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Factors Influencing Parental Patronage of Private Primary Schools in Kenya Despite Free Primary Education (FPE) in Public Schools

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Abstract
Free primary education (FPE) has attracted a lot of attention and its implementation was a landmark policy decision by the government of National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in January 2003. This pronouncement of the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2005 and education for all by 2015 has been one of the major development goals of the Kenyan government. However conditions of learning are crucial in achieving this goal. There are real concerns raised by stakeholders regarding the overall impact of FPE on enrolment and quality of education in both public and private primary schools. The purpose of this study was to establish factors influencing parental patronage of private primary education despite free primary education in public primary schools in Getembe Division, Kisii County, Kenya. The study involved 816 parents drawn from 51 primary schools in Getembe division selected by random stratified sampling proportionate to population size (PPS). It was based on descriptive survey design. Questionnaires and document analysis guide were used to collect data. Reliability of the instruments was addressed through piloting in six schools. Each alpha level value was set at 0.05 and the Pearson (r) for parents/guardians' questionnaire was 0.795 for private and 0.764 for public primary schools respectively. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency counts, means and percentages. Data was presented by use of tables, pie charts, bar graphs and line graphs. The results indicate that pupil teacher ratio (PTR) is the major factor influencing parental choice of a school. The study found out that parents consider quality when making schooling decisions for their children. Free Education was found to be the major reason for parental preference of public primary schools. It was also found that FPE has increased access to education but it has caused general decline in academic performance in public education and occasioned a surge for demand for private education. The study also found out that most people including those in public primary schools prefer private primary schools for their children. The study concluded that, policies addressing school quality are likely to be more effective in increasing school enrolment. It is hoped that stakeholders in education including teachers, parents, policy makers and students will benefit from this study.
Key words: Free Primary Education (FPE), private, public, patronage

INTRODUCTION

Education is regarded as a prime mover for the socio-economic development of countries and accounts for as much as 20% of the annual Gross National Product (GNP) of developing nations (Alvares, et al., 2003). This is based on the observation that education improves the productive value of human beings by imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour traits referred to as human, social and cultural capital which are required in producing goods and services (Inglis, 2008). In addition to the productive value, education promotes harmonious co-existence, population control, healthy living, effective citizenship, nutritional adequacy and child upbringing (Psacharopoulos, et al., 1985). For Kenya, the provision of education and training to all Kenyans is fundamental to the success of the Governments' overall development strategy (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

Parents go to a great length to ensure that their children go to school and later colleges and universities (Munia, 2004). Demand for education is affected as parents and students compete to obtain enrolment in best performing schools. In California, highly ranked schools, where students score highly, are regarded as effective schools while the lowly ranked schools are thought to be ineffective. Because parents worry about their children's well being, they are lured into settling in districts that have top ranked schools which their children can access (Popham, 2000).

In England, league tables have a strong focus on absolute levels of academic achievement of students and exert a strong influence on parental choice (Woods & Levacic, 2002). Bradley, et al., (2000) found that an improvement of 10% in a school's examination performance led to an average increase of 7% in pupils enrolments. At the same time, increase in attainment may be accompanied with decrease in equality of opportunity as parental preferences reallocate positive peer group effects away from lower-ranked schools (Adnet and Davies, 2000). A study carried out in Tanzania by Lassibille, et al., (1998) found that students in the public schools tended to

perform better than their private school counterparts. As a result, between 1990 and 1992, the average size of a public school grew by 31% in the public sector. Schools whose position in the value added ranking improved between 1992 and 1995 gained more students than those with a lower ranking. In the public sector, schools that ranked higher in 1995 than in 1992 in terms of form 4 examination results gained 41% in average enrolments. Although the recommended enrolment in Kenya is 40 pupils per class, some schools have higher enrolments because of the high demand for places (MOEST, 2001).

Although it is argued that education is not merely passing examinations (Republic of Kenya, 1998) performance grades are the most widely used indicator of quality educational attainment. Githinji (1990) views performance in public examinations as an appropriate measure for assessing the output of an education system on skills acquired. Providing examinations in many subjects enables information on achievement in a wide range of skills to be obtained. Since examinations are geared towards the school curricular, students, teachers and the general public regard them as important and schools are therefore under pressure to teach the subject matter and skills that are examined.

