

JOURNEY TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL IN KENYA AT CROSSROADS? A CASE OF FREE SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Free Secondary Education introduced by the Grand coalition government in 2008 was a major leap in the right direction in Kenya's education system. It opened doors to millions of youths who had missed a chance to get education and improve their lives. This paper provides an international concept of Providing Education for All (EFA). It follows up the historical development of Secondary Education in Kenya since independence to date.

The paper endeavors to articulate the challenges which have hitherto emerged in implementing this popular programme which, if not addressed urgently, might undermine the gains made so far. The Free Secondary Education programme has overwhelming support from Kenyans and Africans in general; they see it as a potent instrument that can enable communities in the region to extricate themselves from object poverty, thus empowering them economically. It is therefore imperative for Kenyans to acknowledge that Free Secondary Education is not a luxury but a necessity for equitable social and economic development.

The paper is exclusively based on secondary documentary data.

Key words: *free secondary education, education for all, enrolment, teaching, learning, accessing and challenges.*

Introduction

Any country can invest in her people by reducing levels of illiteracy and raising literacy levels. From the time of independence in 1963, The Kenyan government has been struggling to expand its education system. This is derived from its desire to fight ignorance, poverty and disease; and the belief that every Kenyan child has the right of access to basic education and welfare provisions (Muhoho, 1975).

For the government to combat these three enemies, it has a duty to provide the youth in the country with the opportunity to take part in the socio-economic and political development of the country. The Kenyan government policy to provide free secondary education was in line with the wider international developments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, it thus started "...everyone has a right to education" (Fraser, 1975) The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, sparked off new energy towards serious commitment to education.

This was followed by the Ammam Mid-Decade Review of Education for All (1996) that reaffirmed the commitment to the Jomtien resolutions. Emphasis was on provision of basic education for all in less industrialized countries like Kenya. This review was later backed by the Dakar conference of 2000 that saw world leaders and experts declare the six goals of Education for All.

One of the EFA targets was to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. To achieve these goals, the governments, development agencies and the civic society organizations represented at the World Education Forum to mobilize strong national and international political commitment to EFA, develop national action plans and significantly invest in basic education among several other targets. This was further endorsed by the millennium development goals (MDGs) which among others targeted “to ensure that by 2015, all children will be able to complete full course schooling.

Free Secondary Education for Kenyan youths was one of the pre-election promises that the Orange Democratic Movement and Party of National Unity made. Later the Grand coalition government launched it in January 2008. Since then, millions of youths who had previously dropped out of school have turned up to enroll in various Forms.

The endeavour to delivering the pre-election pledge in Kenya has been a rough path to follow, it is clouded with uncertainty, while free secondary education has increased enrolment, it has posed a considerable number of challenges.

Historical Overview

Soon after attaining independence in 1963, Kenya has tried to make substantial expansions in her secondary education resulting in an increased participation by groups that previously had little or no access to schooling. The country has made several attempts to ensure that all its eligible children deserve to have education.

This was brought about by the realization that there was need to transform the socio-economic situation for her citizens. Education was seen as the main factor to bring about transformation. This is why the government committed substantial amount of funds to finance education.

In essence, free secondary education was geared towards providing equal education opportunities for all citizens. The argument was that the payment of school fees at secondary school level prevented a substantial proportion of youths from continuing with their education after primary school. The provision of free secondary education in Kenya was a major political milestone in the recent past.

Challenges of Implementing Free Secondary Education: Millions out of School

By 2009, 1.8 million eligible children were out of school despite the government's subsidy. The Ministry of Education Subsidizes tuition in secondary schools to the tune of Ksh. 10,265 per student. Such a subsidy was intended to reduce the cost of education and enable needy students access secondary education. Two years into the life of the initiative, fees continues to rise as secondary schools ignore the ministry guidelines. Much as the enrolment hit the ceiling after the government declared free secondary education (FSE), the drop out rate has been on the increase and the scenario is likely to worsen if parents continue paying levies.

