

REFORM AGENDA AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN KENYA: CIRCA 21st CENTURY

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Abstract

This study examined the reform Agenda and the educational policy in Kenya with regard to the secondary school sector in Eldoret municipality. The study was based on the social systems theory as advanced by Newstrom (1993). The research adopted an exploratory survey design. The target population was the principals in secondary schools, the student governing council, teachers and parents. The sample was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation schedule. Descriptive statistics, (percentages, frequency distribution tables and graphic representations) were used in data analysis and interpretation of data. The significance of the study lies in the fact that reform agenda in education with regard to educational policy is aimed at creating equal opportunity for all learners in Kenya. The study findings revealed that the education opportunities at secondary school level are unevenly distributed, ranking of schools based on performance create discrimination. The admission criteria have created a rift rather than promote unity, and that affirmative action in the education sector has led to inequalities. The study concludes that, the government of Kenya needs to redirect some public resources for education from the wealthiest people to the poor population. Concludes that unless the regional differences are considered educational policies will always replicate social injustices.

Key words: education, policy, social injustices, regional disparity.

Introduction

Education is always deemed to be one of the policy areas contributing to social development by equipping society with educated manpower and human resource for the well-being of the local economy. Nevertheless, education can also be a powerful tool to exacerbate the problem of social inequality. Proper education ought to do the opposite of this; namely to help make man concerned with all sorts of political problems and able to effectively deal with governments as well as create knowledge from information and use it to create for himself a meaningful career both as an individual and as an effective citizen of his society. Education ought to produce informal and participating citizens with an operative understanding of the political system pertaining to their country (Adea,2003)

The provision of quality education and training has been a central policy issue in Kenya since independence in 1963, with the Government of Kenya (GoK) devoting a substantial portion of its resources to education. Public expenditure on education now accounts for 30% of total government expenditure; and, as a result Kenya has a comprehensive network of over 52, 000 educational institutions (19, 496 pre- and primary, 3, 999 secondary, 55 tertiary) that provide impressive coverage and access to education. Adult literacy rates have almost quadrupled, from 20% in 1963 to 76% in 1997, and the average person in the working-age population (age 15-64) has about 6 years of formal education. Kenyan education is based on an 8-4-4 system introduced in 1985: eight years in primary school, four years in secondary and four in tertiary education. The gross enrolment rates are: Pre-primary-32%, Primary- 104%, Secondary- 22%, Tertiary-3%. Owing to the steady decrease in enrolment rates the primary level GER dropped to about 87 % in 2000 from 105 % 1989. In response the new the National Rainbow Coalition

(NARC) government abolished the cost-sharing policy and declared Free Primary Education (FPE) in January 2003. The implementation of FPE led to an influx of 1.3 million more children in schools, and enrolment climbed to 7.2 million pupils (Bedi et al, 2002).

Capitation grants to cater for the costs of providing teaching and learning materials and support services in secondary schools has alleviated some problems. That Kenya has made enormous progress in education quantitatively- increased number of schools and students- is not in doubt. However, declining completion rates, increased school drop-out, reduced quality are issues we cannot ignore. Relevance of education and inadequate financial and management capacities has increased public concern. Despite the increased expenditure on education and the introduction of FPE, Kenya is far from achieving full school enrolment for both girls and boys. Of those who do attend primary school, the majority does not complete the primary cycle with only 55% of boys and 35% of girls entering standard 8, and enrolment and completion rates are continuing to fall, especially for girls. In addition there are questions about the quality of education given that the National Curriculum has remained unchanged for some time, class sizes are generally 40 plus, and the teaching style is generally talk, chalk and learning by rote. In order to revitalize education and training the Government appointed a "Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya" in May 1998. The Commission which adopted a comprehensive "multi-strategic approach" to facilitate the participation of as many Kenyans as possible in the inquiry released its report (popularly referred to as the Koech Report) in March 2000 (GoK/MOES&T, 2001).

