

Wastage in Schools: What Are The Emerging Internal Efficiency Concerns in Public Primary Schools in Kyeni Division, Embu County, Kenya?

Catherine Muthoni MUNYI¹ and John Aluko ORODHO^{2*}

1 Doctoral student, Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya

2. Associate Professor, Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Corresponding author orodhojohn@gmail.com

Abstract

The thrust of this study was to examine the causes of wastage in public day primary schools in Kyeni Division, Embu County, Kenya. The study was premised on the systems theory Systems theory first propounded by Bertalanffy (1950) which views an organization as a social system consisting of individuals who cooperate within a formal framework, drawing resources, people, finance from their environment and putting back into that environment. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population was 26,250 pupils and 560 teachers in public day primary schools in the study locale. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of 521 subjects, comprising 10 head teachers, 10 school management committee (SMC) chairpersons, 400 students, 100 teachers and one Quality Assurance and Standards Officer. The main research instruments were questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions guidelines and observation checklists. Data was processed and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study were that schools lacked enough resources which affected the quality of teaching-learning resulting into low pupils' academic achievement. There was also increased dropout, repetition as well as low completion and transition rates. It was recommended that in order to increase internal efficiency of schools, the Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Education should increase budgetary allocations to the schools, recruit more teachers, undertake regular in-servicing of teachers to improve their pedagogical skills and economically empower parents to enable them meet both direct and hidden costs of education, amongst others.

Key Words: Pupil Teacher ratio, Wastage, Inefficiency, Public Primary Schools, Kyeni Division, Embu County, Kenya.

Introduction

Background Information

Primary education has been made universal and compulsory, and there is a large-scale national campaign for enrolling all school-age children to primary educational institutions in Kenya. However, the cost of its provision has risen as a result of rising enrolments due to increased social demands and high expenditure (Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005; Orodho, 2014; Orodho, Waweru, Getange Miriti, 2013). In 2003, Kenya introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy with a view to meeting the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE). Having successfully initiated the implementation of this policy, the country is now gearing to widening access to and improving the quality of primary education. However, the country faces constraints in mobilizing additional public and private resources to meet the high cost of expanding access to quality public primary education (KIPPRA, 2006).

MoEST (2005) reports indicate that a gross enrolment in primary schools has increased from 5.8 million in 2002 to 7 million in 2003 and 7.1 million in 2004. Although about 1.5 million children have joined primary school, many school-going age children are still out of school (Wamukuru, Kamau & Ochola, 2006). Gross primary school enrolment rate was 104 percent in 2003 but the net primary school enrolment rate was estimated at 77 percent. The 1999 population projections show that the primary school-going age populations were 7.02 million in 2004 and 7.09 in 2005. Therefore a national net enrolment rate of 77 percent translates to 1.6 million children out of school (Republic of Kenya, 2005). A recent survey by Oxfam revealed that 37.3 percent of children in Kibera, in Nairobi, are still out of school and the majority of those in school (70%) are attending non-formal primary schools (Sava & Orodho, 2014). According to Oxfam (2003), Kenya needs an additional US\$137 million between now and the year 2015 to make education for all a reality.

Despite the government's effort of making UPE a reality, primary education continues to experience many challenges related to access, equity and quality (MoEST, 2005). The high rate of failure is largely attributed to overstretched facilities; overcrowding in schools; high Pupil-Teacher Ratios (PTR), over-age children, insufficient textbooks, lack of finances and socio-cultural impediments such as early marriages, diminished community support following their misconstrued role vis-à-vis that of the government in the implementation of the FPE initiative; gender and regional disparities; increased number of orphans in and out of school as a result of HIV/AIDS; and other reasons such as internal inefficiencies (MoEST, 2005). Mbatia (2004) concur with MoEST that FPE has encouraged more enrolment at lower primary levels and variables such as class size, pupil-

desk ratio, pupil-textbook ratio, school schedules, and class control have changed. Survey data indicate that on average, 4 primary school pupils in public schools in Kenya share one textbook (pupil-textbook ratio of 4:1) in every subject offered (Orodho, Waweru, Getange & Miriti, 2013; UNESCO, 2005).

Although studies have been done on the challenges of FPE, they have not paid specific attention to the possible influence of FPE challenges on classroom interaction (MoEST, 2003). World Bank (2004) reports have shown that there is a wide disparity in the relationship between pupils and teachers in primary schools due to high pupil-teacher ratio. Krueger (2002) study on teaching large classes in the *International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education in Melbourne* noted that it is easy to ignore the importance of human interaction when instructing in a large class. The shortcomings are evident in the declining access and enrolment rates, the ever decreasing completion and transition rates as well as the declining performance in national examinations.

Wastage in primary schools is about Kshs.10 billion per year. This is a huge amount of money which could revamp this level of education (World Bank, 2005). Dropouts, repetition, overflowing classes, low Textbook-Pupil Ratio (TPR) and an acute teacher shortage have emerged as the stumbling block to good examination performance, an indication that Kenya is yet to reap the full benefits of its heavy investment in primary education (MoE, 2006). Total candidature in KCPE has almost doubled since 2003, having risen from 481,111 to 727,045 in 2011, in tandem with a galloping enrolment in primary schools. Concerns over performance in public primary schools come at a time when Kenya is grappling with a skills shortage, which could hinder the smooth implementation of Vision 2030 or force the government to engage workers for longer than the retirement period. This laxity in boosting performance, educationists say, has the potential of watering down the FPE, which uses up at least Sh8 billion annually and has so far cost taxpayers over Sh50 billion since inception.