On the surface, the Ksh. 200 the education ministry plans to chop off the Ksh. 10,265 annual subsidy per student may seem negligible-barely two percent of the amount the government is financing. However, the fact that parents and guardians are expected to subsidize

the government programme to the tune of Kshs. 1.5 billion, points to the possibility of an initiative headed for a collapse. Unesco predicts that Nigeria will have 7.6 million children out of school, while Ethiopia and Burkina Faso will have 1.1 million. Kenya and Niger will each have 900,000 children out of school. Of special mention is Tanzania, a country that is out-performing richer countries such as Nigeria. In a space less than a decade, Tanzania has reduced its out-of-school population from over three million to fewer than 150,000 (The Sunday Standard, Feb. 15 2009 Pg 6).

As the race towards 2015 intensifies, the challenge for many countries, Kenya included is not just to put pupils in school. "millions of children start school but drop out before completing secondary school" Therefore countries should embrace enrolment and completion rates.

There are other underlying factors responsible for eligible youths not attending secondary school such as congestion issues, staffing issues, socio-cultural issues, inadequate physical facilities, corruption and generally hostile learning environments.

Staffing Issues

There has been increased student-teacher ratio. Due to increased enrolment, more streams have been created leading to acute understaffing, these are real human resource implications for free secondary education. Such an issue can only be addressed by increased training and recruitment of teachers to fill the gaps and also replace the aging teachers and those who leave through natural attrition.

With the upsurge in enrolments, teachers are unable to give students individualized attention. This is one of the sticking and pressing issues in the implementation of FSE. A child is never a student without a tutor. This noble idea is almost sagging and collapsing in the hands of few over worked teachers.

Many teachers are now opting for shortcuts such as use of: Lecture method, assignments that are hardly corrected, dictation of notes, e.t.c. But in as much as the country is concerned with quantitative expansion in secondary education, quality should inform the policy initiatives in Kenya as much as quantity.

Physical Facilities

Free Secondary Education is facing considerable problems in regard to teaching and learning. Because of the high influx of students, there arose acute congestion in classrooms. Although the number of students almost doubled, the physical facilities in many school have remained constant.

This issue was further complicated by the governments ban on collection of funds through funds-drives. School Principals who ask parents and the public for money are reported to authorities and punished. The existing teaching and learning facilities have been overstretched. In this case the worst hit are girls and the physically challenged. Infrastructure in many public secondary schools is inadequate and deplorable.

Lack of physical facilities is threatening to impede the implementation of this splendid programme. It is standing in the way of quality and relevance of skills imparted to students. As enrolment in secondary schools soared, many secondary schools were not aware of all the challenges that came along with the increased enrolment. Many schools lacked basic teaching and learning facilities like books, libraries and classrooms with some classes remaining untaught not to mention the case of students with special needs not being catered for. With time, enrolments have reverted to the situations before.

Misconception of Free Secondary Education

When the Kenyan government undertook to provide free secondary learning, the understanding was that the government would take full responsibility for the secondary school budget. And therein lay the futility of giving false hope to parents.

Later, reality set in when the same government turned around to say that it had not undertaken to do everything. This called on parents to support the programme through meeting some expenses like meals and medical care for students. The Ministry failed to talk to parents and communities to honestly let them know that the government would not provide everything and guide them in their role in supplementing the government's efforts.

Discipline Issues

With the advent of free secondary education there was an unprecedented influx of students to school. Age was not a factor. Everybody, including street children and senior citizens of the country trooped to school. A point was made: the quest for knowledge had been hampered by the monister levies but a challenge was posed: Most of these students needed rehabilitation which is a slow process that needs a multi-sectoral approach that calls for collaboration between the government, communities, students, parents and key stakeholders in service delivery.

Consequently, teachers are obliged to spend more time assisting such students to settle down at the expense of implementing the laid down curriculum.