As a result of the Koech report, subsequent dialogue and a review of the education sector, the NARC government that came into office in the December 2002 elections recognized that inadequate policy and legal frameworks had negatively affected the development of quality basic education in Kenya. In one of its first actions the NARC government introduced the FPE policy and embarked on a variety of policy reforms as reflected in its Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). These reforms aimed at achieving the goal of quality *Education For All* (EFA) by 2015, includes a decentralization policy involving major changes in the structural arrangements for the delivery of education services. The changes represent the response by the GoK to the challenge of ensuring that the education system addresses national concerns about relevance, quality, access, and enhanced service delivery (GoK/MOES&T, 2003). That is the reason why this study sort to establish the reform agenda with regard to the education policy.

Methodology of Research

This was an exploratory study. The study employed descriptive survey design. This was dictated by the nature of this exploratory study, which primarily involved establishing the reform agenda with regard to the education sector primarily the secondary schools in Kenya. This study was carried out in an Eldoret municipality in the rift valley province, Kenya. The unit of analysis comprises of the principals, the teachers, the students and parents. Questionnaires, interviews and observation methods were used to obtain data for this study.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Sampling is a process of selecting a number of cases from a population such that the selected group contains all the elements representative of the characteristics found in the entire group (Orodho, 2005). The simple random sampling process was used. The list and number of secondary schools in the district were obtained from the DEO's office in Eldoret town and half of them were selected to participate in this study. From each of the participating schools the BoG and PTA chairpersons, principal, twelve (12) students from the governing council and eleven (11) teachers were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling, according to Jacobs (2006, as cited by Thilapi, 2011), sought to select particular subjects from

the population that was representative and provide maximum insight and understanding about the research questions. Information-rich cases were considered those from which the researcher could learn a great deal. The sample size to be used was fifty percent of the total population as advocated by Best and Kahn (1998).

The sample size was as follows:

Table 1. Sample Size.

Respondents	Target population	50 percent	Sample size
Principals	30	0.5	15
BoG and PTA	60	0.5	30
Teachers	330	30	99
SGC	480	30	144
Total	902		452

Source: Author (2012)

Data Collection Instruments

In order to get data for this study, the researcher used questionnaires and interviews. For the selected schools the questionnaires were administered to the teachers, the BOG chairpersons and PTA. The interview was administered for the head students (the SGC). Interviews were carried out to validate the information in the questionnaires and to give more in-depth insights on the adoption of the reform agenda with regard to secondary school in Kenya.

Results of the Research

Table 2. Reform Agenda in the secondary school education sector.

Statement on reform Agenda with regard to secondary school education	Principal (agreed)	Teachers (agreed)	B.O.G and P.T.A (agreed)	Student Governing Council (agreed)	Dissemination, %
1. Educational opportunities are unevenly distributed	15 (100%)	99 (100%)	30 (100%)	144 (100%)	100
2. Ranking of secondary schools creates disparity of attitudes about the schools	10 (75%)	99 (100%)	15 (50%)	140 (98%)	100
3. The form one admission policy has created a difference in attitude.	9 (73%)	78 (78%)	15 (50%)	120 (90%)	100
4. Affirmative action in the education sector has enhanced inequality in the education sector	15 (100%)	99 (100%)	30 (100%)	144 (100%)	100
Total					453

Source : Field data, 2012

Regional Imbalances and Education Opportunities

The findings revealed regional imbalances in terms of educational opportunities. All (100%) of the respondents, namely the principals, teachers, B.O.G and P.T.A representatives and the student Governing council admitted to this,

Education has promoted regional imbalance for example educational opportunities in Kenya are unevenly distributed. According to Thompson (1981) the spread of education following its introduction reflected different rates of social and economic change, such as growth of urban centres and development of cash crop agriculture which made schooling meaningful to people in different areas and communities. Schools are more developed and better equipped in the urban centres and former white highland than in the northern part of the country which is semi-arid. The uneven distribution of opportunities for the acquisition of education by different ethnic, religious, regional, status or gender groups has added a new dimension to other more fundamental inequalities and because education construed the principal means of the benefits offered by national development has made those other different and inequalities sharper and more significant than they might otherwise have been (Thompson, 1981). Equal opportunities policies for example are often paper exercises open to criticism for creating the impression that something is being done while at a day-to-day level no action change is evident.