Theoretically, UPE policy sounds commendable as a means of cushioning children from poor socio-economic backgrounds from failing to participate in education as it reduces the private cost of education. Practically, the policy sacrifices the quality of education diluting the overall productivity of the educated person and subsequently reducing the rate of return to education (MoEST, 2005). The government tends to focus on the quantitative expansion of education, paying less attention to the qualitative growth of individuals for the community (Mukudi, 2004). Educationists are now questioning the effectiveness of the heavy investment in the FPE plan in improving the quality of learning and performance. Failure to expand primary education resources will compromise human capital accumulation and therefore jeopardize economic recovery and development. Economic recovery and growth will prove elusive with small proportions of the labour force completing primary education, and this will undermine the financial sustainability of Education for All (EFA) as envisaged in the national development goals (Koech, 1999). If nothing is done soon to resolve the issue, the progress Kenya has made over the past decade in improving primary education could be at risk of coming undone (World Bank, 2005). It is against this background that the study intended to find out the causes of high wastage in public day primary schools in Kyeni Division, Embu County.

The State of Art Review

The main purpose of primary education is to prepare students to participate in the social, political and economic well-being of the country, and prepare them to be global citizens. A major goal of primary education is to develop self-expression, self-discipline, and self-reliance, while at the same time providing a rounded educational experience. The Kenyan government recognizes that education enhances human resource development, which is necessary for facilitating high and sustained economic growth and development (Abagi & Odipo, 1997). The combination of the availability of primary education and the genuine desire of Kenyans to equip their children with the tools to pursue a better way of life led to a phenomenal expansion of the primary system of education in the first two decades of independence (Abagi, 1999). Since 2003, an estimated 1.5 million children, who were previously out-of school, have turned up to attend classes (Orodho, 2014).

In Kenya, like most African countries, the significant increase in primary school enrolment puts pressure on the existing school resources, leading to poor performance (MOE, 2006). Statistics released for the 2009 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) showed that performance in the examination has been improving at a slower rate since 2003, a sign that increasingly, the high investment in the sector is not yielding quality results. Rapid expansion in enrolment also exacerbate problems of teaching and learning facilities, overflowing classrooms, high pupil-teacher ratios, shortage of text books and other learning materials and affects inflow of pupils (Mukudi, 2004). These conditions are un-conducive to good learning environment which deteriorates the quality of education in public primary schools. Following the envisaged enrollment increase and current curriculum-based teacher establishment policy, the resources required under the baseline scenario is 90,779 teachers and 54,467 classrooms by the end of 2010. The total cost is estimated at US\$ 651 million and US\$ 793 million in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Coupled with the envisaged expansion, and the government commitment towards implementation of the Children's Act (Cap 586 of 2001), which emphasizes on making basic education compulsory and universally accessible, substantial resources will be required (GoK, 2005).

The 2007 report, compiled by CREATE (Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity), states that while the Kenyan government raised its Free Primary Education budget in 2003-04 by 17.4 percent, the cost of providing education is beyond the scope of the ordinary education budget. It was not adequately planned and resourced and thus has the consequences of increased drop-out and falling educational efficiency and quality.

UNESCO, in a study in 2005 in five provinces; Coast, Eastern, Nairobi, Rift valley and Nyanza covering nine sampled districts; Embu, Gucha, Kisumu, Kajiado, Kericho, Nairobi, Mwingi, Kwale and Taita Taveta, established that, while enrolment rose to 92974 in the 162 sampled schools in 2003, up from 74,410 in 2002, the number dropped to 88356 in 2004, representing a 5 percent drop. A number of factors explain this situation, including unfriendly learning environments, child labour, poverty and HIV/ AIDS. Only a quarter of the pupils are actually in a grade that is suitable for their age, while 44 percent are over-age for their grade by two or more years. The results indicate that the majority of the pupils are above the age expected for their grade. This has a negative impact on the learning achievement. This also impacts on the survival rates especially for girls, who due to cultural practices are considered marriageable once they reach teenage even though they may still be in primary school. Repetition was noted as a common feature in most schools, an indication that the education system is wasteful. In the sample, 7.7 percent of the enrolled pupils had repeated their classes. The proportion of repeaters is high- and this contradicts the official ministry of education policy that outlaws repetition (Orodho, 2013).

Due to a large pupil influx, schools were facing a serious teacher shortage. Most classes were too large to be handled by a single teacher which has a lot of implications on teaching and learning. The teachers were not able to give individual attention to the learners especially the slow ones, and this made it difficult for schools to offer quality education. Provision of instructional materials including textbooks was identified as one of the major achievements of the FPE programme, particularly through reducing the cost burden of education on parents and thus leading to an influx of pupils to school. However, it was noted that FPE grants disbursements were not done on time in most schools and therefore limited access to textbooks for some students. Most schools do not have adequate classrooms and teachers to accommodate the large number of pupils.

With the high number of pupils in classrooms, teachers are overstretched and are thus unable to give each student adequate attention. Further, analyses indicate that for the last five years, completion rates at primary school level have remained below 50 per cent, with the rate for girls being worse than that for boys (Abagi, 1999). Given the high rate of population growth rate of 3.4% per annum leading to 50% of the population being less than 15 years of age; and increased incidence of poverty, completion rates at primary school level will have dropped drastically to about 35 to 40% by the year 2015. The quality of education, including its relevance to the country's needs has also been questioned. The overloaded curricula, lack of teaching materials, poor teaching approaches, poor or lack of adequate supervision and low morale of teachers greatly contribute to poor quality of education.

Despite the high enrolment rate in schools, about 1.6 million children are still not in school. A combination of factors including poverty, social problems, child labour, displacement, and lack of schools and teachers, have conspired to keep Kenya's children out of classrooms (Vos et al., 2004). As Kenya's economy has crumbled over the last few years, many families, forced to live on incomes of about kshs.3, 000 per month, simply cannot manage the costs. Faced with limited resources, and reduced returns from education, parents are not only unable but also unmotivated to educate their children. In the end, these factors have negative effects on children's school participation. Lack of textbooks hinders many children from attending school regularly; in the end, these children give up education. The frustrations these pupils go through affect their academic performance: they lose interest in education and, eventually, drop out of school (UNESCO, 2008). The pressure under which pupils in primary schools work is a lot. They are taught in congested classes and have short holidays. These burdens have reduced children's playing time, and affected their motivation for learning. The consequences are that their performance deteriorates and in the long run, drop out of school (Sifuna, 1990).

