



An Analysis of the Extent to which the Government Policies affect the Academic Performance of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Matete Sub County, Kakamega County Kenya.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 6 February 2019;

Received in revised form:
30 March 2019;

Accepted: 11 April 2019;

Keywords

Government Policies,
KCPE Performance.

ABSTRACT

The performance of pupils at the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in public schools in Kenya remains a challenge since the number of pupils performing poorly is still high. In Matete Sub County, the performance of pupils at KCPE has been declining from the year 2012-2015, with a mean of 2.48. Therefore, the objective of the study was to find out the extent to which government policies affect the academic performance of primary school learners in Matete sub county, Kakamega county. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study population comprised of 49 head teachers, 49 senior teachers, 75 standard eight class teachers, 1759 class eight pupils, and 1 Sub County Quality Assurance Officer. The study sampled 44 head teachers, 44 senior teachers and one sub-county Quality Assurance Officer who were selected through saturated sampling technique. Sixty-three class eight teachers were selected through simple random sampling technique. It also comprised 525 standards 8 pupils, who were selected through stratified sampling technique. Instruments for data collection were questionnaire, interview schedules, focus group discussions and document analysis guide. Face validity of the instruments was ascertained by experts in educational administration. Pilot study was carried out among 15 pupils, 5 head teachers, and 5 senior teachers. A Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.7 was found; hence the instruments were reliable. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data was transcribed and categorized on an on-going process as themes and sub themes emerge. The study showed that Government policies moderately affect academic performance with a mean of 3.39. Staffing policy as one of the government policy profoundly affected KCPE performance with a mean of 4.39.

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Introduction

Education is recognized by the United Nations as one of the basic human rights and considered to be instrumental to achieving social equality and higher economic growth (UNICEF, 1992). The need for better attainment of education was realized far back in 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand when some 150 organizations agreed to "universalize primary education and massively reduced illiteracy by the end of the decade" (UNESCO, 2009).

In 2000, ten years later, the international community met again in Dakar, Senegal, and took stock of many countries being far from having reached this goal. They affirmed their commitment to achieving education for all by the year 2015, and identified six key measurable education goals. The six goals are: to expand early childhood care and education, provide free and compulsory primary education for all, promote learning and life skills for young people and adults, increase adult literacy by 50%, achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015 and improve the quality of education. According to Jean-Claude Guillemard 2010, the principal actors in EFA are governments and civil societies at the National level.

The introduction of free primary education in January 2003, following the passing of children Act 2001, has led to vital educational achievements. Enrolment in public schools increased significantly from 5.9 million in 2002 to 6.9 million in 2003, a 17% increase. Despite FPE making it easier for pupils to access education, the performance at K.C.P.E has not improved. Mwendwa (2011), in her study found out that FPE has led to decline in academic performance. Her study however did not look at the extent other government policies affect performance, it only examined FPE. This is the knowledge gap which this study tried to establish. It is therefore clear that the major impact of FPE is on access since the learner's enrolment improved tremendously. But the higher number of learners constrained learning facilities and compromised standards of teaching, hence leading to decline in performance.

A comparison of pupil's performance in the sub-county in the years 2008-2009(before the introduction of FPE), Shows that the mean for the two years was 249.4 and 261 respectively (Kakamega County Education Director's office). With the introduction of FPE, the average mean performance of pupils for the years 2012-2015, remained at 248.4. This

implies that as policy, the government has to re-examine it with a view of streamlining the weak spots in it.

Another policy of the government as far as education is concerned is the re-admission policy on school girls who deliver. The policy of the government is that they should be re-admitted after delivery. Whereas the policy gives the pupil the second chance to pursue education, but it affects the performance of pupils. Shanigwa (2007), asserts that such learners tended to withdraw in class and were generally unable to participate in co-curricular activities, but were nonetheless able to compete with their peers in terms of their academic performance. Shanigwa's study dwelt on "educationally related challenges, faced by teenage mothers returning to school". This study endeavored to look at the extent this re-admission policy affects the academic performance of pupils as a knowledge gap.

