

THE INFLUENCE OF FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION ON KENYA CERTIFICATE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION PERFORMANCE IN KENYA

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Abstract

The origin of Free Primary Education (FPE) can be traced back to the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights where basic education was recognized as a human right. The current FPE programme was launched in 2003 and it led to an overwhelming enrolment of pupils at the primary level of education. Such a soaring enrolment is feared to have compromised the Kenya Certificate Primary Education (KCPE) performance, which is a key indicator of quality education. The study therefore aimed at determining the influence of high enrolment on; the ability of teachers to offer quality instruction; learning resources; management of pupils' discipline and suggestion on how to improve FPE in light of KCPE performance. The paper assessed FPE on KCPE performance in Kaptama Division, Mt. Elgon District, Kenya. The researcher used descriptive survey design. A sample of 310 respondents consisting of 253 standard eight pupils, 40 teachers, 13 head teachers and 4 education officers was used. The main tools of data collection were a questionnaire and interview schedule. Document analysis was also used in the study. Data analysis involved the use of frequencies, percentages, tables, chart, graphs and description. The findings of the study established that implementation of FPE led to high enrolment which witnessed high pupil - teacher ratio and ill-discipline among pupils. It has also led to inadequate learning facilities (classrooms, desks and chairs), fewer tests for pupils which lack in content and depth and increased work load among teachers. This has in turn compromised KCPE performance. Constant inspection should be carried out by the Ministry of Education for the success of the programme.

Key words: free primary education, assessment, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education.

Introduction

According to USAID (2001), education is the key to sustaining democracies, improving health, increasing per capita income, and conserving environmental resources. In this context, education can be seen as an investment in human skills which help to foster economic growth, enhance productivity, contribute to national and social development, and reduce social inequality. Free Primary Education (FPE) is not a new phenomenon in Kenya. Vos, Bedi, Kimalu, Manda, Nafula & Kimenyi (2004) observe that since independence in 1963 the Kenya government has committed itself to providing education to all primary school age going children. UNESCO (2002) though notes that the original FPE can be traced back to the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights where article 26 stipulates that 'elementary' education shall be free and compulsory. Kenya is one of the 189 United Nations (UN) member states which have committed

themselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) whose second goal is to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE). The target is to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary school (RoK, 2005a). This re-affirms the commitment to provide Education For All (EFA) made by the same countries during the World Education Forum at Jomtein, Thailand, in 1990 and the Dakar Education Forum in 2000 (Kitamura, 2005). In the first two decades of independence the primary school level of education was characterized by non-enrolment, high dropout rates, low completion and transition rates, which could largely be attributed to the high cost of education that was worsened by the cost sharing policy that came into effect in 1980s (UNESCO, 2003).

Thus the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in her 2002 General elections campaigns promised FPE to its citizens. When it formed the government, NARC declared FPE in January 2003, as a fulfillment of one of the key pre-election pledges (Irin, 2006). The NARC government abolished the user charges in primary education and is committed to supporting FPE by providing instructional materials, teachers, and quality assurance services. This move resulted to an increase of about 1.3 million children in public primary schools in 2003 that translates to a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 104 percent (RoK, 2005b). At the same time, there has been an increase of over 130,000 KCPE candidates representing 24.35 percent since the inception of FPE; which strongly indicates that many school drop-outs have re-entered school at various levels of education (MoEST, 2006). In the face of increased enrolment, the quality of primary education is at jeopardy especially in schools with shortage of teachers and limited textbooks (MoEST, 2003a). Although the government's policy on FPE is laudable, its implementation is besieged by a multitude of challenges that include inavailability of physical facilities, school furniture, equipment and teachers (Vos et al, 2004). It is in light of this that the researcher assessed the influence of Free Primary Education on Kenya Certificate of Primary Education performance in public primary schools in Kaptama Division, Mt. Elgon District in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of FPE witnessed a drastic increase in enrolment, shortage of teachers, lack of clear guidelines on admission, delay in payment of funds and expanded roles for head teachers (UNESCO, 2005). World Bank Report (2003) on Kenya's educational development, one year after KANU's rule, adds that the school system was ill equipped to cope with increased demands for education hence intense competition for places leading to poor-quality teaching. The situation has been aggravated by the fact that since 1998, the government suspended the recruitment and employment of teachers except for replacements to cater for natural attrition (MoEST, 2003b). According to UNESCO (2005), HIV/AIDS pandemic is killing teachers quicker than replacements can be trained. In the face of increased enrolment, in public primary schools the above-mentioned factors conspire in diluting the quality of education and hence poor performance in KCPE. It is in light of this that the researcher assessed the influence of FPE on the performance of standard eight pupils in KCPE in public primary schools in Kaptama Division, Mt. Elgon District in Kenya.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of free primary education on KCPE performance in Kenya. The study was guided by the following objectives;