Teachers' attitudes towards their work and pupils, their classroom management and their interaction with pupils have great impacts on the academic achievement and the retention in school of their pupils. Few classroom observations in Kenya indicate that there are cases where teachers' negative attitudes push pupils, especially girls, out of school. These pupils are sometimes neglected, abused, mis-handled, and sent out of class during teaching learning periods. This atmosphere is not conducive to learning and makes some children hate school. An obvious result of all this are absenteeism, poor performance, and non-completion of the education cycle (UNESCO, 2008).

Since the introduction of FPE, there has been expansion in terms of enrolments without revitalization. At the moment, the government seems to be more concerned with numbers than with the type of education being offered in schools. Parents' aspirations have been to send their children to school with the expectation that they would come out literate with employable skills. However, their expectations have been dashed. After investing

heavily in education, schools are churning out large numbers (2/3) of either illiterate or semi-literate primary school leavers.

Implementation of education policies is another major variable in the provision of quality education. Lack of proper implementation of the policies has been found to play a negative role as ignorance or non-adherence to policy statements has acted as a hindrance to attainment of expected competences. For example, there has been promotion of female quantitative access where much emphasis has been put on enrolling more girls to school. The need to increase girls' enrolments has not taken into account their growing up needs in order to retain them in school. This has resulted in persistent dropout rates. Teaching in Kenya, and indeed in other developing countries is greatly influenced by examinations that have caused negative backwash effects. What is not tested is not taught and therefore the aim is to cram content from textbooks, not to get life-long education. After all, ability to read fluently is not one of the skills examined in the public national examinations (UNESCO, 2002).

Evidently from 2002, at least 48 per cent of those who sat the KCPE had access to secondary education. There were 3,200 schools which absorbed 287,248 pupils out of the 514,350 who sat the KCPE. This translated into 55.5 per cent missing Form One places. Simply put these are wasted pupils and opportunities. Again, out of the 650,000 candidates who sat the KCPE examination in 2004 only 300,000 secured Form One placement. The poor transition from primary to secondary school remains a major concern in Kenya. Investing resources in poor quality education is like not investing at all. Based on various factors that may influence examination performance and the varied background of pupils who take examinations in any given year, predictions of the quality of education and/or performance in national examinations would not be realistic (Bogonko, 1992).

There is strong evidence that the Jomtien objectives of Education for All (EFA) are not being met in Kenya. Instead, more and more school-going age children have limited access to quality education. Enrolments have not risen with population and are highly sensitive to the financial demands placed on parents. Schools still lack essential materials and facilities despite households' contributions. The major worrying issue is that despite investment in education by the government, households, private individuals, NGOs and the donors, crises facing the education sector still persist.

National primary school completion rates have remained below 50 percent. This means that, for the pupils who enrol in Standard 1 less than 50 percent complete Standard 8. A study by Deolalikar (1998) revealed that Kenya's pupil/ teacher ratio was significantly below the levels that would be expected for a country at its level of per capita GDP. Although the importance of quality of education in the policy is often acknowledged, rapid quantitative expansion is given priority as opposed to meeting the urgent need of providing quality education (Mukudi, 2004). In view of these challenges, the attainment of sustained free primary education might be an illusion in the context of Kenya and the future of its student could be dire. The situation is likely to worsen if drastic measures are not taken.

Problem Statement

According to the background to the study it is evident that, although major strides have been made to provide education in Kenya, the system exhibit high levels of inefficiency, particularly at the lower levels. This is evidenced by high national pupil- teacher ratio, poor performance in national examinations and high wastage as a result of dropout rates and low transition to secondary level (Abagi & Odipo, 1997). Efficiency of primary education has been camouflaged by the desire to promote access to education by increasing education opportunities to school-age population, in a bid to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE). The country is now faced with the problem of a trade-off between enhancing efficiency of the education sector and increasing primary education (Abagi & Odipo, 1997).

Following the statistics obtained from the education office in Embu County, about 30% of pupils who enter the school system at primary level do not complete the cycle. This means that the resources already invested in them go into drain. It also increases the opportunity costs to the individuals and their families for it implies many years of foregone income since the affected learners enter the labour market belatedly or they do not enter the market at all. The situation is grave and worsening in Kyeni division where pupils drop out at various stages especially in standards 6, 7 and 8; a trend which contradicts the national goal of promoting UPE. The current status of primary education in Kenya suggests that the scenario is likely to remain the same, if not worsen, unless urgent interventions are put in place. This study therefore sought to establish the causes of wastage in public day primary schools in Kyeni division, Embu County.

Purpose and Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of low completion rate in public day primary schools in Kyeni division; and explore innovative and viable strategies for improving the situation. The study was guided by three objectives, namely:

1. To investigate the completion rate in public day primary schools in Kyeni division, Embu County.
2. To examine the dropout rate in public day primary schools in Kyeni division, Embu County.

3. To assess the level of achievement of pupils in public day primary schools in Kyeni Division, Embu County.

Theoretical framework

This study was based on the Systems Theory of Management propounded by Van Bertalanffy (1950) in an attempt to justify efficiency in operations of an organization as a system. The theory views an organization as a social system consisting of individuals who cooperate within a formal framework, drawing resources, people, finance from their environment and putting back into that environment. The systems theory maintains that an organization (school) does not only depend on its environment but it is also part of a larger system such as the society or the economic system to which it belongs. Educational system is a complex system comprising of subsystems at different levels. These are; macro (state), meso (school) and micro (classroom and the student) levels. At each of these levels, educational decisions are influenced by different actors, for example, at the school level the school committee, the head teacher, teachers, and parents make certain decisions and give opinions on the management of the school. Schools are open systems hence they respond to the external influences as they attempt to achieve objectives. The implementation of the free primary education is an example of a change from the outer environment.