The study explores the reasons for increased enrolment in private primary schools despite free primary education in public schools and to establish if FPE has had any impact on both performance and total enrolment in both public and private primary education.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study employed a descriptive survey design. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) describe descriptive survey as collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study. Descriptive survey design was chosen because it is appropriate for educational fact finding and yields a great deal of information, which is accurate. It also enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Oso and Onen 2008)

Sample and venue

Stratified simple random sampling was employed. The researcher first stratified the schools according to type as public or private drawn from Getembe Division of Kisii Central District in Kisii County. Random sampling was used to select 16 Parents from each selected school to make a total of 816 parents participating in the study. Simple random sampling was used because it is a technique in which every member has equal chance of being selected (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999).

Data collection instruments

The instruments of data collection were; questionnaires, document analysis guide and interview schedules. Parent's questionnaire was used to collect data on factors for school preference which consisted of open ended and closed ended questions. After a brief training, the researcher used the head teachers of the sample schools to distribute and collect questionnaires from parents. The researcher examined schools enrolment records for the period of 11 years (2000-2011) and examination performance records for the schools. Document analysis guide with regard to enrolment, examination performance and school establishment was used and the details recorded. Interviews for the head teachers were also conducted specifically on the impact of FPE on academic performance.

Pilot study

To establish reliability of research instruments, a pilot Study involving 6 schools (three from each category of school) was conducted in the month of January 2012. During piloting the researcher tried out the instruments of data collection namely; questionnaires, interview guide and document analysis guide using test-retest method. The two tests were administered at an interval of two weeks. The piloted schools were excluded from the main study. This was done so as to find out whether the terms used resonate with respondents. The researcher also verified their content for accuracy, consistency, and ensured that ambiguous information was removed while deficiencies and weaknesses were noted and corrected in the final instruments. This method of establishing reliability of instruments was suitable for the instruments that gather data which is qualitative in nature (Creswell and Miller, 2000). The reliability coefficients for parents/guardians' questionnaire was 0.795 for private and 0.764 for public primary schools respectively an indication that the questionnaires were reliable for use. To ensure face and content validity of the research instruments, two experts on the topic from Kisii University, examined the content of the instruments and advised the researcher on the content validity. Their suggestions were used to revise the instruments before preparing a final copy of the instruments and accordingly improve the scope, comprehensiveness and content.

Data collection procedure

The researcher secured a research permit and research authorization letter from the ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology through Kisii District Education Office before proceeding to the field for

data collection. The researcher visited the sampled schools to seek official permission for the actual study between January and March 2012. The researcher booked an appointment with the sampled schools through the head teachers and the officers concerned to visit for data collection. The researcher then visited the schools and administered the questionnaires himself/or with the help of head teachers as research assistants after a brief training especially for parents/guardians' questionnaires. Also, the researcher visited Kisii central District Statistics Office to collect information on school establishments, academic performance and total enrolment in Getembe Division.

Data analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and means. Data was then presented by use of graphs and tables. Qualitative data was analyzed by way of summarization or condensation of meanings and it was then merged with data collected by document analysis and by questionnaires in response to the themes of study.

RESULTS

Impact of Free Primary Education total enrolment

Based on the information available in records from Kisii District Education office, data on total enrolment in schools and rate of establishment of new schools in Getembe Division was analysed and presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Trend in enrolment in private and public primary schools (2000-2010)