- i. To determine the influence of increased enrolment on the ability of teachers to offer quality education in public primary schools in Kaptama Division.
- ii. To assess the influence of FPE on learning resources in primary schools in Kaptama Division.

- iii. To determine how enrolment has influenced the management of pupils' discipline in public primary schools in Kaptama Division.

Literature Review

Quality of Teaching

According to Nasibi (2003), teaching is a process that facilitates changes in learners. A teacher therefore is considered not to have taught until a pupil has learned. Similar views are held by Brown (1992) who observes that a person might as well say he has sold when no one has bought, as he says he has taught when no one has learned. Abagi and Odipo (1997) associate quality of education with students' levels of academic performance in national exams. According to them, if the student's achievement is low then the school is purported to be of low quality. Booker (1978) is of the opinion that in higher achieving schools, teachers tended to use more instructional activities in which groups of students competed as teams rather than individuals. Adams (1971) also points out that low quality teaching can result in frustration and boredom of the learner who may eventually drop out of school.

In a comparative study of low and high achievement among pupils in rural and urban schools in Malawi, Salamba (1983) found out that teachers qualification affect pupils' performance. UNESCO (2005) reports that 30 million teachers are needed to achieve EFA by 2015, and as a result, some countries are recruiting low paid and poorly trained 'voluntary' teachers. The Kenya government should therefore move faster in addressing the inadequacy of the teaching force since according to Mwai (2011) at the present Kenya has a deficit of 80,000 teachers in primary schools. Thus the government had resolved to hire 20,000 annually on contract for three years to address the 80,000 deficit.

Learning Facilities

Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1987), reporting on the study carried out on the effects of a school's physical facilities on the performance of standard seven pupils in examinations, in Malawi, established that availability of such facilities had a direct link with the performance of pupils. Such findings are in consensus with Heinemann's (1984) study which evaluated the impact of availability of textbooks in the teaching of Pilipino, mathematics and science and found out that there exists a positive relationship between the availability of textbooks and academic performance.

According to the Presidential Press Service (December 9, 2004), the implementation of FPE intended to abolish all levies for tuition in primary education and the government development partners were to meet the cost of instructional materials, teachers' salaries, co-curricular activities and wages for critical non-teaching staff. The parents were expected to refurbish the existing learning facilities. But then, there is a diminished community support to the programme following a misconstrued notion by the parents that provision of learning resources is solely the duty of the government (RoK, 2005c).

Many countries that have had a longer experience of FPE, like Malawi, which implemented the policy in 1994 face many challenges. A committee which was appointed in November 2005 to probe on the poor performance of pupils in examinations pointed out that the increased number of candidates and examination centers overstretched the human resource available to the extent that security, reliability and validity of the examinations has been comprised (UNESCO, 2005).