Another national policy affecting the performance of pupils is employment of teachers. The government has trained many teachers in the recent past. Most of these teachers are not employed immediately on completion of their training. Employment takes over 5 years to be effected. On the other hand, most public schools do not have adequate teachers. Those who are there are overloaded with work hence affecting quality. Such a situation affects the motivation of teachers. According to the World Bank (1986) report, teacher satisfaction is generally related to achievement. Satisfied teachers would concentrate hence enhancing academic performance of pupils. This report concentrated on how quality of schools affects performance, but this study will explore other factors. It agrees with Watkins (2000) who observed that in developing countries, children learn in overcrowded classes. The advent of FPE aggravated the situation because the number of pupils has increased but employment of teachers is usually overlooked and given less priority by the government. Lidoro (2012), asserted that increased enrolment as a result of FPE has led to staff shortages in some schools. Staff shortages has led to increase in high pupil-teacher ratio. As a result of this, the teacher is not able to attend to the learners needs adequately, hence leading to poor performance. Lidoro's study however dwelt on "effects of FPE policy on teacher adequacy". It dwelt on how over enrolment as a result of FPE, has led to high pupil-teacher ratio. This study tried to examine the extent the government policy on staffing affects pupil's academic performance as appoint of departure from Lidoro's.

Another government policy that affects performance is the provision of sanitary towels. As a way of addressing the plight of the girl-child education, the government allocates funds towards the provision of sanitary pads to them. This policy should be included in the Children Act so that it is not just a favour for girls but necessary legislation should be put in place to make it more effective. According to Scott et al (2009), girls who are provided sanitary pads also reported an improved ability to concentrate in schools, higher confidence levels and increased participation in a range of everyday activities while menstruating. The study of Scott dwelt on "Impact of providing sanitary pads to poor girls in Africa. On the other hand, this study tried to establish the extent the provision of sanitary pads affects pupil's academic performance as a gap in Scott's study. Chebii (2012) also agrees that provision of sanitary ware is a major determinant in achieving gender parity in education in Kenya and there is need to consider it a significant factor in education policy planning. Chebii's study was on "how lack of sanitary towels

reduces school attendance. But this study looks at the extent this policy affects academic performance of pupils.

On repetition of classes, the policy of government is that, there should be no forced repetition of classes. Some schools force pupils to repeat classes to attain better grades. Rono(nd), observed that repetition policy in Tanzania has led to some of the drop out cases. This study endeavors to establish how the repetition policy affect the academic performance of pupils to address that literature gap. She further observed that repetition is an extensive phenomenon in low income countries. Government policies should be followed by tangible follow up activities and punitive measures for those who defy.

Research design and Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. Research design refers to all the procedures selected by the researcher to be followed for studying a particular set of questions or hypothesis. It spells out how the causal relationships between variables or phenomena are to be explored. According to Kothari (2003), research design constitutes the blue print for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. The major purpose of descriptive survey is description of the state of affairs as it exists. The study was carried out in Matete Sub County, Kakamega County. Matete Sub County was curved out of Lugari district in June 2009. It borders Lugari and Kakamega North sub-counties to the East, Bungoma East sub-county to the North and West and Kakamega North and south. The study population included 49 head teachers, 49 senior teachers, 75 class eight class teachers, 1759 class eight pupils, and one Sub County Quality Assurance Officer. Matete sub-county has 49 public schools. The grand study population was 1926 people.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The research population and sample selected is indicated in the sample frame below.

Sample Frame

Table 1. Showing the research population and the sample selected.

Category of Respondents	Target Population	Sample size F	%
DQAO	1	1	100
Class 8 Boys	840	260	30.1
Class 8 Girls	919	265	28.8
Standard C/Teacher	875	63	84.0
Senior Teachers	49	44	89.8
Head Teachers	49	44	89.8

Source: Researcher.

Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) was used to arrive at the sample size. Out of a total population of 1759 class 8 pupils, including 260 boys and 265 girls who were selected through stratified sampling technique. Out of a population of 49 schools in Matete Sub County 44 had reached class 8. Of these, 44 head teachers, 44 senior teachers and 63 class 8 teachers, were selected through simple random sampling technique using Krejcie and Morgan table. One Sub County Quality Assurance officer was selected through saturated sampling technique. This is a non- probability sampling procedure in which members of a target population selected is too few to make a sample out of them (Borg and Gall, 1996). The head teachers, senior teachers and Pupils who will be included in the pilot survey will be excluded from the study sample. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions and document analysis guide. Validity of a test is a measure of how consistent a test measures what it is supposed to measure (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008).

The framing of the questions will to a large extent determine the success of what the researcher is looking for, so the instruments have to be clear, hence there is need to consult experts to verify them before carrying out research. Experts in Educational Administration at Maseno University were consulted on the face validity of the tools to be used for data collection. Reliability is a measure of how consistent the results from a test are, after repeated trials (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). According to Kerlinger (1993) reliability refers to the consistency that instruments demonstrates when applied repeatedly under similar conditions. The reliability of the instruments was carried out by administering a pilot survey. Pilot survey was carried out among 15 pupils (8 boys, 7 girls) and 5 Head teachers representing between 1-10% of the target population (Kothari, 2004). Similar items were administered on the above respondents twice to gauge the consistency in their response. A Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.77 was found. The findings indicated therefore that the instrument was reliable.

Findings and Discussions

The study sought to establish the extent to which the government policies affect academic performance of pupils. The Head teachers were asked to rate the extent to which government policies affects academic performance of pupils. Their responses were as shown in Table below

From the Table 2, FPE was rated by Head teachers at a mean of 3.41, which means it moderately affects the academic performance of pupils. It can also be observed that 7 (15.9%) of the head teachers rated that it highly affects, 21 (47.7%) it affects, 3 (6.8%) it moderately affect, 9 (20.5%) it slightly affects while 4 (9.1%) it never affects. From the responses it's a clear that FPE affect academic performance. This finding is supported by senior teacher's interview schedule who agreed that introduction of free primary education (2003) has made it possible for learners even from low income families to access education." Cases of learners being interrupted by being sent home for fees have been minimized hence they concentrate on academic work", asserted one senior teacher. On the other hand, a good number of respondents i.e. 20.5% of the head teachers' felt that FPE, slightly affect pupil performance. Class teachers interviewed also agreed that the pupil teacher ratio is high hence hampers individual attention to learners needs. It implies that FPE has grey areas that need to be addressed so that it can lead to improved performance. This argument agrees with Ngugi (2007) who found out that students making transition to top schools are from private schools. The poor performance of public schools means that despite education being free, there are other factors that need to be addressed to make it successful, example the overcrowded classes.

However, Mwendwa (2011) in her study, found out that FPE has led to decline in academic performance. From the above views there seems to be disagreement on the impact of FPE on academic performance. A comprehensive study therefore needs to be done to assess the real impact of FPE on academic performance.

The senior teachers and class 8 teachers who were interviewed were of the opinion that FPE has made it possible for learners from low income families to access education. They however felt that the policy has led to overcrowding in classes hence affecting individual attention. FPE has had negative effects on education. One senior teacher says "learners are admitted irrespective of age and over age pupils do not concentrate and their performance is low compared to other pupils". Another senior teacher, observed that there is a delay in the disbursement of the FPE funds and this delay is affecting and delaying school programmes such as buying the teaching and learning materials.

From the focus group discussion, majority of pupils felt that FPE has had a positive effect on pupils' academic performance since the pupils are provided with the learning materials. A critical analysis of KCPE results before the introduction of FPE and after the introduction supports the views of most of the respondents. The main impact of FPE, has been making education accessible to learners, but this has not been translated to improved performance. The introduction of FPE led to over enrolment of pupils. Overcrowded classes led to scarcity of teaching and learning resources and high teacher –pupil ratio. Such conditions in public schools worked against quality teaching hence poor performance of learners. Furthermore, despite education being free, schools have other charges like exam fees, PTA teacher's salary charges, lunch charges etc. Pupils are frequently sent home to bring money for the aforementioned. This leads to pupil absenteeism, hence affecting performance.