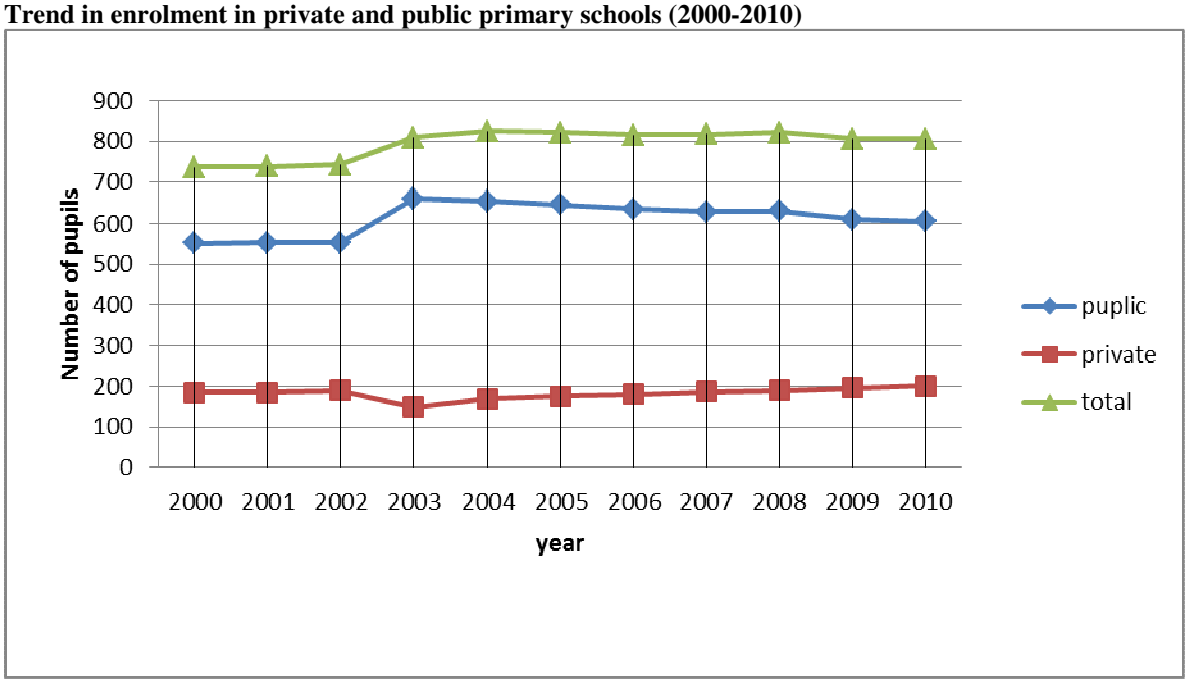

Figure 1: Time series plot for enrolment in public and private schools (2000-2010)

Figure 1 indicates that, enrolment increased spontaneously in public schools in 2003 during the intervention year (2003) while those in private schools went down. Thereafter, enrolment in public schools started to decline consistently up to 2010 while that of private schools increased consistently across the same time period. This could mean that in 2003, some parents removed their children from private schools to benefit from the FPE policy but from 2004 they may have been dissatisfied with education offered in public schools and transferred their children back to private schools. This could be due to overcrowding in public schools and hence poor delivery of services with no individual attention.

The time series graph (Figure 1) also indicates that there is a strong negative correlation between the trend in enrolment in public and private schools in Getembe Division after the FPE intervention in 2003. The trend shows that primary school enrolment in government schools increased after the FPE intervention in 2003 but started declining thereafter. On the other hand demand for private schools declined immediately after introduction of FPE but started to increase thereafter. Also the number of registered private schools in Getembe Division has increased by 50% in a span of 10 years from 20 schools in the year 2000 to 30 schools in the year 2010 in private schools (Figure 2). The researcher interprets this decline in demand for public schooling by some households in response to decrease in fee levels as evidence of deteriorating education quality in public schools.

Rate of establishment of new schools in Getembe Division from 2000 to 2010

This was necessary to determine how the demand for public and private education has changed over the years which have a bearing on parental patronage of school type, enrolment and also on examination performance. Records from Kisii central District statistics office on establishment of new schools were analysed and the result presented in Figure 2. The number of registered private schools has increased from 20 in the year 2000 to 30 in the year 2010 which represents 50% increase in the number of private schools within a period of 10 years. Over the same period the number of public schools remains constant. This shows that demand for private education is high compared to public education. This also explains the increased enrolment in private education in Getembe Division and it also indicates increased demand to private education compared to public education in Getembe Division. This also explains the increased enrolment in private schools and dwindling enrolment in public schools in Getembe Division. This also shows that more people prefer private education than public education.