There are of course many reasons for the uneven spread of educational opportunities, among them the obvious ones of geographical position and demographic characteristics. It is evident that educational opportunities in Africa were neither equitably distributed between different regions and sections of the population, nor are they evenly utilized. A child's chance of entering primary school depends on where he is brought up. During the colonial period the indigenous African child suffered a serious handicap in comparison with settler populations in terms of the number of school places available, the quality of teaching provided and the opportunities for higher and specialized training. Education differences have led to the claim that people from particular regions dominate the public services, and fears by advantaged groups that political democracy would involve being controlled by larger groups.

The Jointed Admissions Board ought to consider admitting students to the strategic courses in the universities based on regions to allow all regions to have all the professionals. This view is further supported by Thompson (1981) when he states that an early advantage in terms of educational opportunity tends to reinforce itself since not only does the possession of education enable a community to benefit more readily from further educational opportunities but it puts that community in a stronger position to demand those further opportunities. Consequently the opportunity gap between an advantaged and disadvantaged group tends to widen.

Ranking of Secondary Schools in Kenya

When asked whether the ranking of secondary schools has created a disparity of attitude about schools the response was as follows; 10 (75%) of the principals agreed, 99 (100%) of the teachers agreed, 15 (50%) of the B.O.G and P.T.A agreed and 140 (98%).

Today there is massification of education which has greatly compromised the inculcation of values and life skills to the students. The result is that schools and teachers are faced with enormous challenges of indiscipline which manifest itself in form of violent strikes and cheating in the examinations. Even more effective as a catalyst is a daily experience at the chalk-face when teachers have to cope with the indiscipline of students, poor motivation to work, inadequate performance in public testing procedures, and increased truancy (Bentauet et al., 2004). Such considerations are pre-disposing schools to some re-thinking. A system of education that ... uses those scores for such stakes decisions as grade promotions and high school graduation

(and) rules out the possibility of discussing students learning in terms of cognitive and intellectual development, in terms of growth, in terms of social and emotional development. It is as if the 'whole child' has become a stick figure and not an individual (Fullan, 2001).

The Teachers actually care about mean scores and not about student welfare hence push them for the attainment of targets. Everyone knows that we live in a market economy and teachers must accept this and operate within its constraints, preparing the young for this world-tough consumerist, competitive, information and skills oriented. Those who want will still be able to pursue leisure interests, but the serious work of school must not give a high priority to this (G.O.K, M.O.E.S.T, 2005). Education cannot be value-free since undue influence of the young in certain directions rather than in others is inevitable. Rather than being at the mercy of chance, teachers need to be aware of the possibility of what they want to convey, and as far as possible should be drawn into this awareness otherwise, they are simply being either conditioned or indoctrinated.

Education is not for selfish and irresponsible personal development. Schools must instill a sense of shared purpose among the nationals of the state if society has to exist. Society is only possible through the free consent of the individual comprising it and is therefore authentically an association of human freedoms which champion selfless by accepting self-sacrifice, obedience and common welfare. Education should be for individual fulfilment and to equip man with knowledge, moral virtues, strength and judgment, power and the spiritual heritage in his nation.

Admission Criteria into the Secondary Sector

On the criteria of admission with regard to the secondary school admission policy, the respondents agreed that the policy created varied attitudes. This was at principals 9 (73%), Teachers 78 (78%), B.O.G and P.T.A 15 (50%) and the student governing council 120 (90%).

The educational changes introduced over the years have contributed to social injustice. This is because the introduction of certain policies only served to divide the country along regional, elite and ethnic lines which served the political class. For example the introduction of the admission quota in the secondary schools served to make students loyal to their communities and not the nation. In Kenya, this is achieved through the quota system used during the selection of students in secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Ominde commission had recommended a quota system of 80% from locality and 20% from other regions and by 1990 the policy was 85% from locality and 15% from other regions. The argument behind this policy was to promote access to education among the students from those areas perceived to be lagging behind in development. Mixing of students in secondary and higher institutions of learning gives them an opportunity to view themselves as belonging to one nation. The hope of every nation has been that young people may be effectively socialized into the national culture or made aware of the desirability of maintaining the national political framework through the formal education they may receive. Deliberate mixing of pupils from various cultural and regional backgrounds with a national school system may generate mutual understanding and respect and promote a common national outlook (Thompson, 1981).

