Impact of Social Inequality Factors on Access and Completion Rates in Public Primary Schools in Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to access how factors in social inequality impact on learning process among primary school children in Athi-River district. The objectives of the study were three fold, namely i) to identify types of social inequality and challenge,ii) document access to education by primary school pupils and iii) determine the state of retention of learners in schools. The study was premised on the Reference Theory by Matron (1936) which stipulates that people often identify with social and cultural group to which they belong.   A descriptive survey design was adopted to guide the study. A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques were applied to select 256 subjects comprising of 48 parents, 72 teachers , 120 pupils and 2 quality assurance and standards officers (QASOs) to participate in the study. Questionnaires for teachers and pupils, focused group discussion for parents and interview guidelines for QASOs were the main research instruments used to collect data. The major findings were that poverty, family background (orphans) poor infrastructure, poor pupil-teacher ratio, level of parental education and poor housing were the major social inequality factors in the community. It was also evident that although   accessibility to school was good, the schools were not enough for all school-age going children.   The conclusion was that the negative impacts of social inequality on education of pupils include poor academic performance, lateness to school, dropping out of school, early marriages, early employment and drug abuse. The study recommended that employing   more teachers, improving school feeding programs and infrastructure were some of the measures meant to reduce the negative impacts of social inequality in schooling in the study locale of Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.[278 words].

Keywords: Social inequality, Access, Retention, Completion rate, primary schools, Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Background information

This study on impact of social inequality factors on access and completion rates of pupils in Nairobi County, Kenya is based on the concept of human insecurity introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) two decades ago(UNDP, 1994) . The (UNDP) introduced the concept of human security in its 1994 *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 1994). The report defined human security as the sum of seven distinct, but interrelated and complementary dimensions of security, namely: food, health, environment, personal, community, and political dimensions .On his part ,Grusky (2001) defined social inequality as a situation in which individuals in a society do not have enough social status. The author points out areas of potential social inequality which includes voting rights, freedom of speech and assembly, the extent of property rights, and access to education, healthcare, quality housing and other social goods. Walter (2009) states that social inequality refers to the ways in which socially defined categories of persons (according to characteristics such as gender, age, class and ethnicity) are differentially positioned with regard to access to a variety of social 'goods' such as the labour market and other sources of income, education, healthcare services, and forms of political representation and participation. He further argues that factors of social inequality were shaped by a range of structural factors, such as geographical location or citizenships status, and were often underpinned by cultural discourses and identities defining for example whether the poor are 'deserving' or 'undeserving'(Walter,2009).

The common factors in both the definitions cited, points to situations where certain conditions inevitably lead to limited access to, or inadequate supply of essential needs to a section of human population across the world. Social inequality, therefore, anchors its understanding on a dual-layered existence of human beings predicated on the social principle of those who have and those who do not have. These factors point to the undesirability of social inequality for social progress in improving the quality of life for the vast majority of people. It appears prudent to make the general assumption that people who lack basic needs or even the practical opportunities to create wealth and hence elevate their social status are predisposed to myriad problems of acquisition purchasing

power, provision and most importantly insulation from pressures.

Various scholars have explored social inequality as and its effects on economic status growth, politics, gender relations and education among others. For instance Bottero (2007) while discussing the effects of social inequality explored the effects it has on social relationships. In particular, the writer brought forth the idea that people were more likely to associate with other who were socially similar to themselves. It therefore further implies that social inequality largely dictates human association. Research has shown that there is a social sorting process. Research has shown that there is a social sorting process in the way we form social ties, so that the people we interact with tend to be similar to ourselves in education, social class, race/ethnicity, religion and attitudes. This has major consequences for our routes through life and world views and for how inequality is reproduced.

In Kenya, the Policy Framework on Education that came up with strategies to align education and training to the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and Kenya Vision 2030 and beyond has the following educational mission:

> …..to create an education and training environment that equip learners with the
> desired values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and competencies, particularly in
> technology, innovation and entrepreneurship, while also enabling all citizens to
> develop the full capacity, live and work in dignity, enhance the quality of their
> lives, and make informed interpersonal, social and political decisions   as citizens
> of the Republic of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2012a:9).