Growth of primary school institutions in Getembe Division

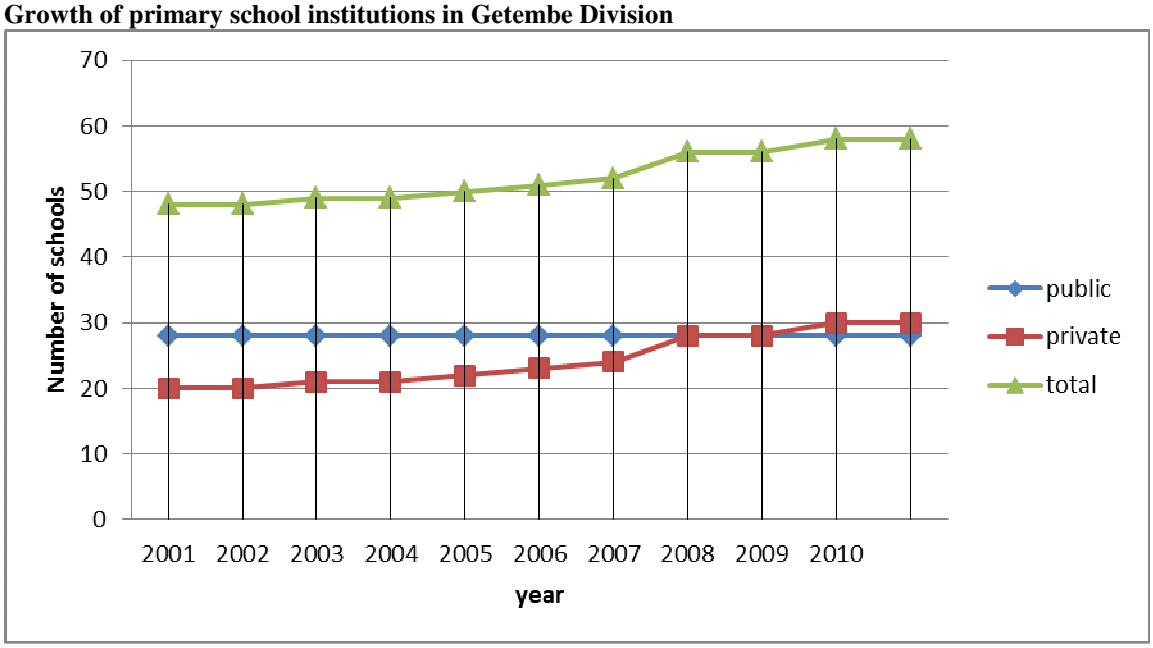

Figure 2: Time series plot for establishment of new schools (2000-2010)

Trend in academic performance between private and public primary schools in Getembe Division.

Data on examination performance before and after re-introduction of FPE available in schools was analysed and the result presented graphically as shown in Figure 4.10.The graph shows the trend in performance of both public and private primary schools in Getembe Division after the FPE intervention. The Graph also shows the relationship between the direction of change in academic performance between public and private primary schools in Getembe Division after re-introduction of FPE

Trend in academic performance in public and private primary schools in Getembe Division