From the foregoing discussion, it's apparent that FPE has had far reaching impact on education in Kenya. The impact has been on making education accessible to all irrespective of their economic background. This has been occasioned by free tuition that is provided to primary school children courtesy of FPE. This however led to increase in the number of pupils in class so much that the pupil teacher ratio increased from 40:1 to 80:1, in some schools which cannot lead to quality teaching. Such a teacher cannot give individualized attention to learners, hence this can lead to poor performance. In addition, the high enrolment leads to scarcity of teaching and learning resources and facilities hence hampering quality education, consequently leading to poor performance.

Table 2. Head teachers' responses on the extent to which government policies affect academic performance of pupils (n = 44)

Statement	Highly Affect (5)		Affect (4)		Moderately Affect (3)		Slightly Affect (2)		Never Affect (1)		Total Scores	Mean Rating
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Free Primary Education	7	15.9	21	47.7	3	6.8	9	20.5	4	9.1	150	3.41
Provision of sanitary towels	5	11.4	19	43.2	12	27.3	5	11.4	3	6.8	150	3.41
Re-entry policy.	2	4.5	9	20.5	11	25.0	12	27.3	10	22.7	113	2.57
Pupils/book ratio	7	15.9	23	52.3	9	20.5	4	9.1	1	2.3	163	3.70
Staffing policy	24	54.5	14	31.8	5	11.4	1	2.3	0	0.0	193	4.39
Repetition of classes.	3	6.8	13	29.5	8	18.2	15	34.1	5	11.4	126	2.86
Overall mean:												3.39

Key: F=Frequency,%= Percentage,Arabic numbers (1-5) = Rating

Interpretation of mean ratings:

1.00- 1.44=, Never Affect, 1.45- 2.44=, slightly Affect, 2.45- 3.44=, moderately Affect, 3.45-4.44=, Affect, 4.55-5.0=, highly Affect.

Asked the extent to which the provision of sanitary towels in schools affect performance of girls, the rating was as follows, 5 (11.4%) head teachers felt that it highly affect, 19 (43.2%) it affect, 12 (27.3%) it moderately affect, 5(11.4%) it slightly affect while 3 (6.8%) it never affects. This gave a mean of 3.41. This means that the provision of sanitary towels moderately affects the academic performance of girls.

From the head teachers' perspective, provision of sanitary towels has led to significant improvements of class attendance by girls. The same view is held by the senior teachers and the class 8 teachers. The results agree with Scott et al (2009) who found out that those girls who are provided sanitary pads also reported an improved ability to concentrate in schools, higher confidence levels and increased participation in a range of every day's activities while menstruating. Negative experiences relating to soiling and embarrassment declined and measures of wellbeing improved. Chebii (2012) also agree that the provision of sanitary ware is a major determinant in achieving gender parity in education in Kenya and there's a need to consider it as a significant factor in education policy planning. Whereas a significant number of class 8 pupils agreed that the provision of sanitary towels affect performance due to improved class attendance, majority felt that the impact is insignificant. This may be attributed to inadequate access to sanitary facility by girls.

Provision of sanitary towels was a right step in the right direction as a way of addressing gender parity in the academic performance. Some of the girls from the poverty stricken homes find it hard to access the facility. This can lead to absenteeism, hence poor performance. Although the Government has allocated some funds towards the provision of sanitary facilities for girls, more funds need to be channeled to the same so that enough sanitary facilities are purchased for all adolescent girls. Asked to what extent readmission of girls after delivery perform affects their academic performance, the head teachers rated it as follows, 2 (4.5%) head teachers felt that it highly affects, 9 (20.5 %) it affects, 11 (25.0%) it moderately affects, 12 (27.3%) it slightly affects while 10 (22.7%) it never affects. This gave a mean of 2.57, meaning that it moderately affects academic performance of pupils. This implies that the re admission of girls after pregnancy has insignificant effect on performance, it only improves access to education. One senior teacher interviewed said "Readmission of girls who conceive and give birth has led to moral erosion" On the other hand over half of the pupils through their focus group discussions were of the view that readmitted cases do not perform well. A significant number were undecided meaning such cases are rare in their schools hence they had no comment from the witness perspective. Shanigwa (2007) did a study and found out that while the learners tended to withdraw in class and were generally unable to participate in extracurricular activities, they none the less were able to compete with their peers in terms of their academic performance. Besides being re-admitted such girls require guidance and counseling so that they can re-adjust to school life. Cases of being ridiculed by other students are bound to be there, leading to frustration and even dropping out of school. Hence such guidance is necessary to the victim and other pupils. Re admission of expectant girls back to school is a good policy meant to assist girls to access education which could have been denied to them. Deliberate follow up measures should be undertaken by

the government to ensure that school administrators adhere to that policy.