The theory also puts forward the concept that a system is a collection of parts unified to accomplish an overall goal. A school system can be looked at as having inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes, which in the long run produce feedback. Inputs include resources such as textbooks, teachers, pupils, money and physical resources. These inputs go through a process where they are planned, organized, motivated and controlled, ultimately to meet the organization's goals. Outputs are results obtained after inputs are processed. Outcomes are enhanced quality of life or productivity. Feedback would be information from human resources carrying out the process or from the larger environment of the organization, e.g., influences from government, society, economies, and technologies. If there is a mismatch between inputs, processes and outputs in an educational system, then it is said to be inefficient.

In studying a system consisting of inputs, educational processes, and outputs, one of the most desirable outputs is students' achievement. Thus, students' achievement is one of the major indices reflecting the degree of efficiency of the primary education system. A major problem in primary schools in developing countries is educational wastage, resulting from failure to manage the educational system in a manner that enables students to complete their education within the time frame prescribed by the syllabus. Education is the driving force of any nation and like any other organization or enterprise, efficiency; effectiveness and quality ought to be the cornerstones.

Research Methodology

This study employed descriptive survey research design. Orodho (2009a) asserts that descriptive survey research designs are used to describe the state of affairs as they exist. The study therefore collected information from respondents on their attitudes and opinions towards school resource availability, adequacy and utilization. Five hundred and twenty one (521) individuals were the respondents. They include; 10 head teachers and 10 SMC chairpersons; one from each of the selected schools, 100 teachers, 10 from each school, 400 pupils, 40 per school and one AEO. This formed about 30% of the public day primary schools in the division.

Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) guidelines, Interview Schedules and Observation Checklists were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. From the AEO's questionnaire, the researcher obtained valuable data on bureaucratic constraints that hamper the flow of information and finances which are critical for implementing the FPE policy. In every school, the head teacher was given a form from which the study collected useful quantitative data pertaining to enrolment, transition rates, class size, attendance and distribution of pupils by class and sex; and stock of school facilities. In-depth interviews based on semi-structured questions were done to obtain information from the SMC chairpersons to collect details on problems experienced in resource allocation and suggestions for improvement. FGDs were conducted to collect qualitative data from the pupils and teachers. This aided enlisting of views and perceptions of teachers and students. Observation as a research instrument offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations rather than relying on second-hand accounts (Louis, 2007). Observation checklist was used to gather observational data concerning availability of the key teaching facilities such as; classrooms, laboratories, workshops, teaching materials and equipment. The researcher also physically visited designated classes (two lower classes and two upper classes) and made observations regarding, congestion, pupils present and sharing of desks and textbooks. Through this tool, the study collected massive data to enrich qualitative and quantitative data that enabled the researcher to draw conclusions on the adequacy of the teaching-learning resources in the schools.

Effective data analysis involves scrutinizing the acquired information and making quality inferences. Responses received from the above instruments were organized and tabulated for easy analysis. Descriptive data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and from informal interviews was also analyzed descriptively. Data was

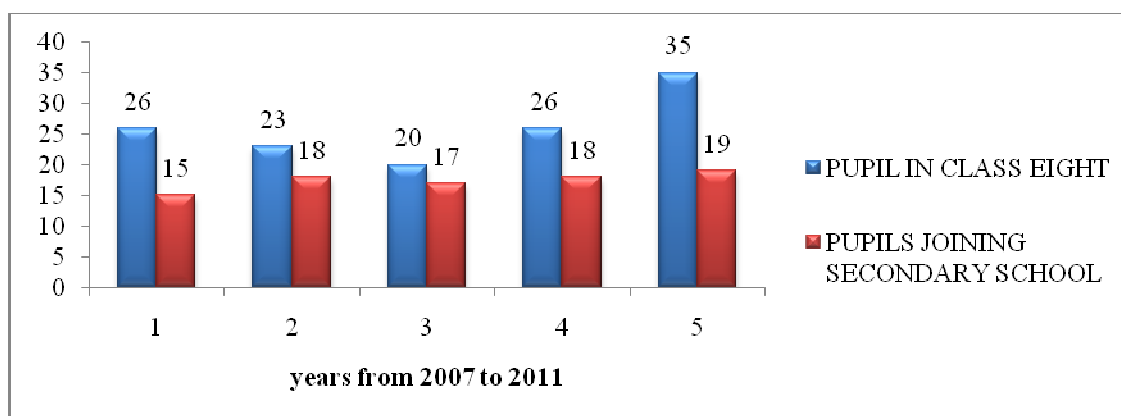
triangulated, then coded, computer formatted and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) as reported in Orodho (2009b). To respond to all the five objectives, descriptive and inferential statistics; percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used.

Findings and Discussion

Factors hindering completion and transition rates in public day primary schools

The completion rate in the schools under study was found to be increasing in fall out with a large number of pupils enrolling in grade one but not reaching grade eight. The transition rate was also noted to be low as majority of the learners who managed to complete the primary level of schooling did not join secondary schools as presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Completion and transition rates



Most SMC chairpersons felt that households burden in financing secondary education was high thus; cost was the key barrier to transitioning to secondary school for the poor, who formed the majority in the division. Some parents were also uninformed and therefore did not value secondary education. Early marriages and teenage pregnancies hindered some girls from completing schools or transitioning to secondary level. It was also noted that there was a lot of peer influence in the area to join child labour. Some parents and children were also increasingly engaged in illicit brew businesses and timber sales in order to acquire immediate income. Some children especially those with special needs were also noted to have low esteem and therefore avoided secondary schools while others failed to secure secondary school places as they scored extremely low marks in KCPE.