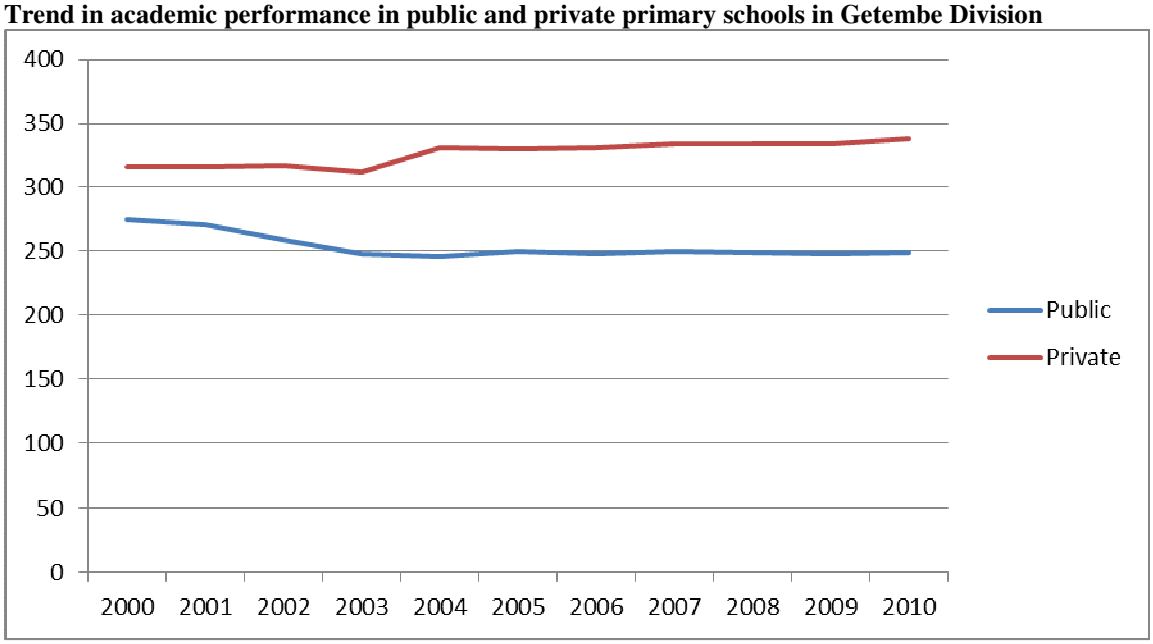

Figure 3: Time series plot for performance in public and private primary schools (2000-2010)

The trend graph (figure 3) indicates that, after FPE intervention in 2003, performance in private schools rose in 2004 and thereafter stayed more or less stationally. For public schools, performance went down after the FPE intervention and thereafter stayed more or less stationally. The difference in performance between public and private primary schools was much larger after the introduction of FPE in 2003 than before 2003. This can be attributed to change in enrolment in schools due to FPE intervention without proportionate change of school facilities and and other factors which determine academic performance of a school. There was mismatch of the available factors in public schools and the number of learners. One head teacher attributed the trend in observed performance to high pupil teacher ratio (PTR) and congestion in public schools the opposite of what is prevailing in private schools. This trend graph also indicates that there is a weak negative correlation between performances of public and private primary schools in Getembe Division after the FPE intervention.

Factors contributing to parental patronage of either public or private primary education

This study sought to find out the factors influencing the parental choice of a school type. Parental characteristics such as education level and economic status as well as their views on the reasons for choosing a school type were analysed and presented as shown in Figure 4 and 5, and Tables 1-3.

Public schools parents' education level

The study sought to find out the academic level of parents of both public and private primary schools in Getembe Division and the result is presented in Figure 4.

Parents' education level

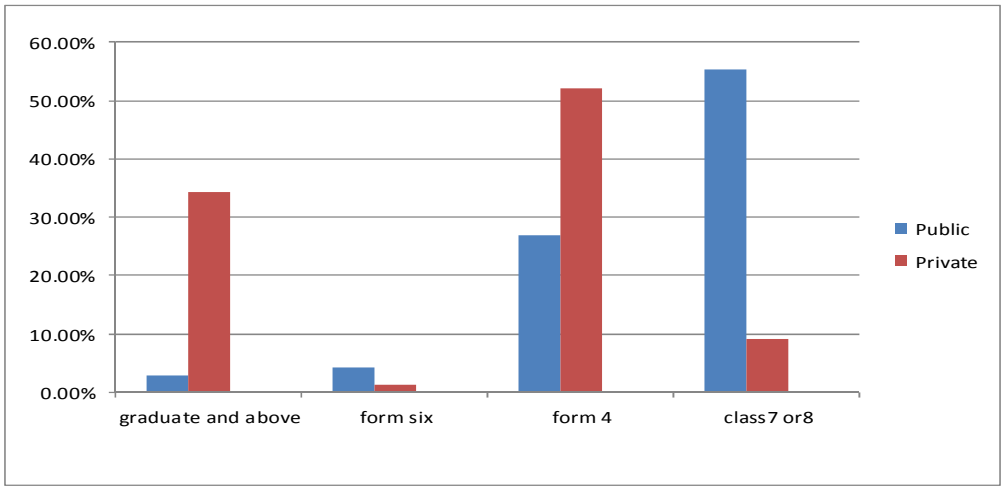

Figure 4: Information on parents' education level in public schools

The results indicate that majority 206 (66.15%) of parents in public schools have not gone beyond class 7 or 8. Only 09 (2.80%) have university education, 13 (4.25%) have reached form six and 84 (26.80%) have form four education. For private schools, 326 (87.60 %) parents have reached form four and above compared to only 106 (33.85%) who have reached above form four in public primary schools. Majority of parents in public schools 206 (66.15%) have primary level of education or none at all. This indicates that public schools are dominated by parents whose education level is low compared to private schools where majority of the parents 325 (87.60%) have reached form four and above. This shows that education level of the parents, determines the choice of a school for their children. More educated parents have taken their children to private schools while less educated parents have taken their children to public primary schools. This is in consonance with (Mathangani 2008)