Asked to what extent the provision of learning materials affected academic performance in primary schools, the analysis of the results showed that 7 (15.9%) head teachers rated that it highly affects, 23 (52.3%) it affects, 9 (20.4%) it moderately affects, 4 (9.1%) it slightly affect, while 1 (2.3%) it never affects. This gave a mean of 3.70, meaning that it affects the academic performance of pupils. This implies that the provision of learning materials affects academic performance. If learners lack the learning material, they can perform poorly.

From the interview schedules the senior teachers and class teachers and pupils though focused group discussion were in agreement that provision of learning facilities by the government affects the academic performance of pupils." Learners have an access to text books provided through the FPE programme", asserted one class 8 teacher. This finding is in agreement with Ubogu's (2004) who observed that basic needs like learning materials could provide a stable mind and conducive environment for pupils to study. Lack of learning materials contribute to poor performance in national examinations. With FPE however, this problem has been minimized. Yara (2010) also observed that there is a positive correlation between the provision of learning materials and performance. He therefore encouraged the government to give more financial support to schools in order to provide the basic infrastructure like class room, laboratories and text books. FPE has made it possible for learners to have increased access to learning materials. On the other hand, FPE, led to increase in the number of pupils in schools, leading to the scarcity of the textbooks. Provision of learning materials through FPE has been one of the success stories of the NARC government. This policy should be streamlined to ensure that all schools have an access to the teaching and learning resources depending on the pupil population. Further allocation should be channeled towards the improvement of the physical facilities and strengthen school feeding programme for pupils like the school milk programme of the Nyayo era.

Asked to what extent the staffing of schools with enough teachers affect academic performance, the analysis of data revealed that 24 (54.5%) head teachers rated that it highly affects, 14 (31.4%) it affects, 5 (11.4%) it moderately affects while 1 (54.5%) rated that it slightly affects. This gave a mean of 4.39. This means that staffing schools with teachers affects the academic performance of pupils. This implies that adequate staffing of school can lead to improved performance. On the other hand, lack of teachers can adversely affect the academic performance of pupils.

The head teachers agreed that provision of enough teachers affected academic performance. From the interviews, majority of senior teachers and class 8 teachers and class 8 pupils through focused group discussion agreed that their school had few teachers." High pupil teacher ratios hinder effective teacher assessment and supervision of pupils' academic performance hence leading to poor performance", asserted one senior teacher. These findings agree with Watkins (2000) who observed that in developing countries, children learn in overcrowded classes. The advent of FPE has aggravated the situation because the number of pupils has increased but employment of teachers is usually overlooked and given less priority by the government. Lidoro (2012) agrees further by saying that increase in pupil's enrolment due to FPE has led to scarcity of teachers. The number of

teachers who retire, dismissed or die annually is high. Although the government employs new teachers, the number is still far much below the required number in public schools. Furthermore, decentralization of staffing policy to county education officers has further complicated the situation. Tribalism and clannism and bribery are factored by the recruitment officers hence compromising competence. In the long run, this will have far reaching repercussions on pupil performance. Government policy on staffing came out as an outstanding government policy that has to be re-examined because it affects pupil performance profoundly.

Asked the extent to which the repetition of pupils affected academic performance, the head teachers rated it as follows, 3(6.8%) head teachers felt that it highly affects, 13 (29.5%) it affects, 8 (18.2%) it moderately affects, 15(34.1%) it slightly affects while 5(11.4%) it never affects. This gave a mean of 2.86. This means that repetition moderately affect academic performance. Majority of the head teachers disagreed with other respondents hence to them repetition does not result in improved performance. It is possible that as administrators, they do not want to appear disagreeing with the government policy that outlaw's repetition of classes. These results correlate that there's mixed feelings about the value of repetition. About half of the repeaters continue to work hard to improve their academic achievement and that most of them appeared to have learnt from their past lapses to adopt a better attitude to their studies and did better. It also indicated that half had not improved their performance.

