggest a consensus among respondents on these issues. Additionally, respondents tend to agree that boy-child attendance in public primary schools is low (M = 3.22, SD = 1.089), though the higher standard deviation reflects more variation in their views. In contrast,

respondents disagree with the statement that boy-child academic performance is lower than girls' (M = 1.66, SD = 0.665), indicating a strong consensus that boys perform similarly or better than girls academically. Overall, while dropout and attendance are recognized concerns, academic performance disparity between boys and girls is not widely perceived. The perceptions of teachers and pupils toward boy-child retention in public primary schools in Nzega District Council was as presented in Table 4.3.

**Table 5: Status of Boy-child Retention as Perceived by Teachers and Pupils**

Items (N=315)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Boy-child dropout in public primary schools is a concern.	3.61	0.591	Agree
Boy-child dropout in public primary schools is high	3.52	0.635	Agree
Attendance of boy-child in public primary schools is low	3.22	0.665	Tend to Agree
Boy-child academic performance in public primary school is lower than girls	1.66	1.089	Tend to Disagree

**Source:** Field Data (2024)

The responses from the Ward Education Officers (WEOs) revealed a strong collective awareness of the problem of low boy-child retention in Nzega District public primary schools. Each of the four WEOs affirmed that the issue is prevalent and deeply concerning. One officer emphasized, *“Absolutely, I’ve seen firsthand that boy-child retention is quite low,”* pointing to the grounded nature of the problem in their communities. Another officer stressed the urgency of the matter, stating, *“It’s something we need to address urgently to ensure every child has the opportunity to learn.”* These expressions reflect a shared commitment among WEOs to addressing the dropout crisis. Moreover, they viewed the issue not merely as an educational challenge but one with broader social and economic implications for the district’s future, with one officer noting, *“The statistics show that fewer boys are completing their primary education... This trend is alarming for our community’s future.”*

The WEOs identified several causes behind the declining retention of boys in schools, with economic hardship being the most dominant. According to one WEO, *“Many boys are required to work at home,”* highlighting that responsibilities such as labor and caregiving often override schooling. Another officer observed, *“In our district, male children drop out of school as they get involved in early child labour,”* pointing to the systemic nature of the issue. They also agreed that while academic performance was not the primary concern, structural barriers such as poverty, labor demands, and family responsibilities disrupted the education of boys more than girls. One WEO emphasized, *“It is true that male children drop out of school is high*

*compared to female children,”* while another stated, *“The problem of boys dropping out of school is very real.”* These firsthand accounts indicate that retention is hindered more by external circumstances than by academic struggles.

These insights from the findings align with broader research on boy-child retention challenges. For example, UNESCO (2019) reported that in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania, boys face lower retention rates due to economic burdens and social expectations. UWEZO (2016) and URT (2019) also found that boys had higher dropout rates than girls, with URT reporting 62% male dropouts compared to 38% for females. Studies by Koskei et al. (2020) support WEOs’ claims, revealing that boys are often pulled out of school to support their families through labor. Despite this, both teachers and pupils in the current study did not believe academic performance was a primary issue, echoing Li et al. (2022), who argued that socioeconomic factors, rather than learning ability, are the dominant contributors to dropout. Overall, the findings indicate a widespread, systemic issue that requires multifaceted interventions targeting the socioeconomic barriers boys face in completing their education.

### 4.3 Gender Role

The findings indicate that, gender role as household factors as perceived by teachers and pupils as follows; boys are given priority in the family (M= 3. 16; SD = 0. 72) and have more support at home (M = 3. 17; SD= 0. 54), boys

can get jobs easily regardless of their education status (M= 3. 06; SD = 0. 67), parents are not taking disciplinary measures on boys (M =3.14; SD= 0. 65), male children can take care of themselves (M = 3. 06; SD=0. 69) and male children are assured of inheritance of family wealth (M=3. 21; SD=0. 57).

**Table 6: Gender Role**

Descriptive Statistics (n=315)	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Boys are given priority in the family	3. 16	0. 723	Tend to Agree
Boys can get jobs easily regardless of their education status	3. 06	0. 669	Tend to Agree
Parents are not taking disciplinary measures on boys	3.14	0. 649	Tend to Agree
Male children can take care of themselves	3. 06	0. 685	Tend to Agree
Male children have more support at home	3. 17	0. 542	Tend to Agree
Male children are assured of inheritance of the family	3. 21	0. 566	Tend to Agree
Average M= 3. 13; SD= 0. 64			

**Source: Field Data (2024)**

The above findings reveal that boys are given first priority in the family and have more support, which seem to be some of the household factors that positively affect their retention in school. In contrast when boys get jobs easily regardless of their education status, when parents do not take disciplinary measures on erring boys, the assumption that male children can take care of themselves, and their assurance of inheritance of family wealth seem to be some of the household factors that negatively affect their retention in public primary schools in Nzega District Council.

One of the respondents said; *“Baaadhi ya wazazi hawafuatilii tabia za watoto wao hata wakikosea hawajali. Na wengine hudhani mtoto wa kiume anaweza kujiongoza mwenyewe kwasababu ana nguvu”* “Some parents do not monitor their children's behavior, even if they make mistakes, they do not care. Some think that a boy can lead himself because he is mentally strong”.