The other effect of this policy was the collapse of schools in certain areas for example Garbatula secondary school and poor performance in national examination. Accessibility to institutions of learning should be equal to all Schools having a very positive influence for unity. In pre-independence days, schools played a highly important role in recruiting and socializing the leadership for national political organizations. It fostered the rise of the new politically oriented elite which was to demand the transfer of power from the colonial regime by equipping it with the means to challenge that regime on its own terms, notably by providing the intellectual basis for its position and the organizational concepts upon which effective political actions could be taken (Thompson, 1981, p. 55). Through bringing together men of high ability from many different cultural backgrounds to schools like Alliance High school, common educational experi-

ence helped to confirm in them to believe in themselves as the leadership elite and establish a foundation for working together in later life.

Affirmative Action and Inequalities in the Secondary Sector

On whether affirmative action in the education sector has enhanced inequality in the education sector has enhanced inequalities Principals, 15 (100%) agreed, Teachers 99 (100%), B.O.G and P.T.A 30 (100%) and SGC144 (100%) agreed to this. Schooling on the other hand has sought to make distinctions between individuals, to develop their individual talents, and has been instrumental whereby men are set apart from and placed in new relationships. In fulfilling this differentiating and a locative function, schooling has taken on an internally competitive nature and, despite efforts of educators to promote attitudes of service to others and respect for the less fortunate, it has helped economic forces to undermine the communalism and relative egalitarianism of most traditional societies. This has been possible through the use of examinations carried out at all levels of the education system in Kenya. The practice of charging fees has also favored the wealthy and urban dwellers against the peasant farmers and other rural folk whereas the traditional elites were on the whole well integrated with their societies, modern elites have tended to become increasingly remote and socially separate (Thompson, 1981).

The school's role is to essentially sift, sort and label a one as either a failure or success thus education process has helped to legitimize the inequalities in society by attributing them to variations in the qualifications and credentials gained in the formal system. There is no point having examinations if everyone passes them. So even if the adoption of effective techniques meant larger numbers of children gaining good exam results, this does not in itself tackle the ensuing qualification inflation (Davies, 1994).

The sound bites that seduce policy makers always emphasize claims of benefits, not the actual costs. As pointed out by Fullan (2001) the costs are great: a decline in the quality of what is taught and a new form of discrimination in the education of the poor and minority kids. But perhaps the worst effect is the silencing of two voices most important in understanding the real effects of standardization: teachers and children. Emphasis on schooling making a difference justifies the spending and draws attention away from structured inequalities in society.

The civil rights movements pointed out inequalities in the societies. Numerous national initiatives across the world focused on the disadvantaged. Fullan (2001) asserts that, the education system was thought to be one major societal vehicle for reducing one's practice was added the enormous difficulty on tackling the existing power structure and overcoming the prejudice and ignorance of ethnic, class, gender, and special differences of all kinds, nor is that the much evidence that the lives of the disadvantaged have improved, even in cases where since efforts to do so are in evidence. And where gains have been achieved it has been isolated cases seemingly guaranteed not to go to scale.

The world today increasingly requires educated citizens who can learn continuously, and who can work with diversity, locally and internationally. Education systems and its partners have failed to produce citizens who can contribute to and benefit from a world that offers enormous opportunity and equally complex difficulty of finding your way in it. The link between poverty and education is a modern construct, rooted in a post-World War II problematization of poverty and emergence of a discourse of poverty-as-deficiency, with development as its antithesis. This 'discovery' of mass poverty on a worldwide scale framed two-thirds of the world as poor, creating a new paradigm for looking at the world (Arnestein, 1969). "Thus poverty became an organizing concept" and improving the human condition through the 'development project' (Davis, L.1994) became a necessity, or universal truth - a transnational mission. The incorporation and institutionalization of poverty alleviation into western academic research, national agendas, and international development practice, can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s, when a significant strategy shift occurred within Robert McNamara's World Bank (Bedi et. al. 2002). By the mid-1970s, poverty had come to be viewed as a condition of people,

rather than states. The conception and treatment of poverty in academic circles and development institutions are continuously evolving, and with these, notions about the role of education in alleviating poverty concerns. Education has been viewed as a panacea for a number of human 'ailments.' This education-as-cure or education-as-intervention perspective has pulled education into the development formula. In addition, human capital theory has tied economic development tightly to education and has continued to be a prominent mainstream framework for poverty eradication.