Poverty

The economic status of many people and communities in the country is bad. Most people here are enduring high levels of poverty which limits their capacity to invest in education. For instance, children from the poorest 20 percent of the households are less than half as likely to proceed to Form one as those from the richest 20 percent. In Kenya, rural children are less likely to complete their secondary education as their counterparts in urban areas owing to poverty.

Poverty impacts negatively on the girl-child's education as an estimated 22% of school girls miss four days in a month due to lack of necessities like sanitary towels. Others are forced to leave school to venture into manual jobs in order to fend for their siblings.

Harsh and Hostile Environments

High levels of insecurity in some parts of Rift Valley and North Eastern provinces hinder progress in education. This is due to tribal clashes over land or cattle raids, persistent clashes force teachers, parents and students to flee to safety, hence interrupting studies and wasting useful time that would otherwise have been used to cover the syllabus in time.

Participation of students has also been hampered by poor accessibility due to bad terrain in some districts. Enrolment in Arid and semi arid lands is quite low.

Social Cultural Issues

In many communities in Kenya, the girl-child continues being left behind as her counterpart; the boy-child advances in education. This is due to the socio-cultural perception that a boy is superior to a girl. Parents in these communities attach more value to the education of boys than that of girls and therefore invest more in the education of boys. In the case of

limited resources, preference for boys' education to girls' education by parents is common.

Girls are made to stay at home in order to take care of their younger siblings, many of which have been orphaned because of the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS. The Education Minister Prof. Sam Ongeru speaking during the international literacy day disclosed that in Kenya, of the 1.8 million children out of school, a whopping 57 percent were girls (Education news, Sept 25, 2009).

Under such a setting, the girl-child is unlikely to benefit from free secondary education. Girls have suffered discriminatory and cruel practices ranging from incest, rape, unemployment, bad paying labour intensive jobs and the worst of all, crushing poverty. In order to address socio-cultural practices such as early forced marriages, female genital mutilation and nomadism that prevail in some parts of the country, the Ministry concerned ought to implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education and stress the need for people to recognize that they have to change their attitudes, values and practices. There is also need for establishment of community based programmes to address cultural issues such as those listed here focusing on prevention of the girl-child being left behind in the face of deep-rooted cultural beliefs. Giving girls an opportunity will create a balance and bring out the essence of the initiative.

Corruption

News that the two year old subsidized secondary education program is facing hurdles due to corruption confirms what has been feared all along-that in as much as the initiative is noble, it's inception was based more on populist posturing than sound planning because it seems there is no solid policy on how to fund and manage the funds according to rules set by the government and donors to avert losses.

The free schooling programme in Kenya has been rocked by graft. The Department for International Development (DfID) a United Kingdom donor agency withdrew its support for free education programme citing theft of Ksh. 103 million meant to support the programme. (Daily Nation, Feb 19, 2010) This is proof that the Grand Coalition government in the country is helpless as far as taming corruption is concerned. High level graft poses threat that could derail the vision 2030 a development blue print. It also complicates the task of wooing sponsors to support the free school programme.

The latest Transparency International research findings on education have pointed to pervasive rot. It reveals that the Ministry of Education has consistently under-spent its allocations for development expenditure despite a steady increase in budgetary allocations over years. (The Standard, Feb 27, 2010)

Despite the loss of a large amount of money, more money will be spent covering up the corruption through toothless commissions; the government's typical response to problems in the country-millions of shillings spent on goose chases for perpetrators.

This rot runs from top to bottom. A study by the Ministry of Education blames poor accounting records in school for rise in corruption. Two years into the life of the initiative, there are cases where schools have not been using official government receipt books to acknowledge funds received while bank statements were not available in others.

Its Cost and Sustainability

At the time the Kenyan government was introducing free secondary education, it was already investing Ksh. 24 billion in secondary education every year. With the coming of this programme, it implied that the cost would automatically increase the amount from Ksh. 24 billion to an estimated Ksh. 45 billion.

Such a move has in the long run had an impact on taxation. Sourcing of funds to finance FSE is a real challenge. Our question is: Did those who proposed the plan consider all the costs and logistical challenges involved?