The information obtained from the AEO indicated that there were numerous pupils of the school age population who were still not enrolled in schools. The enrolment rate in the schools under study depicted a picture of low efficiency as 7(70%) of the schools experienced a decrease in enrolment while only 3(30%) had an increase despite the amount of resources pumped into the schools especially with the coming of FPE. The respondents reported that decreased enrolment was caused by poor performance in public day primary schools, increasing number of public boarding and private schools in the division, peer influence for instance due to child labour, miraa harvesting and sales, local brews and brick making in the area, poor attitudes and lack of school ownership by the parents and teachers, lack of parents motivation and support due to ignorance and lack of information; and a tag of war between some schools and the church community. The declining enrolment resulted to underutilization and wastage of resources already provided by the government into the schools.

Approximately 20% of the schools studied indicated increased repetition in both lower and upper grades while in 8(80%) of the schools there was decreased repetition rate. Teachers reported that learners were required to repeat a grade in order to catch up with the particular level since with the coming of FPE; some learners were admitted and pushed into levels even without evidence of the previous level or ability. Other learners opted to repeat especially in class 8 in order to score higher marks and secure better secondary school places. Poverty at the household levels also forced some learners to repeat especially due to lack of secondary school fees hoping to get sponsorship from well-wishers with time.

The school environment plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining learners in the school. Majority of the schools under study lacked proper facilities; only 1(10%) of the schools had proper facilities. Unfriendly school conditions discouraged learners from joining and attending schools resulting to underutilization of resources meant for them. The findings also indicated that only 1(10%) of the schools had well maintained safety and security standards, 4(40%) was fair, 4(40%) poor and 1(10%) had not taken any measure. On the other hand, nearly half of the schools did not have water supply at all while 6(60%) had a supply although not regular. This meant that learners wasted time every day on the way to far streams to fetch drinking and cleaning water. This

time would be spent in reading or completing assignments. Again when pupils had to leave schools and walk significant distances to fetch water some did not always return to class. The study also found out that 4(40%) of the schools lacked playgrounds while 6(60%) had playgrounds that were inadequate. Most schools also lacked games equipment such as balls and nets which limited pupils' participation in extra curricula activities. Majority of the schools were also noted to have untidy compounds.

The observations made on classrooms revealed that most schools had permanent classrooms, but were dilapidated. From the classroom walls observations, it was evident that only 2(20%) of the schools classes had walls in good conditions. Nearly three-quarters had unstable walls, and 1(10%) in crumbling states. The researcher also observed that 7(70%) of the schools had classrooms with broken windows while only 3(30%) were in place. Again, 5(50%) of the classes had old roofs which were also open in places, 4(40%) of the roofs were leaking while only 1(10%) had well covered roofs. Further observations indicated that 9(90%) of the floors in classes were uneven, potted, dusty and in some cases muddy. Only 1(10%) was flat, smooth and clean. In terms of lighting, 6(60%) of the classes had good visibility while 4(40%) had a poor visibility. The situation was worse in lower primary where most classes were dark and especially in the morning hours. The ventilation in 4(40%) of the classes was poor and uncomfortable while only in 6(60%) of the classes was stable and pleasant. Majority of the classes; 8(80%) had poor acoustics and were found to be very noisy and with interferences from outdoors. Only 2(20%) of the classes had good acoustics.

The schools visited showed noticeable variation in learning space. In virtually all schools, the lower classes were congested while the upper classes had fairly adequate space. 7(70%) of the classes had ample spaces for pupils to work while 3(30%) indicated overcrowded classes hindering movements by the teachers and also learners thus affecting learning. In terms of classroom mood, pupils were found to be cheerful in 8(80%) of the schools while 2(20%) were dull and drab. Wall charts and visual aids were not available in 7(70%) of the classes in the schools visited while only 3(30%) of the classes had charts. Only 1(10%) of the charts available were of good quality while 2(20%) were of poor quality. 8(80%) of the schools had very old and rough chalkboards with poor visibility from some segments of the classroom which hindered learning. Only 2(20%) of the classes had chalkboards visible from all segments of the classroom.

Insufficient, old and broken furniture was also observed in 8(80%) of the schools studied with pupils seated uncomfortably while only 2(20%) of the classes had good furniture. A large variation existed in the distribution of furniture with the condition being worse in lower grades in the majority of the schools. The shortage of desks forced two or sometimes three pupils to squeeze on to a small bench. Structures such as libraries, workshops and latrines/toilets among other facilities play a pivotal role in completion of education in an institution. The physical counting of latrines in the schools visited indicated that 6(60%) of the schools had enough for both the teachers and pupils. In 3(30%) of the schools there were inadequate latrines while 1(10%) had fairly adequate latrines. However, the available latrines were found not to be gender sensitive in construction. This put off some teachers and pupils lowering school attendance. Moreover, 9(90%) of the schools did not have workshops while only 1(10%) had a workshop that was even not in use indicating wastage of resources. None of the schools in the study had a library. This indicated that there were no proper storage facilities for books except for some improvised areas in head teachers' offices or in classrooms which caused loss and distortion of many books. Teachers in all studied schools sat in crowded and poorly conditioned rooms which interfered with their preparation for lessons thus hindering quality in performance. The respondents were concerned that there was a lot of wastage in primary education in the division.