Concurrently, state and non-state actors, local and international, have approached the provision of educational services from a human rights perspective. In September 2000, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to improving conditions for the poor through the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Among the eight key goals, the second is to ensure that, by 2015, all the world's children will be able to complete a full five-year course of primary schooling. This education-as-right perspective is prominent in international development rhetoric and has been used to wrap national economic agendas and geo-strategic interests of donor nations in (the more palatable form of) human rights clothing. However, as education develops quantitatively, its quality varies a great deal in China. Like other developing countries, the fiscal difficulties confronting the government pose significant restrictions to improving the quality of education. Even as the demand on public resources to support education grows, governments also face compelling demands to address issues such as disease, natural disaster, and pollution. It is not realistic to rely entirely on tight government budgets to conduct interventions to improve school quality. This urges education policy makers to seek alternative sources, including private resources, to finance education and to re-examine the allocation of funds for education (Bowe and Ball, 1992).

Many important educational decisions are related to the costs of schooling. Information on costs is necessary to monitor resource allocation over time, to diagnose the functional status of the education system, and to evaluate the efficiency in resource utilization (Bentaouet et.al., 2004). Specifically, costs of education refer to the resources used in the production of education services. They include not only public expenditure on education, but also private resources invested in education. According to Bowe et.al. (1992), private resources at the school level refer to those provided by household, individuals, and the community support the production of educational services. Private resources are divided into three categories: direct private costs, private contributions, and indirect private costs. Direct private costs are defined as household educational expenditure related to a child's schooling, including tuition expenditure and non-tuition expenditure (such as spending on other school fees, textbooks and supplementary study guides, uniforms, writing supplies, school bag, transportation, and boarding). Private contributions refer to donations in the form of cash/gifts from parents, individuals, or the community to a school. Indirect private costs refer to the economic value of forgone opportunities of schooling. In order to improve educational quality, it is important to take private costs into consideration. Schools can use some of the direct private resources to employ interventions that enhance quality. Through examining the components of private costs, the government can encourage parents to invest more on items (reference books and other learning materials) directly related to student learning. Moreover, disparities in private resources in education among social groups may exacerbate educational inequalities among those groups. A better understanding of the variation in private investment in education will help decision makers design policies to mitigate educational inequality (Bowe and Ball, 1992).

Conclusions

It is ironic that although lower income families have fewer resources to spend on their children's educations, they still have a heavier economic burden than high-income families. Primary education in China is tuition-free and the fees are modest, but the results present some idea of the limits to the capacity of low-income households for educational expenditure. The

government may want to consider providing financial assistance to needy students and explore the feasibility of a student loan program. Despite substantial progress worldwide, millions of children, the majority of them girls, still do not have access to basic schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The majority of those children who are able to attend school often receive such poor quality education that they fail to acquire even the most basic skills of reading and writing. Even with increased government and donor funding and on-going reform efforts, the results in relation to quality, sharing responsibility and resource mobilization, though encouraging, have still not achieved critical mass. In order to consolidate and deepen positive developments in a context of limited economic, financial and human resources, it is essential to use every possible resource. One such resource is parents and communities, who as partners and beneficiaries of the education system can play a substantial role in tackling these challenges. With the trend towards education decentralization, greater transparency in Kenyan school systems and growing attention to quality beyond access, there are encouraging signs of increasing opportunities the education stakeholders to participate in education policy and decision and to make a difference in the quality of their children's education. Also, the government needs to redirect some public resources for education from the wealthiest people to the poor population. People who can afford the direct private costs should be encouraged to spend more, so that the additional public resources can be used to subsidize the poor families to ensure they have access to quality compulsory education, and that they are adequately represented in post-compulsory education in Primary School Enrolment in Kenya.

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