Available literature indicates that many African countries including Kenya, lack enough funds for procuring adequate learning facilities. In Kenya, the remuneration of teachers ac-

counts for 71 per cent of the whole recurrent education budget (RoK, 2005c). Kess (2005) also observes that the country needs money to pay the teachers; there are not enough textbooks, not enough space in schools, the infrastructure in the majority of schools is falling apart and not safe. Many of the schools do not even have the necessary sanitation facilities which are needed by the girls.

Pupils' Discipline

The implementation of FPE policy opened floodgates to enthusiastic learners who had been kept out of schooling. Unprecedented high enrolment is therefore the biggest challenge facing the countries embracing FPE. In Malawi, UNESCO (2005) reports that it is difficult to discipline a class of 200 children giving rise to rowdy behavior. In Kenya, it is trickier to handle tens of thousands of 'over-age' and street children who wish to return and complete their primary education and often bully young and brighter ones (UNESCO, 2005).

Methodology of Research

The study used a descriptive survey design. The design was used to investigate the current situation in Kaptama Division with regard to the effects of FPE on KCPE performance. Cohen and Morrison (2000) observe that the intention of a survey research is to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of existing conditions. Thus the design enabled the researcher to obtain the respondents opinions on the effects of FPE on KCPE performance in Kaptama division.

The study comprised 253 standard eight pupils, 53 standard eight teachers, 14 head teachers and 4 education officers from Kaptama Division, Mt. Elgon District. Standard eight pupils were targeted because they are consumers of the FPE while their teachers are implementers of the programme. The head teachers and education officers were chosen since they supervise the implementation of the programme. Thus, stratified random sampling technique was used to select the standard eight pupils while Purposive sampling technique was used to select seven top schools and seven bottom performing schools in KCPE. Purposive sampling technique was also used to select the Education Officers in the division. This is because they are the ones who supervise the implementation of the government policies in education within the divisions.

The study used an interview schedule, observation schedule, document analysis and a questionnaire to collect data from the education officers, head teachers, teachers and pupils. The questionnaires contained both open ended and closed-ended questions that were used to obtain a variety of information from pupils and their teachers. The interview schedules were used with the head teachers and education officers. Observation schedule was also used and this accorded the researcher time to think and make opinion on what was observed in terms of availability and adequacy of the teaching-learning resources. In document analysis, the researcher analyzed the type, purpose and length of tests that were administered to pupils and sought comments about it from the education office. The data generated by the study was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics. It was then presented by use of frequencies, percentages, tables and graphs.

Results of Research

The study sought views from education officers, head teachers, class eight teachers and their pupils. Data was obtained on the effects of increased enrolment in the following areas; KCPE performance, teachers' workload, tests administered per term, teaching methods, pupils' discipline and adequacy of learning resources.

Results of the Education Officer's Response on KCPE Performance

The research instruments sought to find out the KCPE performance in Kaptama Division. The findings of the study are indicated in Figure 1.

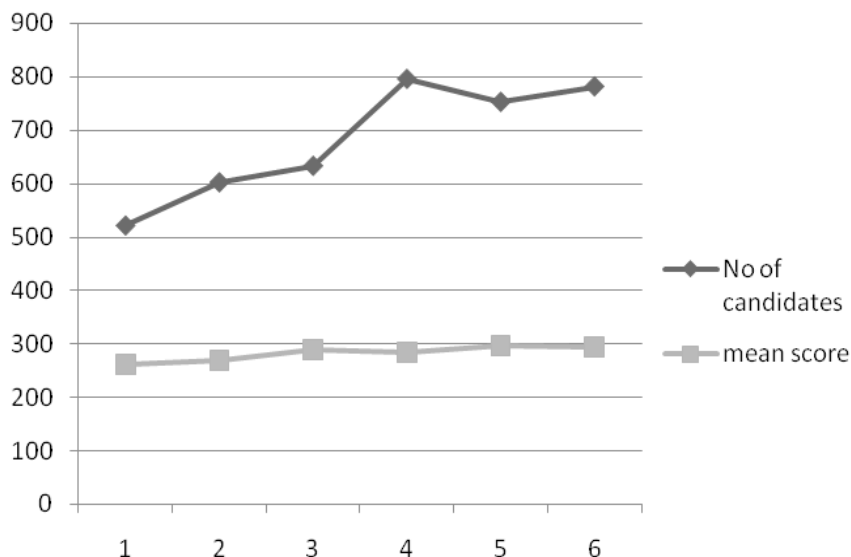


Figure 1: A line graph showing KCPE mean score and the number of candidates in years 2005- 2010.