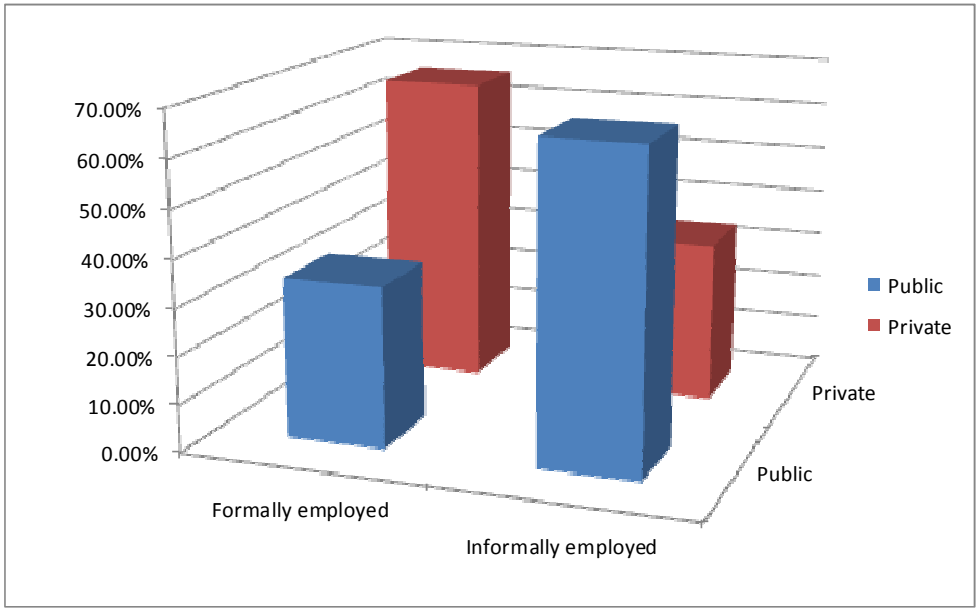

Figure 5: Occupation of parents in public and private primary schools

The result presented in Figure 5 indicates that majority 245 (65.78%) of parents in private schools are formally employed compared to minority 127 (33.80%) of parents in public schools who are in the formal sector. This indicates that the social economic status of a family determines the choice of a school. Formally employed parents with probably higher, regular and stable incomes have enrolled their children in private schools. This is in consonance with (Digolo 2010).

Factors for parental preference of a school type

This study sought views of 816 parents from both public and private primary schools on reasons as to why they have enrolled their children in their respective schools. The findings are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Factors for parental preference of a school (Public, n=312; Private, n=372)

School category	Public		Private	
Statement on availability of factors	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
Good academic Performance	248	79.48	354	95.16
Children are trained to be inquisitive	108	34.61	233	62.63
Availability of educational facilities	119	38.14	264	70.96
Secures future standards of child's education	110	35.25	265	71.24
Children develop in all spheres of life	142	45.51	158	42.47
Smooth transition from home to school	284	91.02	272	73.12
Children are more disciplined	119	38.14	372	100.00
Classroom encourages more learning	170	54.48	343	92.20
Attractive immediate environment	45	14.42	174	46.77
School has enough teachers	27	8.654	359	96.50
School has got qualified teachers	275	88.14	359	96.50
Opportunity of admission into the best high school	165	52.88	322	86.56
Children go for field trips	95	30.45	290	77.96
Teachers mark assignments regularly	78	25.00	340	91.40
Proximity of the school to home	301	96.47	063	16.94
No incidents of teachers strike	014	4.481	356	95.69
Transport is offered	000	00.00	348	93.55
Lunch is provided	000	00.00	323	86.83
Fees is not charged	312	1000	000	0000
Teachers give relevant home work	151	48.40	365	98.11
Official and national language used	140	44.87	335	90.00
No classroom congestion	34	10.90	330	88.71
Teachers are always present in school and attend to lessons	78	25.00	359	96.50