The salient message in the foregoing citation is that the Republic of Kenya perceives education to be a very vital commodity and should be provided to all citizens without any discrimination. It is implicit in its mission statement that any forms of inequality should not be tolerated. The Vision 2030 emphasizes on the provision of globally competitive quality education, training and research for all its citizens in an equitable fashion for development and enhanced individual wellbeing (Republic of Kenya, 2007, 2012b). A recent study by Lyn and Orodho (2014) on influence of Kenya Vision 2030's education policy on quality education in public secondary schools in Nakuru District similarly argues that inequality in educational provision should be avoided in any effective educational pursuits (Lyn & Orodho, 2014). It is against this backdrop that this study on examining the impact of social inequality on access to, and completion rate in public primary schools in Athi- River District, Machakos County, Kenya, was premised.

State of Art Review Relevant Literature

The issue of social inequality and its impact on education has attracted the attention of several researchers and educationists (UNESCO, 2009; Ardit, Chaos, Robin, Jun & Woods, 2005, Hepburn, 2001; Nherea, 2006, Kiungu, 2000; Lyn & Orodho, 2014; Orodho, 2014). Orodho (2014) observed that basic education as the minimum education is a crucial factor every Kenyan must have for progressive existence in society. It is for that reasons Kenya subscribes to the international protocols that established EFA in Jomtien, Thailand 1990 and the world education forum in Dakar, Senegal, 2000. Since then the Kenya government in her education sector strategic plan and Sessional paper No. 1 of 2005 has articulated how to attain the goals for education for all. The plan and implementation matrices for 2003 – 2007, show her commitment to eliminate poverty as a hindrance to educational development, promote human rights through provision of education and attach sustainable development by the provision of quality basic education for all. This is like other developing nations in the world today; Kenya is making efforts to achieve access in education for all.

UNESCO Partnering with International institute for Education, and Planning (2009) raised issues with regard to access and inclusion in education with a focus on gender issues and emergencies. In their concern they observe that despite significant advocacy in this area, education remained marginalized in crisis response strategies and it was rarely seen as a priority by donors. Funding for education in crisis-affected fragile states was still woefully inadequate, volatile and unpredictable. Such persistent under-funding was likely due to the unfortunate misconception that education was not life-saving and therefore not a priority during a rapid onset of emergency. The report further states that marginalized groups suffered even more from these beliefs that education was not a priority in emergencies. Humanitarian workers in the field of emergencies often believed that school provision alone was not problematic enough and that greater stability was needed before attempting to reach excluded groups. Although the UNESCO report has raised pertinent issues specifically with regard to education access in war situations, the study found it a useful resource in engaging several other factors that cause social inequality and hence its effects on access to education by children in Athi-River.

Hepburn (2001) carried out research to find out national and community level initiatives, that had the potential to increase primary education for children who had been orphaned (or made vulnerable) in areas heavily affected by AIDS in the eastern and southern Africa region (ESAR). He analyzed various initiatives that could be used more effectively to target resources to increase primary education access for orphans and other vulnerable children in this region.   He found out that despite the many challenges HIV/AIDS posed to the educational systems, access to primary education remained a basic need and right of every child as defined in the UN

Convention on the Rights of the child. Primary education also had the ability to play a role in fighting the 3spread of HIV. Hepburn's study focused on vulnerable children and those predisposed in HIV/AIDS challenges. The current studies expanded this further and include all other critical factors of social inequality, disease included that are on obstacle to access to education for children in Athi –River.

Nherea (2006) presented findings on access to education in Zimbabwe made several observations with regard to education among school goers. For example he observed that in spite of the impressive expansion of educational service provision after independence, issues of access, equality and quality still remained problematic, especially in remote and, commercial settlement areas. He further pointed out those areas that had been left out during the period of rapid expansion of education services continued to receive limited resource and were characterized by the highest percentage of children not in school, especially at higher levels, such as secondary schools. Failure to attend was due to inability to pay school fees by parents and guardians. The author further pointed out that research had proved that failure to meet school fees has been the main reasons for withdrawal from school. Drought experienced during the 1990's also contributed to the withdrawal of children from school. For younger children aged between 6 years and 8 years long distance to school had also been a deterrent. Furthermore, the girl-child was particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to secondary education. Currently, only 46.18% girls were in school, compared to 53.82% boys. The study found issues raised here namely fees, drought and long distance as deterrents to both access and completion of school quite applicable in the current research. The study tries to see if in Athi-River the problem of completion has any similarity with regard to the factors discussed in the situation in Zimbabwe.