The data shown in Figure 1 above indicate that the number of candidates increased from 2005 to reach a peak of 796 in 2008. At the same time, the general performance of the division does not show a steady improvement in KCPE.

Findings on Teachers and Head Teachers' Workload

The study therefore sought views from respondents on teachers' workload from the teachers and head teachers respectively. Workload was in this case assessed by the number of lessons per week, teacher- pupil ratio and other responsibilities before and after the introduction of FPE.

Table 1. A Table showing distribution of teachers and head teachers responses on workload (N=53).

Workload	Teachers responses		Head teachers responses	
	N	%	N	%
Increased	40	100	13	100
Constant	0	0	0	0
Decreased	0	0	0	0
Total	40	100	13	100

The findings in Table 1.0 reveal that all teachers (100%) concur with head teachers (100%) that high enrolment occasioned by FPE increased; their number of lessons per week, the teacher-pupil ratio and other responsibilities. Teacher- pupil ratio was found to be 47:1 which means that the high pupil-teacher ratio in all the sampled schools exceeded the recommended ratio of 40:1. Kenya Paul (2008) observes that increased workload; congestion in classes, unbalanced Pupil-Teacher ratio and poor infrastructure has affected the quality of education with some parents moving children to private schools. This implies that the increased workload and the high pupil-teacher ratio are likely to impact negatively on KCPE performance.

Tests Administered per Term

Pupils, teachers and head teachers responses on the number of tests administered per term were also sought. The results are tabulated in table 2.

Table 2. A Table showing distribution of respondents based on tests given per term (N=253).

Number of tests	Pupils responses		Teachers responses		Head teachers responses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 2	81	40.5	10	25	0	0
3-4	100	50.0	20	50	8	61.5
5-6	19	9.5	10	25	3	23.1
Above 6	0	0	0	0	2	15.4
Total	206	100	40	100	13	100

The results in Table 2 indicate that most schools sampled administer tests to their pupils three to four times per term according to pupils (50%), teachers (50%) and head teachers (61.5%). It was revealed that this was much lower than what the testing policy that most schools prescribe (six times). The tests that were sampled and taken to the divisional education office for advice in their depth (content), purpose and length were found to be lacking in all the three aspects. Most papers lacked focus and were too short for the level of pupils they were meant to test. The education office found out that most of the papers were below standard and were set with an aim of being easier to mark. Thus a lack of adequate testing by teachers might be a possible contributor to poor performance in KCPE in Kaptama division. It is therefore clear that high pupil-teacher ratio, low quality tests and inadequate testing of pupils' compromises quality of education.

Distribution of Teachers and Head Teachers According to Teaching Methods

Table 3. A Table showing distribution of teachers and head teachers according to teaching methods (N=53).

Teaching methods	Teachers responses		Head teachers responses	
	N	%	N	%
Lecture	23	57.5	4	30.8
Discussion	8	20	4	30.8
Demonstration	2	5	2	15.3
Other teaching methods	7	17.5	3	23.1
Total	40	100	13	100

The data in Table 3 reveal that lecture method is commonly used while demonstration method is least applied. 57.5% of the teachers and 30.8% of Head teachers reported that the lecture method of teaching was commonly used due to the increased number of pupils and increased workload. The least used method is demonstration according to teachers (5%) and head teachers (15.3%). Some of the teachers (17.5%) and head teachers (23.1%) observed that they did not only use one method of teaching but a combination of many teaching methods. The use of the lecture method by many teachers limits a closer interaction between pupils and teachers which is necessary for the provision of quality instruction. This also limits the chances of integrating various child-centered techniques in instruction delivery, which is a relevant ingredient to quality learning.