According to the public policy Research and Analysis, the country needed a whopping Ksh. 16.5 billion in 2008 to top up the Ksh. 24 billion that was already being spent on secondary education. It is estimated that free secondary education in Kenya is expected to gobble up Ksh. 72 billion in its fourth year of implementation.

Hurdles in Supervision of the Laid down Curriculum

For free secondary education to be implemented successfully, teachers and school administrators have to be supervised. This calls for the strengthening of the Quality Assurance and Standards department requiring Quality Assurance and Standards Officers to adequately monitor activities in schools to ensure availability of teaching documents and effective instruction.

In Kenya, the implementation of free secondary education has been hampered by inadequate education officers and Quality Assurance and Standards officers to supervise and provide direction in the implementation of the curriculum. The few officers available don't do much because they lack machinery like vehicles to enable them efficiently traverse the many secondary schools in the country.

Expanded Roles of Secondary School Principals

The secondary school principal is the chief accounting and procuring officer for the government funds. They are carrying out these duties despite the fact that they lack adequate training in accounting and record keeping (Daily Nation, April 11, 2005, P.4)

Conclusions

The Kenyan government did not carry out situation analysis prior to the implementation of free secondary education. The consequences are now glaring: lack of teachers and learning facilities and congestion in classes. What is required more is a systematic approach, not piecemeal inputs.

This was a matter of political expediency rather than a well thought out and planned programme. The quality of free secondary education as per now is not thrilling at all because at the end of the day, some secondary school leavers end up being semi-literate. Such will end up joining the ranks of the country's "lost Generation".

The Ministry of Education should wake up to the fact that counting eligible youths out of school is secondary, what counts is striving to remove barriers that bar them from accessing free secondary education. It should also come out and tell Kenyans how it plans to run this programme devoid of knee-jerk reactions that confuse and disorganize parents.

In spite of the challenges enlisted, every noble Kenyan should drum up support for this programme. The programme should be commended and effort made to address the challenges standing in its way. By highlighting these challenges is not to say that the programme was not tenable; it was an idea long overdue and which ought to have been implemented. The problem however was that of having been started in haste, a lot ought to have been done prior to and afterwards to support the programme for its sustainability. It was a case of the Ministry of Education climbing the stairs and chewing gum at the same time.

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TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH ON KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN FAMILY AS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper presents a new perspective on family as a possible community of practice using a transdisciplinary approach and the search window methodology with top-down and bottom up levels of knowledge. In a family as community of practice communication is facilitated by a flexible accessible structure (mutual engagement) between parents to children (top-down perspective) and children to parents (bottom-up perspective). In this mutual inform-action process parents through the mechanism of authority and collaborative relationships encourage learning as a central aspect of children's identity shaped by family participation. The children, through the mechanism of apprenticeship learn through sharing information and experiences. This process of mutual engagement leads to a shared understanding (joint enterprise) and new resources (shared repertoire) which are the building blocks of a community of practice.

Key words: *community of practice, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire, assertive, behavioral and collective family.*

Introduction

The research is focused on the nuclear family as a community of practice (CoP). The term of community of practice (CoP) is a relatively new one even if the development it describes is rather longstanding. The concept soon came to be identified with a paradigm shift of the learning experience in the context of social interaction within a group (Wenger, 1998). A growing number of groups and organizations set out to apply the principles of community of practice (CoP) in order to improve performance. The concept of community of practice (CoP) can be used to any group of people who share a profession, interest, or goal whether the group was created naturally as a result of its members' common concerns; formed specifically as a result of its members' goals; or simply given because of its members' affiliation. This paper takes a different approach to community of practice (CoP) by applying the concept to a special kind of group that exists as a result of genetics, affinity or co-residence. In this sense is presented a new perspective on the process of learning through the sharing of information and experiences in the nuclear family. The nuclear family plays a crucial role in the socialization of children through which they learn to become established members of the society. Socialization as legitimate peripheral participation through apprenticeships implies both a particular