Kiungu (2000) releasing a report of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO on EFA observed that the critical review of how well Kenya has done in achieving EFA goals indicate that despite the above achievement , unfortunately, a wide disparity had emerged between the goals agreed upon at Jomtien and actual domestication of those goals in Kenya. The report noted that major issued had emerged which had made the achievement of EFA goals difficult. Among these were increased poverty levels, the implementation of structural adjustment programs and the serving of both domestic and international debt. Despite the fact that more educational opportunities had been created in the last decade many eligible school age-children aged 6 – 13 (above 11%) were still out of school. This was more pronounced in the ASAL and coastal areas. Current statistical data shows that in the last two years national GER at primary school level did increase from 86.4% in 1996 to 88.8% in 1998 of the many children who enrolled in primary schools in Kenya. Girls, in particular did not stay long enough to complete the cycle. The completion rates   had remained at the 46% mark and out of those who joined form one, and   only about 84.5% completed secondary education in 1998. The current study found the statistics given by the author valuable in company trends of completion rates of primary school going children in Athi River and tried to determine any other factors to social inequality that militates against school completion.

Shanghais Poverty Conference (2004) observed that in many countries, ministries were trying to meet the concurrent challenges of increased access and demand for quality. The top priority was to extend continuation of FPE to the poorest. Most marginalized population, and to the most remote areas were the most affected. Domestic household surveys showed that schools costs remained a problem for the very poor, planning and projections for the very poor, planning and projections were improving. Gaps had been identified in legislation and regulation and were being managed. High dropout and poor completion rates needed to be addressed and improving quality throughout remained a major challenge. Surveys had found a variety of reasons for high dropout rates including schools costs, the need for labour, pregnancy or early marriages, disability or illness or a lack of interest n attending school. Complementary or alternative basic education was needed to reach marginalized groups. The conference raised pertinent issues with regard to reasons children do not complete school. This study sought to determine whether a part form social irregularities, some of the reasons identified by the conference are at play in the completion problem in Athi River.

Abagi and Odipo (1997) indicated that the operation of primary education system in Kenya faces the problem of inefficiency. Completion rates had remained very low (less than 50 per cent) for the last five years. Besides, national pupil – teacher ratio was also low; about 31:1. There was need to review 8-4-4 curriculum in a comprehensive and holistic manner. The curriculum had to be reduced and made relevant. Besides viable and sustainable accost and financing mechanisms in education had to be instituted to stop drop-outs from the system, thus enhances completion rates. They observed that pupils dropped out at various stages of the education system especially in standard 6, 7 and 8. The situation was grave and worsening, a trend which contradicted the national goal of promoting literacy and fighting against ignorance. The authors outlined factors that were thought to be responsible for completion rate problems as education policies institutional process, school-based factors, household and community- based factors. As far as completion rates is concerned the current study investigated some of the factors the researchers have raised especially those that tie with school and household to determine how they affect completion rate in Athi River.

Crossing, Heagney and Thomas (2009) argued that there was need to institute teaching and learning strategies to promote student retention and success. These strategies were to consider the impact of mass higher education

and increasing student diversity on student persistence and withdrawal. Further there was need to re-evaluate the curriculum to ensure student engagement in the learning process. This could be done through making the curriculum more responsive and relevant to students' experiences while seeking to expand their skills and knowledge and making assessments and evaluation more transparent so that the students could understand the learning process. One way to improve quality in regard to student retention was to identify influences and causes of student retention and attrition. Engaging students in their studies had been identified as important in retaining students and stemming attrition. The current, study found the author's suggestions aimed at increasing retention quite useful. They assisted in focusing research towards identifying and suggesting solutions to the problem of retention in schools in Athi River.