Results of Head Teachers' Response on KCPE Performance

A majority of head teachers indicated that majority of the schools had a mean score of between 200 and 250 since 2005 to 2010. None of the schools has ever attained a mean score higher than 300 marks. The results of the head teachers' responses are shown in table 4.

Table 4. A table showing head teachers' responses on KCPE performance (N=13).

Year	Below 200		200-250		251-300		Above 300	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2005	0	0	9	69.2	4	30.8	0	0
2006	1	7.7	8	61.5	4	30.8	0	0
2007	4	30.8	6	46.2	3	23.1	0	0
2008	1	7.7	8	61.5	4	30.8	0	0
2009	2	15.4	7	53.8	4	30.8	0	0
2010	0	0	7	53.8	6	46.2	0	0

The result shown by the data in table 4 indicate that most of the schools had an average mean mark of between 200 -250 (53.8%), in the last six years. It can also be observed that no school has ever had a mean score of above 300 marks (0.0%).

Pupils, Teachers and Head Teachers' Response on the Extent to which the Learning Materials are Adequate for all the Pupils Enrolled

The study sought to establish pupils, teachers and head teachers' response on the extent to which learning materials are adequate for all the pupils enrolled in schools. The results of responses are contained in table 5.

Table 5. A table showing pupils, teachers and head teachers response on the extent to which learning materials are enough for all the pupils enrolled in schools (N=253).

Learning resources	Pupils response				Teachers' response				Head Teachers' response			
	Adequate		Inadequate		Adequate		Inadequate		Adequate		Inadequate	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Classrooms	105	52.5	95	47.5	0	0	40	100	0	0	13	100
Desks	35	17.5	165	82.5	0	0	40	100	3	23.1	10	76.9
Chalk Boards	88	44	112	56	0	0	40	100	4	30.8	9	69.2
Text Books	30	15	170	85	0	0	40	100	5	38.5	8	61.5
Exercise Books	0	0	200	100	0	0	40	100	5	38.5	8	61.5
Teaching Aids	100	50	100	50	0	0	40	100	2	15.4	11	84.6

The findings on table 5 established that resources provided were adequate for all the pupils in school. For instance, the least provided learning resource according to pupils was exercise books (100%) and head teachers cited classrooms (100%). The teachers` observed that learning materials, classrooms (100%), desks (100%), chalk boards (100%), text books (100%), exercise books (100%) and teaching aid (100%) are not enough for all the pupils. None of the schools sampled had a library. According to the responses expressed by pupils, teachers and head teachers, inadequate learning resources have led to a drop in KCPE performance. The parents were expected to refurbish the existing learning facilities. But then, there is a diminished community support of the programme following a misconstrued notion by the parents that provision of learning resources is solely the duty of the government.

Teachers and Head Teachers` Responses on Pupils` Discipline

The teachers and head teachers were also asked to give their opinions on whether more and more pupils were getting ill-disciplined in their school. The following table 6 gives a summary of the teachers` and head teachers` responses.

Table 6. A table showing the distribution of teachers and head teachers` responses on pupil discipline (N=53).

Discipline level	Teachers responses		Head teachers responses	
	N	%	N	%
Discipline has improved	0	0	3	23.1
More pupils are getting ill-disciplined	40	100	10	76.9
Total	40	100	13	100

According to the findings of the study, high enrolment led to more and more pupils were becoming ill-disciplined in schools. FPE programme never had a clear admission criterion and as result pupils of diverse educational background joined school. The head teachers do not supervise pupils closely as before because of expanded role of managing FPE funds. 100% teachers and 76.9% head teachers sampled agreed that a majority of the Pupils` discipline had deteriorated. For instance, according to class registers, there were previously fewer cases of absenteeism as compared to the situation after the introduction of FPE. According to the teachers the numbers of suspensions have also increased significantly as a result of bullying in school mostly involving the over age students.