It could be observed from Table 1 that all the listed factors as influencing parent's preference of a school actually acted as stimulants to some extent for parental patronage of a school. It is worth noting that all the parents who have enrolled their children in public schools mostly are inspired by the fact that fee is not paid in public schools bringing in the issue of social economic status of parents as a factor determining parental preference of a type of a school. Also apart from free education in public schools parents also believe that there is good academic performance 248(79.48%), there is smooth transition from home to school 284(91.025), school has qualified teachers 275(88.14%) and proximity of the school to home 96.47%). Private school parents are mostly inspired by a believe that there is good academic performance 354 (95.16%), availability of better educational facilities (264(79.96%), smooth transition from home to school 272(73.12%), children are more disciplined 372(73.12%), classroom environment encourages more learning 343(92.20%), school has enough teachers 359(96.50%), school has qualified teachers 359(96.50%), children go for field trips 290(77.96%), teachers mark assignment regularly 349(91.40%), no incidents of teachers strike 356(95.69%), transport is offered 348(93.55%), lunch is provided 323(86.83%), official and national language is used 365(90%), teachers give relevant homework 365 (98.11%) and there is no congestion in the classroom 330(88.71%) among others.

Views of parents on preference of a school type

The study sought to establish the type of a school which parents prefer most irrespective of where they have enrolled their children since it could be due to reasons beyond their control. The result is as per table 2.

Table 2: Preference of parents on school type

School type	Percentage approval in percentages
private	81.52%
public	18.48%

The results indicate that majority 558 (81.52%) of parents prefer private schools. It is interesting to note that even those parents who have enrolled their children in public schools prefer private schools most likely because they also believe that there is quality education in private schools.

DISCUSSION

The central finding of the analysis is that the introduction of FPE has increased access to schooling for poorer households but also contributed to a decline in the perceived quality of education in government primary schools

(Figure3). This effect is evidenced by the decline in net enrolment in government schools and the surge for enrolment in private primary schools (Figure1).The decline in academic performance in public schools has also led to an unmet demand for private education which has led to establishment of more private schools than public schools effectively overtaking the number of public schools (Figure 2)

The factors which encourage private provision of education despite Free Primary Education were: Avenue to train a child properly, availability of educational facilities, smooth transition from home to school, children are more disciplined, no incident of teachers strikes, classroom environment encourages learning, schools have got enough teachers, opportunity of admission into the best secondary school, students go for field trips, teachers mark homework regularly, transport is offered to and from home, lunch is provided at school, teachers give relevant homework, official and national languages are used, teachers give children close supervision and children get quality education.

Pupil teacher ratio is a major indicator of school quality. Theoretically, it is perceived that small class sizes are synonymous with higher quality; hence parents would prefer schools where pupil teacher ratio is low since the teachers will not be overwhelmed by work and can offer more individual attention to each child. The study found that pupil teacher ratio is lower in private schools compared to public schools. This is because high pupil teacher ratio is associated with poor quality which may prevent parents from sending their children to public schools. Parents are therefore likely to consider pupil teacher ratio when deciding whether to send their children to school as a high pupil teacher ratio is likely to lower the expected gain Figlio, et al., (1997) and Aldemman, et al., (2001) had similar findings.

It is worth noting that all the parents who had enrolled their children in public schools mostly were inspired by the fact that fee was not paid in public schools bringing in the issue of social economic status of parents in this category of a school. School costs are expected to be the major determinant, for school choice given that this is the direct price the family pays for sending the child to school. The attractiveness of private schools when costs increase may be attributed to the additional and perhaps quality services availed such as extra tuition, feeding, computer lessons and music lessons. This concurs with Aldemman, et al., (2001) results on increment on instructional costs implying willingness to pay for quality improvement. This may be due to the fact that private schools can further be categorized into low, medium and high cost schools depending on other additional facilities and that parents attach some value to the quality of resources available in a schools.

In this study it was found that school fees (costs) in private schools are a major discouragement for parents who enroll their children in public schools where it is free. This is an indication that even parents in public schools accept that private schools offer higher quality education than public schools only that they do not have a choice since they cannot afford to pay for private education. This therefore means that given financial ability all parents will prefer private education for their children. The study also revealed that educational level of parents in private schools is higher compared to parents in public schools and that most of them are in formal employment and therefore can afford to pay for private education compared to parents in public schools who have low education and majority in the informal sector. These findings support the arrangement that parents should pay a fee so as to raise additional revenue that can be used to improve school quality in private schools (Getler & Glewwe, 1990). This leads to a further question that of identifying who enters a public school system in post FPE and who exits a public school in favour of a private one and in particular the interaction of these two flows can provide clues about the Social Economic Status (SES) of parents in private and public primary schools.