Gachuhi (1999) argues that various teaching and learning approached to encourage student to engage with their studies and their institutions had been surveyed and found to work. They included, early engagement through pre and post entry induction activities, greater understanding of the diversity of students, including where they have come from what they are interested in and their aspirations. This in turn could inform the organization of the programme and curricular contents, authentic and relevant curricular, building on students previous experiences, interests and future aspirations and using include language and relevant examples. Others were student-centered active learning designed to involve students in the learning process. Integration of study skills to support the success of all students and signing posting students to access support services to necessary, formative feedback which is relevant and integrated into the learning experience in a timely and constructive way. The current study used some of the factors raised as a guide to determine why there exists a problem of retention in schools in Athi River.

Alkaman and Unterhalter (2005) wrote that although he Kenyan education system did not discriminate against girls and women their participation was characterized by manifest disparities. They were serious regional disparities in regional enrolment particularly in the arid and semi-arid lands where pastoralism and nomadism dominate. They were also wide variances in drop-out rates between regions and in the last ten years completion rates in Kenya had never exceeded 50%. Low completion rates for girls meant that few of those who enrolled in school ever got to penetrate the job markets. The challenges the girls faced. They spanned the economic, cultural regional and policy realms. The current study investigated this problem of completion and retention in schools in Athi-River as a product of social inequality.

Orodho, Waweru and Getange writing on strategies to dismantle the gender differential jinx in Mandera District, Mandera County in Kenya relates females inequality in access and performance in education in the county to multiple disparities across the nomadic pastoralist communities ; rural-urban, male-female, poor non poor, and between occupation groups. The extent of enrolment was low in rural areas, especially among the nomadic pastoralist communities of North Eastern Province compared with urban areas and in some geographic areas; the enrolment was low among females compared to males.

The Orodho et.al (2014) study thus established that the enrolments was conspicuously low among the poor and particularly low among person engaged in some economic activities such as wage labour, household as compared with those engaged in business as self employed. This was happening against the background that the Government of Kenya has introduced and is implementing free primary education (FPE) and free day secondary education (FDSE) across the county in a bid to make the basic education free, affordable and compulsory. Nonetheless, the increase in demand for education in most geographical areas of the country had not been matched by corresponding increase in the education infrastructure in terms of educational institutions and other facilities. Due to the demand outstripping the capacity, a large number of aspirants are also denied access to higher education. Although the Authors' focus was on access to basic education among nomadic pastoralists , current study found this invaluable discourse enriching in understanding any shades of social inequalities   in Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.

Statement of the problem and justification

Despite the fact that various policy blue prints such as the Framework of Education for the alignment of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and Vision 2030, and the Kenya Vision 2030 documents agitate for an educational provision that is equitable and equitable, recent literature indicate that this noble objective is rather elusive. There have been no monitoring and evaluation of the performance of education in Kenya to demonstrate that the set objectives are being attained.

In 2003, when the national Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government took over the rein of power, the provision of the free primary education (FPE) for all was the policy that was implemented immediately in line with the 2nd millennium goal on universal education. Consequently, a large number of children who had hitherto been unable to attend school due to economic challenges found space in public education institutions. However, according to Gachuhi (1999) all the noble intentions the country holds towards provision of education for all its citizens has become a big challenge to the policy makers. Enrolment rates have declined due to what some see as the impact of poverty as a major component of social inequality on over 50% of Kenya's population, making education an

expensive service.   This study therefore basing its foundation on those noble educational intentions the government harbors for its children set out to examine aspects of social inequality in society and their influence on access to education, retention in learning and completion rates of learners in public primary schools in Athi River.   The study is keen on making contribution to the wider literature of effects of social inequality by addressing particulars as far as educational processes are concerned.   This study also is useful to education policy makers in the areas of designing and implementing mitigation measures to challenges in access, retention and completion of education, processes.   The study is useful in aiding primary school managers to have a better understanding of social inequality and its effects in specifically retention and completion; consequently they will be able to draw roadmaps that can circumvent the effects of social inequality to be able to ensure sustainable completion and retention rates of their pupils.   It can be argued that without pupils, the manager and the institutions will be rendered ineffective and it is for that reason that the findings of this study will provide leadership necessary as to avert such a situation.