The dropout rate in public day primary schools

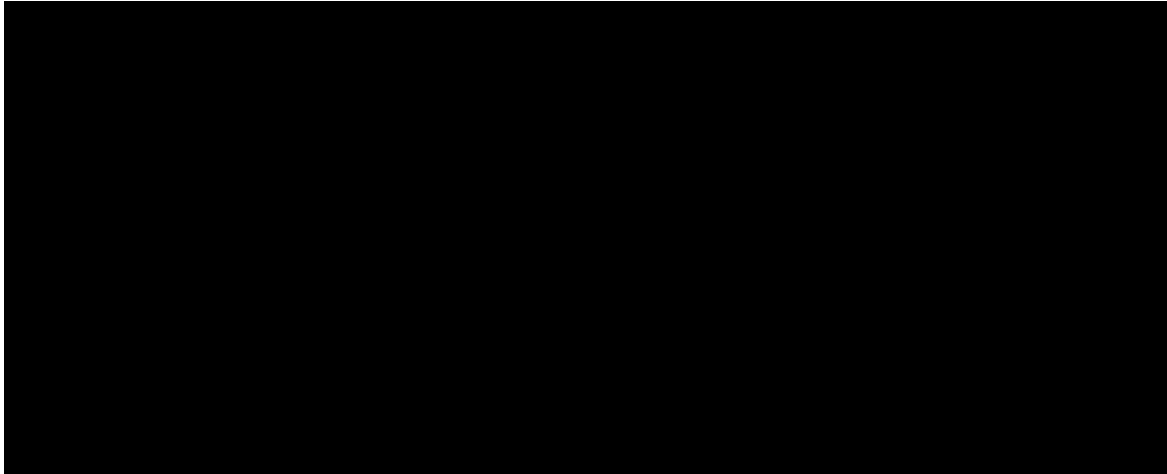
The rate of students flow in a system determines whether those entering the school system are able to graduate within the stipulated period. If the rate of progression from the entry point to the point of departure is low, the system is said to be internally inefficient since the affected students are disproportionately using the resources allocated to the sector. A system is termed efficient by enrolling 100%, retain 100% and graduate 100%. Over three quarters

The study established that the school dropouts were alarmingly increasing in the division. Over three quarters of the schools sampled indicated increased dropout rate while only 2(20%) showed decreased dropout. According to the responses obtained from the AEO, head teachers and the SMC chairpersons, the dropout cases were common due to brick making influence in the area to earn daily bread, miraa harvesting, illicit brew taking by parents, children and some teachers, peer influence, indiscipline cases such as truancy and rudeness, family breakages, health problems, early marriages, overage children, ignorant parents thus lack of pupil motivation to attend schools, poverty, harsh school conditions and poor performance in KCPE in the schools. The SMC chairpersons also revealed that some parents and teachers had negative attitudes towards the public day primary schools in the area thus discouraging school attendance by children. Some parents were also reluctant in supporting education due to increased levels of educated unemployment in the area. A parent in one of the sampled schools challenged their SMC chairperson that he was well educated but he had not secured a job yet.

The parent argued that school attendance was a waste of time since there were no jobs. Some parents also did not bother following up the discipline of their children causing expulsion from schools.

Figure 2: Dropout rate in sampled schools in Kyeni division

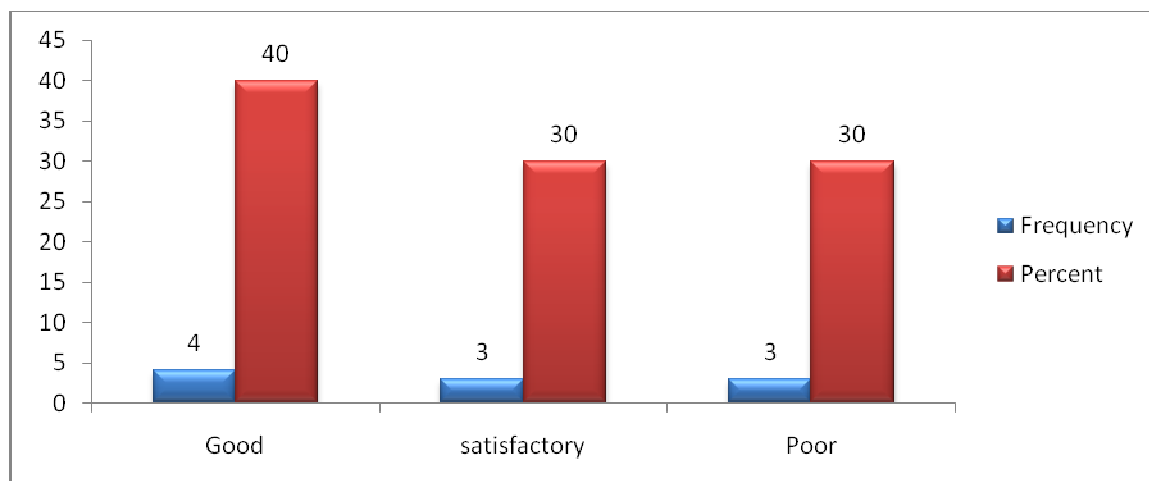
Factors influencing achievement of pupils in public day primary schools



A number of factors were noted to influence achievement of learners. These included, school attendance by pupils, teacher performance, learner ability and motivation, availability of sufficient and relevant resources, school environment and parental support. The study indicated that the rate of school attendance in Kyeni Division was good for 6(60%) of the schools sampled, 3(30%) indicated satisfactory attendance while 1(10%) indicated poor attendance by the learners. A discussion with some respondents revealed that irregular school attendance was caused by lack of levies such as PTA money, exam and tuition fees, lack of proper school uniform, lack of food, sickness, peer influence and unfriendly school conditions This contributed to low achievement in schools as most pupils were not able to follow and understand the content taught in their absence.

Teacher preparedness and proficiency in content delivery in a class by and large influences learner achievement. The study findings showed that teachers in 4(40%) of the schools sampled had good class performance, 3(30%) was satisfactory and 3(30%) poor as presented in figure 3.