The findings are in line with Wainaina (2021) who observed that several boys had dropped from primary schools because of parents’ perceptions that boys can take care of themselves as they are superior mentally. Equally, Koskei et al. (2020b) reported on parents who perceived boys to be physically strong and more self-governing. These qualities were thought to be helpful in manual and agricultural activities at home.

WEO 2 said; *“Baadhi ya familia hasa za wafugaji vijana warinathishwa mapema mali hii huwafanya wasione umuhimu wa kwenda shule.”* In some families, boys inherit wealth early which makes them not see the importance of going to school." The findings concur with Koskei et al. (2020) who pointed out that in some pastoral societies, boys inherit family wealth such as cattle at an early age. This situation negatively affects their retention in school. The findings imply that poor parental practices negatively affect boy-child retention in public primary schools in Nzega District Council.

### 4.4 Effect of gender roles on boy-child retention in primary schools in Nzega District

The regression analysis results indicate a statistically significant effect of gender roles on the retention of boys in primary schools in Nzega District. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.465) suggests a moderate positive relationship between gender roles and boys' school retention. The R Square value of 0.216 means that gender roles account for 21.6% of the variation in retention levels among boys. This indicates that while other factors also contribute to retention, gender roles are a key predictor. The Adjusted R Square of 0.214 confirms that this relationship holds even when adjusting for potential overestimation in small sample sizes

**Table 7: Model Summary**

del	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.465 <sup>a</sup>	.216	.214	.583

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender roles

The ANOVA results show that the overall regression model is statistically significant, with  $F(1, 369) = 101.713$  and  $p < .001$ . This means the predictor variable, gender roles, significantly contributes to explaining the variance

in the retention of boys. In other words, the influence of gender roles on boys' education is not due to chance but is a measurable and real effect.

**Table 8: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.515	1	34.515	101.713	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	125.215	369	.339		
	Total	159.730	370			

a. Dependent Variable: Retention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender roles

The unstandardized coefficient (B) for gender roles is  $-0.379$ , indicating that for every one-unit increase in restrictive gender roles, the retention level decreases by 0.379 units, assuming all other factors remain constant. This negative coefficient signifies an inverse relationship. Additionally, the standardized Beta coefficient is  $-0.465$ , which reinforces the strength of this negative effect in

standardized terms. The t-value of  $-10.085$  and the corresponding p-value of  $.000$  confirm that this relationship is statistically significant. The negative direction of the relationship suggests that as individuals face more rigid or traditional gender role expectations, their likelihood of being retained in education decreases significantly.

**Table 9: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.594	.145		17.858	.000
	Gender roles	-.379	.038	-.465	-10.085	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Retention

The findings of the current study, which reveal a statistically significant and negative relationship between gender roles and retention, align closely with the reviewed literature on how traditional gender expectations negatively affect the boy-child's school participation. The regression results indicate that as societal gender role expectations become more rigid, retention declines, supporting the argument that gendered socialization places boys in positions where education is deprioritized. According to Çuhadaroğlu (2021), gender roles stem from cultural perceptions and expectations, which shape how children behave and are treated. This is consistent with Nicolao (2014) and Baumgardner (2017), who noted that boys are often encouraged to spend time outside the home, leading to involvement in street life and risky behaviors that diminish their school retention. Koskei et al. (2020) further demonstrated that in poor or pastoral communities, boys are seen as labor assets and are pressured into economic activities like herding or farming, often at the cost of their education. These societal pressures to fulfill masculine roles, including rites of passage or wealth inheritance, divert boys from academic paths. The findings of Wainaina (2021) and Dinesh and Chandrashekar (as cited in Herman & Ligembe, 2022) similarly show that many parents perceive boys as biologically and mentally stronger, resulting in reduced supervision and lower educational support. Studies by Msuya and Ngowi (2023) and Mwakyusa and Lema (2024) add that boys are routinely withdrawn from school during farming seasons or to perform adult responsibilities, reinforcing the view that boys should prioritize work over learning. The regression coefficient of  $-0.379$  in this study provides empirical support for these qualitative observations, confirming that entrenched gender norms contribute directly to reduced retention among boys.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that gender roles have a significant and negative impact on boy-child retention in public primary schools in Nzega District, with societal expectations, household responsibilities, and cultural beliefs about masculinity contributing to high dropout rates and low attendance. Although boys may receive certain privileges at home, these are overshadowed by pressures to work, inherit wealth early, and be self-reliant, which disrupt their education. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions by the Ministry of Education to address gender biases affecting boys, including integrating boy-child retention strategies into national education frameworks. Practically, it calls for increased parental involvement, community sensitization, mentorship, flexible learning, and economic support programs to reduce dropout rates. Schools and education officers should be empowered to identify and assist boys

at risk, promoting a more gender-inclusive approach to education retention.

### 5.2 Recommendations

This study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Culture, Science and Technology develop specific policies that address boy-child retention, integrating targeted strategies into national education frameworks similar to those supporting the girl-child. Community-based gender awareness campaigns should be launched to challenge harmful cultural beliefs that pressure boys into labor and early independence, while monitoring systems should be established to track dropout trends and inform policy. Teacher training programs should include gender-sensitive modules to help educators support boys more effectively. On a practical level, schools should engage parents through sensitization programs to promote the value of boys' education, identify at-risk boys for mentorship and psychosocial support, and implement flexible learning models that accommodate boys involved in labor or family duties. Strengthening school-community partnerships and introducing early intervention mechanisms will further help reduce dropout rates and ensure boys remain in school.

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