The purpose and objective of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to assess how factors of social inequality impacts on learning process among primary school children in Athi river district, Machakos County. The paper had fourfold objectives, namely:

1. To examine   pupils access to education and educational institutions in Athi- River District, Machakos County, Kenya
2. Assess the completion rate of learners of a given cohort in the study locale.
3. Examine the state of social inequality among the population and learners in the study locale of Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.
4. Document the impact of social inequality on the process of learning in the study locale.

Theoretical framework

The study was based on the reference group theory. According to Matron (1936) people identify with the social and cultural group to which they belong. 'Normative reference groups (NRG) or with another to which they aspire to belong. 'Comparative' reference group (CRG). A number of studies point to the extent to which people's total environment and group membership creates an orientation to involvement in educational projects and programmes. In the case of CRG, people have some sense of 'missing out' or being deprived' and thus seek out opportunities to advance themselves. CRG may be provided by the mass media, by colleagues and by relationships. For example keeping pace with your partner as a way of social harmony. The current study finds this theory useful especially in determining issues of completion and retention. Some of the critical questions that accrue out this theory and applied to this paper include: is the reference group of pupils compelling enough for them to want to stay in school? Is there any sense of deprivation, they feel that can, enhance retention or do they feel better when they quit school? Is there any reason explained to them as far as seeking opportunities is concerned? Are there role models around whom the pupils can form identities and hence remain in school to completion because they say a purpose?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Orodho (2009a) defines research design as the scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to a research problem that is an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data is a manner that aims to combine relevance with the research purpose. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2012; Brook, 2013). The purpose of the design is to study the relationships that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs, and attitudes held, process that are going on, effects being felt on trends that are developing (Best & Khan , 2001).

Borg and Gall (1989) have defined the target population as the universe of a study, which is all the members of real or hypothetical set of people, events or objects to which an investigator wishes to generalize the results of the research study. The target population of this study includes head teachers, parents, teachers and pupils of primary school in Athi-River. They were chosen for the study because they are the stakeholders and are knowledgeable about access and retention in public school in Athi River. All the 76 primary schools comprised the study population from which the sample was picked.

The schools were stratified into rural and urban zones where 6 schools were randomly sampled fro each of the two zones. A total of 12 schools representing 15.8% of the total schools in the district were included in the study sample. The study also included 12 head teachers, of the 12 randomly sampled schools, 3 male and 3 female teachers randomly sampled from each of the 12 schools. The 6 teachers were sampled to participate in the focus group discussion because 6 is the recommended minimum number of informants (Mwiria & Wamahiu, 1995). The study also included 12 parents who had no children in schools but are within reach from each zone. Simple random sampling was used to recruit 10 pupils in each of the selected schools. Purposive sampling was used to

sample 2 education officers from each zone – a total of 256 respondents were included in the study.

In social sciences, research, the commonly used instruments are questionnaires, interview schedules, observational forms and standardized tests (Orodho, 2009a, 2012; Brook, 2013). The focus group discussion was also used because it is the best suited for obtaining data on group attitude and perceptions in order to bring to the fore the problem they encountered and suggest possible solutions (Mwiria & Wamahiu, 1995). The study used questionnaires, interview schedules, observation forms, and focus group discussion. It also made use of secondary data such as district education records and students' attendant registers from the school.

The study used construct validity in which it sought to find out if what is tested through the research instruments demonstrated an association between the test scores and the prediction of the theoretical and conceptual framework proposed in the study. The construct validity test for all the instruments selected legitimized the value of the tools and checked whether the tools represented the intended content appropriateness for the sample population and whether they developed measures for the phenomenon they are supposed to measure.

The study sought approval from Kenyatta University Graduate School. A permit was got from the Ministry of Education in Science and Technology before study was conducted. Consent was sought from individual respondents and the institutions that were included in the study. The respondents were guided through the instruments which were also translated where necessary. Relevant documents were then analyzed to give information on the completion and retention rate. Secondary data was assessed through analysis of relevant documents in the Ministry of education Science and Technology publications and other archival and documentary centers. Confidentiality and anonymity informants consent was put in place as requirements conditions for the whole research process. In respect for the informants and in order to protect them from abuse of data they gave for the research against their people, data was represented in such a way that it could not be linked to individuals who gave it except by the researcher who could need to seek clarification during analysis of data.