Figure 3: Level of teacher performance in class

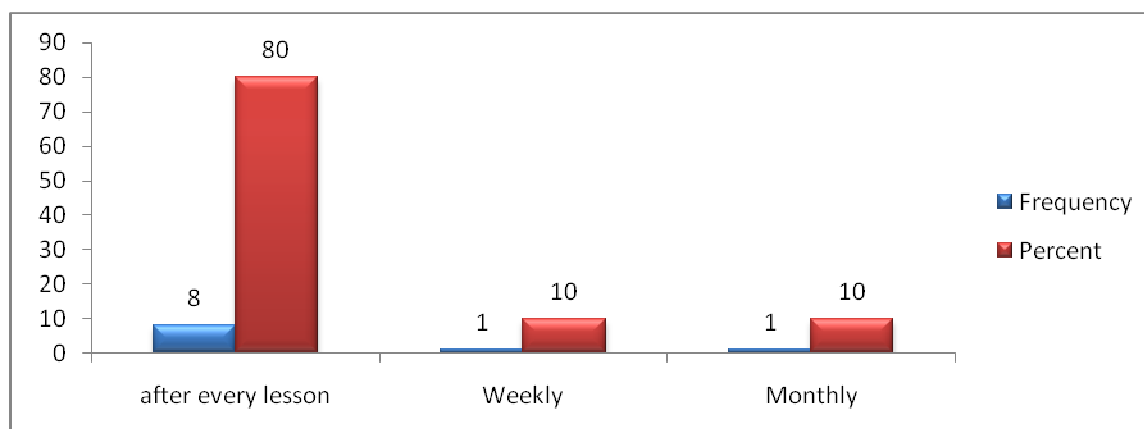


The study also found out that the pupil-teacher interaction in classes was minimal and teachers could only move with the brighter pupils leaving out the slow learners. In such cases, pupils hardly got the attention they deserved; hence many were not learning much. Without personalized attention, the weak learners did not perform well. Teachers admitted that they could not give individualized attention to the pupils due to limited contact hours, tough content for the learners, heavy workloads and high PTR. Pupils complained that some teachers were too harsh on them therefore unapproachable. This demotivated learners hindering performance.

Most of the sampled schools had acquired instructional materials from the government; which was identified as one of the major achievements of FPE, particularly through reducing the cost burden on parents. The textbook-pupil ratio was found to range between 1:2 to a ratio of 1:3 for upper classes and 1:3 to a ratio of 1:4-5 for lower classes implying that most pupils had limited access to textbooks. Priority was mostly given to Mathematics, English and Kiswahili books. It was also apparent that among all the subjects, social studies had the least number of text books in schools resulting to very poor performance in the subject KCPE in the division. The recommended TPR per subject is 1:2 which has not been achieved for most of the schools. The respondents felt that the ratio was inadequate to ensuring effective teaching and learning as it was problematic sharing text books particularly in home works. This caused the pupils and teachers to look for alternative ways of managing the shortfall of which some were not effective. For instance, teachers sometimes turned to lecture methods of teaching, giving few assignments or did not give any. On the other hand, pupils maneuvered their ways of doing assignments, thus turning to crude methods such as copying from others so as to avoid punishments for incomplete work. Other pupils hurriedly shared books early in the morning before lessons began resulting to shoddy works. The revision materials were limited in schools since the schools prioritized purchase of stipulated textbooks while most parents could not afford to purchase extra materials for their children. The pupils and teachers suggested that the government should target provision of more revision materials and at least one textbook per child in the core subjects if not all to boost learner achievement. Some teachers also suggested the supply of textbooks to schools by the government instead of sending money since the amount received was not enough to enable schools acquire good quality books. Teachers also noted they were spending a lot of teaching hours attending meetings on textbooks selection. Similarly, head teachers spent a lot of time travelling to buy books at the expense of teaching or running the schools. Teachers unanimously suggested the return of the Kenya School Equipment Scheme.

Tests and assignments serve the purpose of assessing pupils' achievement in different subjects. The study findings indicated that 8(80%) of the teachers evaluated their learners after every lesson, 1(10%) on weekly basis and 1(10%) on monthly basis as indicated in figure 4.

Figure 4: Frequency of learner evaluation and monitoring in sampled schools



However, only 1(10%) of teachers in the schools studied reported good results by learners in the tests administered while 8(80%) indicated satisfactory results and 1(10%) poor performance. Teachers admitted that they had reduced the number of assignments given to pupils because they could not cope with the overwhelming workloads. Pupils also concurred that teachers had reduced the number of assignments given to them. For the few assignments given, it was reported that some teachers were asking pupils to exchange books and mark for each other in class. This affected teachers' ability to identify pupils' weaknesses, gauge their progress and assist them thus affecting the quality of learning. In addition, the overall pupil achievement was relatively low especially in literacy. The findings of the one on one reading tests conducted by the researcher indicated that 8(80%) of pupils in class one could not read even one word in a sentence while in class two 6(60%) of the pupils were unable to read even one word in the provided passage. An assessment of the new skills learnt by learners in different subjects during the week of the study indicated that 6(60%) had not learnt any new skill yet, only 3(30%) had learnt a new skill while 1(10%) were not sure of what they had learnt.

In the schools visited, some parents were reported to play remarkable role towards improving quality of education such as; providing pupils with food and uniform, paying tuition and exam fees, employing PTA teachers and buying books and revision materials. Others were noted to be involved in dirty politics and negative attitude towards the schools. Conflicts between parents and teachers; and the administration of some schools also affected learning. The findings of the study further revealed that only 1(10%) of the parents monitored their

children learning and checked their homework at least occasionally while 9(90%) did not bother checking the learner achievement. Most parents believed that their role was only to provide uniform and food for the children to attend school and relinquished all other roles to the teachers. Teachers complained that most parents had become irresponsible about their children education. Out of the children motivated by their parents to attend school, only 5(50%) were retained across all grades. However not all joined secondary schools on completion of eighth grade causing wastage in education. The SMC chairpersons felt that while poverty in the area limited some parents' ability to support learning and participate in school-related activities, most parents were ignorant.

An educational institution is likened to a factory which has inputs which are processed to get the output. The inputs include variables like pupil-textbook ratio, teacher-pupil ratio, leadership styles, existing libraries and other facilities. An education system is said to be efficient if learners flow through completing a given level in the expected number of years, with relevant knowledge and skills; and then thereafter joining the successive level. When educational resources are supplied to an institution, it is assumed that the learners will utilize them to create a country's base for future human capital. The findings of the study concerning the completion rate in public day primary schools in Kyeni division were disturbing. Dropout cases were noted to be rampant in the schools contradicting the EFA goal. Repetition also indicated wastage of resources invested in the schools in terms of human, material and financial in average years per graduate. Again the repeaters occupied places that would comfortably be occupied by learners from the previous levels causing congestion in classes.