Rono (nd) observed that some of the cases of poor performance in school in Tanzania and Uganda include frequent repetition of classes. She further observed that repetition is an extensive phenomenon in low income countries. From the interview schedule, the teachers were of the view that repeating of classes enables slow learners to catch up and improve in performance." If they do not repeat they continue to perform poorly, since some learners are slow, they need more time to understand", affirmed one class 8 teachers. On the other hand, from the focus group discussion many of the pupils were of view that repetition of classes affects performance, since the pupil is given a chance to understand the concepts. According to the government policy repetition of classes has been abolished. Most schools however still force pupils to repeat with a view of enabling them to improve on performance. In Kenyan situation where good performance is highly rated, every school aspires to perform better, hence engaging in malpractices forced repetition for poor performers, so that only good performers proceed to standard eight culminating in good performance at KCPE.

Overall mean on government policies that affect performance was rated at 3.39, meaning that the government policies affect the academic performance of pupils. This implies that government policies do have a profound effect on the pupils' academic performance. However, one government policy, that's staffing policy was rated highly at a mean of 4.39, meaning that it had affects pupil performance. The number of teachers who retire, dismissed or die annually is high. Although the government employs new teachers, the number is still far much below the required number in public schools. Furthermore, decentralization of staffing policy to county education officers has further complicated the situation. Tribalism and clannism and bribery is factored by the recruitment officers hence compromising competence. In the long run, this will have far reaching repercussions on pupil performance. Government policy on staffing came out

as an outstanding government policy that has to be re-examined because it affects pupil performance profoundly.

Other national policies that emanated from the interview schedules were as follows;

The Children Act, Republic of Kenya (2001), outlawed corporal punishment in schools. From the teachers' response, it seems like that corporal punishment had its merits and demerits. According to one teacher "sometimes canning could enforce discipline, and due to good discipline, good performance would be realized". Most teachers were of the view that abolition of corporal punishment led to increase in indiscipline cases resulting in decline in performance. From the general perspective of the schools, one can infer that corporal punishment is still practiced although not rampant. Most teachers still believe in the use of corporal punishment to instill discipline. However, we have schools that have excelled in exams like Starehe Boys Centre which do not use corporal punishment, hence should serve as a role model for teachers who still advocate for the use of corporal punishment as a way of instilling discipline.

Banning of holiday tuition was another issue that generated mixed reaction from teachers. According to one class 8 teacher, "remedial could widely impact positively on areas of weakness to pupils as such areas could be covered at that extra time". According to teachers, this extra time tuition is used to cover the syllabus and assist the slow learners. The banning of holiday tuition has therefore affected the performance of the pupils.

A general observation of public schools reveals that the practice of tuition is still common in most schools. A government policy should be followed by concrete follow up mechanism and supervision to ensure that a government policy is adhered to. Failure to have such mechanisms leads to defiance by schools hence the policy is just there on paper but practically schools still practice tuition lessons for standard eight and form four classes.

Conclusion

The study established that, government policies moderately affects performance being rated at 3.39. It means that government policies moderately affect pupil performance. However, one government policy that's, staffing policy was found to have profound effect on learning being rated at 4.39, where we have adequate teacher's learners are bound to perform better and vice versa. It was established that most schools did not have adequate teachers. The pupil –teacher ratio was very high. Such a teacher cannot teach learners effectively, attend to the learners needs and assess them properly. The study recommended that The schools need more funding to improve on the physical and learning resources for the learners.

The government should endeavor to employ more teachers to cushion the schools on the shortage of teachers. The government's policies like ban on repetition and readmission of pupils who become pregnant after delivery should be accompanied by tangible follow up mechanisms to ensure that school administration implement the policies. The national governments together with the county government need to come up with a clear policy and roll out the provision of sanitary towels to girls in all schools.

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