Pupils, Teachers, Head Teachers and Education Officer Suggestions on Ways of Improving the FPE Programme

The researcher also sought the suggestions of pupils, teachers, head teachers and education officer on ways in which the FPE programme can be improved. Their suggestions on ways of improving FPE programme are contained in table 7.

Table 7. A table showing distribution of pupils, teachers, head teachers and education officer according to suggestions (N=254).

Suggestions	Pupils response		Teachers response		Head teachers response		Education officer response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
More teachers	100	50	21	52.5	7	53.8	1	100
Remunerations	2	1	8	20	2	15.4	0	0
Provisions of funds	18	9	5	12.5	3	23.1	0	0
Extra tuition	40	20	2	5	0	0	0	0
Boarding facilities	40	20	4	10	1	7.7	0	0
Total	200	100	40	100	13	100	1	100

Table 7 indicates that for the success of FPE, more teachers should be employed with pupils (50%), teachers (52.5%), head teachers (53.8%), and education officer (100%) agreeing on the same. Other views given included; better remuneration of teachers, increase funding for procuring more educational facilities, provide boarding sections for candidates and extra tuition for weak pupils.

Discussion

The government's key concerns on FPE include quality and relevance, and internal and external efficiencies within the education system. Despite this the overall performance in the schools in Kaptama division is below average and has declined in the last seven years since the new education policy of FPE. The study findings are in consensus with the study of Eshiwani (1983) that, lack of frequency in testing and marking pupils work by teachers contributes to poor levels of performance. The study found out that teachers are overwhelmed with work because of the increased number of students in schools. This is so because when students are joining school due to FPE, not enough teachers are being employed by the government to correspond with the enrolment. Sifuna, (2005) observe that overcrowded classrooms and overburdened teachers are likely to negatively affect the quality of education being offered.

The study also found out that the most commonly used teaching method in schools is the lecture method. Demonstration and discussion methods are also used but most teachers preferred the lecture method due to the increased number of pupils and increased workload. This method of teaching has a lot of limitations in the provision of quality instruction especially if used on primary school pupils where a closer interaction between the pupils and teachers is necessary.

The study findings revealed that discipline in school has declined considerably due to lack of a clear admission criterion, which concurs with an assessment report by UNESCO (2005), which observed that over-age pupils often bullied young ones. Thus through FPE's policy of over age admission, discipline in schools has deteriorated leading to falling academic standards. Yieke, (2006) also observes that congested classrooms, limited physical facilities and shortage of qualified teachers has negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning on one hand and contributed to indiscipline in schools on the other.

The study found out that many parents thought that with the introduction of FPE all school levies were to be shouldered by the government. But this was not the case. According to RoK (2005c) the implementation of FPE was intended to only abolish tuition fee in public primary schools. The government and its development partners were only to meet the cost of instructional materials, teachers' salaries, co-curricular activities and wages for critical non-teaching staff while the parents were to meet the costs of other non-discretionary items. But due to scarcity of finances by the government it has led to inadequate provision of the teaching learning materials which are essential for attainment of any good results in KCPE.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that following the implementation of Free Primary Education, the teachers' workload increased, most schools administer three to four tests per term while the lecture method is the commonly used mode of instruction. Introduction of FPE also resulted in high enrolment. Since the introduction of FPE more and more pupils have become ill-disciplined in schools. Learning resources have also become inadequate.

The study therefore recommends that more teachers should be employed to reduce the increased teachers' workload so that teachers can effectively attend to pupils. More funds should also be allocated to schools by the government to procure more teaching-learning resources. The NGOs and international partners should financially support Free Primary Education for the success of the programme. Lastly the study recommends that constant inspection should be carried out by the Ministry of Education for the success of the programme.

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