Data analysis in descriptive survey studies involved I variety of descriptive and inferential statistics.   Orodho (2009a) defines data analysis as categorizing manipulating and summarizing of data in order to obtain answers to research questions. Data collected through, the questionnaires was analyzed according to emerging patterns or opinions derived through statistics using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and Ms-Excel. Data was organized in frequency distribution tables. The study used frequencies and percentages because they easily communicate research findings to majority of leaders (Orodho, 2009b, 2012). Frequencies easily show the number a response occurred or the number of subjects in a given category. Percentages were used to compare the sub-groups that differed in proportion and size. The data from interviews and focus group discussions was read carefully paying particular attention to comments, ideas, and concerns from the participants. The field notes were edited, coded and written based on content and then analyzed deductively according to the specifications given by Brook (2013).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Access to Education and Educational Institutions
The first objective was to examine the access to primary education by pupils in Athi- River District, Machakos County, Kenya. The study found that majority of the pupils stayed within 2 km from the primary schools and they walked to school. It was also found that 71 (59%) sometimes got late to school. About 8 percent always got late to school due to reasons not related to distance to be covered from home to school. Majority of the teachers and head teachers considered accessibility as good, and as such not a constraint to access to school by the pupils of their schools. The implication is that the locations of schools fro the homesteads of the pupils was not a constraint to their access to school.

The results are in line with Hertz (1991) who aptly argues that long distance poses a security risk during transport especially for girls thus may affect retention in school. Maleche (1972) argues that long distance from school and heavy household duties results in physical and mental exhaustion which makes learning uninteresting and ineffectual. Some pupils may therefore end up dropping out of school hence decreasing retention in schools. All the respondents indicated that there were school age children in a community who were not enrolled in the school. They attributed the non-attendance to the fact that the schools were not enough for all the school age going children.

Rate of completion of the pupils in Athi-River District
 The second objective attempted to estimate the rate of retention and completion of pupils in the schools sampled for the study. The researcher took the class 8 of 2011 as a case example for studying the retention and completion rate. The headteachers were asked to provide the information on their class enrolment for the last three years 2011, 29010, 2009. The result is carried in Table 1.

Table 1: Completion Rate of pupils by gender using 2009-2011 cohorts

School	No	2009 – std 6			2010 std 7			2011 – std 8		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Urban	1.	93	86	179	82	75	157	89	79	168
	2.	16	9	25	15	17	32	8	13	21
	3.	78	69	147	69	85	154	55	56	111
	4.	64	51	115	59	61	120	41	38	79
	5.	92	107	199	94	107	201	79	90	169
	6.	86	72	158	76	67	143	73	63	136
Rural	7.	22	16	38	15	13	28	11	10	21
	8.	25	26	51	29	19	48	20	20	40
	9.	15	19	34	20	25	45	12	11	23
	10.	13	9	22	11	8	19	11	6	17
	11.	17	23	40	22	20	42	15	11	26
	12.	33	26	59	24	32	56	18	20	38
TOTAL				1067			1045			849

From the table 1, it is observed that in 2009, there was an enrolment of 1067 which reduced to 1045 in 2010. Thus 22 pupils dropped out, it further reduced to 849 in 011, thus 196 pupils dropped out. The retention rate of rate class can be calculated as 849 (80%) with a dropout rate of 218 (20%) across the three years, yielding an annual dropout rate of 6.67 % for the cohorts studied.

The above findings are supported by the findings from all the education officers who indicated that the retention levels of the pupils who manage to access education as low majority of teachers 54 (75%) and head teachers 11 (92%) considered the completion rate high. They cited the reasons as drought that brought about poverty, thus the pupils did not attend school regularly as they embarked on ways of looking for money – through sand harvesting, and others come from families where the parents are not keen in their education. The girls may get married early. The above findings agree with those of Abagi and Odipo (1997) who indicated that completion rates were very low especially for pupils in standard 6, 7 and 8.