The study also revealed that most schools did not have adequate classroom space to accommodate the large number of pupils in lower grades while in upper grades the space was in excess due to dropout cases and transfer of pupils to boarding and private schools. This also caused underutilization of space as some big classrooms ended up with very few pupils. Three quarters of the classrooms observed were uncondusive for learning. Pupils complained that their learning environment was uncomfortable and distracted and therefore they did not concentrate during lessons. The poor conditions of the classrooms impacted negatively on the pupils learning outcomes which discouraged school attendance and lowered the quality of learning in the division. The overall observation of the school structures indicated that a thorough improvement of the available facilities was required in order to improve the quality of education offered and boost pupil retention. The respondents suggested that there was need to provide better classes as well as furniture in schools to meet the required standards. According to UNESCO, the minimum student classroom space should be 1.5 square meters per pupil with one-seater desk, which would translate to 67.5 square meters for a room expected to hold 45 students. The Ministry of Education recommends a 7.5m x 6.0m classroom (Government of Kenya, 2000). This translates to 45 square meters or about 1 square meter per child in a room with 45 children. Teachers also felt that there was need for better staffrooms to boost their morale and thus productivity.

The amount of resources spent on education influences its quality and the amount of learning achieved. The textbook availability in a school enhances achievement of learners as they are exposed to better revision. Paradoxically, there are now more books and learning materials in schools, yet all schools of study revealed that quality has seriously been compromised. Lack of motivated teaching force, large and congested classes, indiscipline cases and low contact hours were noted to contribute greatly to this. Parental involvement is an important factor in determining learner achievement. It has a multifaceted impact on children's ability to learn. This was noted to be minimal in the schools of the study. Teachers said that most parents needed to cooperate and assist in their children's education if quality was to be achieved in the division. They needed to encourage their children to work hard in school and frequently check their homework. Teachers also wanted parents to work hand in hand with them to instill discipline to pupils and not just sitting back expecting the government and others to take care of that.

How well pupils are taught and how much they learn can have a crucial impact on how long they stay in school and how regularly they attend. Further, whether parents send their children to school at all is likely to depend on the judgment they make about the quality of teaching and learning. Based on this perception parents decide whether attending school is worth the time and cost for their children and for themselves. Teachers pointed out that most parents in the division were reluctant about supporting their children education. They therefore suggested that the local community leaders needed to mobilize parents to take their children to school and also inform the relevant school administration of the children of the school age population who were not enrolled in schools. The study established that the factors lowering completion rate in public day primary schools in Kyeni division mostly emanated from the FPE policy. Although parents and communities were willing to continue supporting schools by providing additional facilities, their roles and involvement in school activities have not been clearly defined causing conflicts. Indiscipline has become a serious problem in schools resulting to dropout cases, instructional materials and other resources are inadequate compromising the quality of education offered, school environments are unattractive to learners affecting enrolments while poverty and ignorance lower completion and transition rates. The pervasive decline in completion rate in public day primary schools education as revealed by this study requires immediate action.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the schools visited, there was consensus that the government has done a lot towards enhancing access to education. Despite this effort, deep concerns were expressed over the falling quality of education. FPE was meant to reduce school dropouts, reduce the number of child labourers, increase school enrolment and increase the quality of education. Yet quantitative data collected in this study shows that dropout and repetition are pervasive especially in upper grades. SMC chairpersons complained about teacher shortage and laxity and noted that transfer of teachers was infrequent which meant some teachers overstaying in one school. One SMC chairman said that; "Teachers who stayed long in one station got used to the school and became relaxed affecting performance negatively". Pupils felt that most teachers were not understanding and supportive to them. Inadequacy of physical facilities and instructional materials in most schools also militates against good teaching-learning. Any age admission criteria means youths who would have been better suited for adult education are now enrolled in primary schools making it difficult for the teachers and also overage learners to fit in the environment with younger children. Teachers are also overwhelmed by indiscipline cases especially among the overage pupils who are transmitting negative influences from the world outside of school like smoking cigarettes or chewing khat to the innocent others. Since canning was banned in schools, teachers can only try counseling which is ineffective as majority lack skills. Teachers' morale is therefore low causing poor classroom performance. Talking to most teachers, one got the impression that many were just in the job to earn a salary. These factors cannot be ignored if the government to reduce wastage in education.

In view of the study findings, the following recommendations should be considered if completion rate in education have to be achieved in public day primary schools in Kyeni division.

1. Increasing budgetary allocations to the schools to improve the quality and quantity of inputs such as instructional materials and physical infrastructure. This will go a long way in creating attractive school environments thus ensuring retention.
2. Recruiting more teachers to ensure adequacy in schools. The government should also improve rewarding systems for teachers in order to motivate them and boost their performance. There should also be regular inspections to inspire teacher performance, provide support, and improve the quality of their teaching. This will improve quality of education offered in schools.
3. The government should provide regular in-service training to teachers to improve their pedagogical skills so that they consistently tailor teaching to meet individual learner differences. Counseling skills training will also provide them with alternative ways of dealing with indiscipline cases among pupils especially the overage learners.
4. The government should economically empower households in the division by supporting their farming so that they are able to meet both direct and hidden costs of education and in turn support themselves and the schools. This would also bring pay-off in the education sector in that it would reduce the incidence of parents sending their children to work so as to supplement family income.
5. The government should initiate feeding programmes in schools in the division or bring back the school milk programme to attract the poor children to attend schools, ensure retention and help pupils perform better.
6. Designing a more attractive primary curriculum in order to attract and retain learners in schools. Youth polytechnics in the division should also be revamped to strengthen and create centres for vocational and skills training. This will change parents and pupils' attitude towards education thus increasing enrolment, completion and transition rates.

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