State of Social Inequality

The third objective was to examine the state of social insecurity in the study locale. The study found that majority of the teachers 40 (55%) considered the general social inequality to be quite high. Majority of the parents 23 (48%) experienced high cost of living, majority of the parents 33(63%) were unemployed and what they earned did not sustain their needs. Majority of the parents were farmers, yet the environmental insecurity neither facilitate good yields to make them food secure nor the   income from their farming activities to appropriately cater for the education of their children. Some parents were also involved   in own business, but due to their low academic attainment and/or entrepreneurial skills, they were merely relegated to the low earner cadre of workers.   In addition, a good proportion of   mother of these pupils were   housewives. In addition, though most of the pupils had both parents alive, some were found to be either partial orphan with one parent dead or total orphans with both parents dead. The implication of this finding is that pupils in Athi-River District are from parents who suffer from all forms of human insecurity. It is apparent that human insecurity in this area should be perceived as a holistic concept that encompasses a number of major interrelated and complementary components such as economic insecurity, food insecurity, environmental insecurity, community insecurity, and political insecurity (Wanasinghe & Batagoda, 2003, Njeru & Orodho, 2003). It is a people centered concept, which is a precondition for human development. As defined by the Commission on Human Security (CHS), human security protects thee vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment.   In other words, and in the context of education, human security is a prerequisite to active participation in education, as it safeguards people from critical or severe as well as pervasive or widespread threat and situations (Njeru & Orodho, 2003). Indeed, this is the basis on which the development of the concept of child-friendly schools that aspire to offer learning in a friendly environment that is free from any threats in Kenya is based (Republic of Kenya, 2012a, 2012b).

Impact of social inequality on the learning process

The final objective was to find out the perceived impact of social insecurity to the learning process in the study locale. According to the respondents, poverty, family background, (orphans), poor infrastructure, and poor pupil – teacher ratio was main area of social inequality. These resulted in the pupils' poor academic performance, lateness to school and dropping out of school. The pupils embarked on early employment, early marriages and drug abuse. This apparent impact of human security on the learning process is also documented on Orodho,

Waweru and Getange (2014) study on strategies to dismantle the gender differential jix is students access to, participation and academic performance in education in Mandera County, Kenya , that found the recent states of insecurity in the county has been partly been attributed to the dismal performance of students in the county, especially when the performance disparities are unpacked and examined using   gender sensitive lenses. These findings are also in tandem with the findings of UNICEF (1989) which established that most regions in Kenya with a low literacy and general education levels have rampant poverty and morbidity due to social insecurity exhibited in terms of depressed standard of living.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main thrust of this paper was to examine the impact of social inequality factors on access and completion rates in public primary schools in Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.

Based on the research findings and discussions in line with the reviewed literature, the following   conclusions were made:

1. The social inequality was high and most parents experienced high cost of living.
2. Majority of the pupils stayed 2 km from school, however the majority sometimes got late to school.
3. While most of pupils had both parents alive, some were orphans consequently vulnerable.
4. Distance, transport problems, and parenting were cited as the main reasons for the challenge in accessing education institutions.
5. There were school age children in the community who were not enrolled in schools.
6. The schools were not enough for all the school age going children.
7. The retention rate for the 2009 class 6 was 80% with a dropout rate of 20% across the three years. This yielded a substantial annual dropout rate of 6.67 percent for the cohorts studied.
8. Both school and home factors brought about social inequality and negatively impacted on the learning process among pupils in Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ministry or Education should employ or deploy more teachers in schools especially in the rural areas to improve on the content importation and the teacher student ratio.
2. The government, NGOs social groups should introduce and sustain feeding programs to enhance retention of pupils in the primary schools.
3. Guidance and counseling measures should be utilized to ensure that pupils are empowered in counteracting negative and improper influence and embark on completion of their primary education.
4. The government and other stakeholders and well wishers to improve the infrastructure of schools, these include roads, buildings, toilets and water provision.
5. The government should improve on the infrastructure to facilitate employment opportunities for the people of the area. It should seek to improve the farming efforts of the community through irrigation, greenhouse farming to reduce the effects of drought.

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