The study revealed that educated and formally employed parents prefer a private school to public schools. Therefore as a parent acquires higher education, there is a higher likelihood that they will enroll their children in school and are also more likely to opt for private school probably because of the perceived education delivery. Educated parents are also likely to be advanced in age having spent some considerable time learning and earning meaningfully, hence can afford to put their children in private schools. These results both concur with the descriptive statistics and findings by Figlio, et al., (1997) and Aldeman, et al., (2001) that graduate parents have a high probability of enrolling children in school and will prefer private school option.

The results of this study showed that both Public and Private Primary schools were well endowed with facilities. This is an indication that school facilities do not cause significant difference in academic performance of private and public primary schools in Getembe Division. The findings of this study therefore contradict Mbaabu (2001) and colelouch (2001*).* The study revealed that teachers in private schools are more satisfied with the management of their schools compared to teachers in public schools. This is an indication that academic performance is better in private schools due to more effective supervision of work and a more friendly

relationship between teachers and management. This effective supervision improves the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. The findings were in consonance with Aaronson, et al., (2003) and Duighan (1998).

This study revealed that teachers in public schools are more qualified and with better experience than their counterparts in private schools. This study is in accordance with Ongeti (2005) who noted that children in private schools were performing much better than their counterparts in public schools. He argued that in private schools teachers were employed on temporary terms and they could hardly stay in schools for more than three years, and despite of the little salary being paid irregularly they produced good results. Therefore, this study is in consonance with Ongeti (2005).

The result of this study showed that private school teachers are less absent from school than public school teachers who were noted to be more absent and don't attend to their lessons as required leading to poor syllabus coverage. The FPE policy was commendable as it expanded the country's primary education but unfortunately the quality of education went to the dogs during the period. The public primary schools became factories of mediocrity. And contrary to the conventional wisdom, their poor academic performance is not necessarily a result of poverty, but largely an outcome of absenteeism by teachers on the teachers service commission's (TSC) payroll. Many might be in school or even in class, but they don't teach. This is made worse by frequent teachers strike agitating for better conditions of service as evidenced by the findings of this report.

The performance of private schools has continued to improve since the introduction of FPE as that of public schools declined. The decline in public schools' academic performance may be due to congestion in public school classes which led to high Pupil teacher ratio and hence less individual attention to learners. On the other hand improved performance in private schools may be due to low STR since most parents transferred their children to public schools to benefit from FPE policy in the year 2003. This may be attributed to difference in supervision of curriculum implementation, levels of teachers' commitment and social economic background of the composition of parents in these schools, parents from well to do households economically are in private schools and those from poor households are in public schools. This is in consonance with Mathangani (2008) and Digolo (2010).

Conclusion

This study has discussed factors influencing academic performance and parental choice of private or public primary schools and impact of FPE on academic performance. The study revealed that parents prefer to send their children to private primary schools because of low PTR, proper monitoring, teachers give relevant homework, no congestion in classes, lunch is given, children are well disciplined, class environment is good and transport is offered, teachers are always present and in class teaching which lead to better performance and therefore a better opportunity for admission into the best secondary schools. Free Education was found to be the major reason for parental preference of public education and because public education is seen as an avenue for admission into better public secondary schools, since the admission criteria into secondary schools in Kenya favours those children from public primary schools. It was also found that FPE has increased access to education but it has caused general decline in academic performance in public education and a surge for demand for private education. The study also found out that most people including those in public education prefer private education for their children. The study concluded that, policies addressing school quality are likely to be more effective in increasing school enrolment and that it is not enough for the government to concentrate on increasing enrolment, gender parity, improved infrastructure and teacher recruitment without addressing the issue of quality. Therefore for vision 2030 to be realized, the country must invest heavily in education for the majority of Kenyan pupils are in public schools where quality education is still an issue as per the findings of this report. It is hoped that educational stakeholders including teachers, parents, policy makers and students will benefit from the study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study policies addressing school quality are likely to be more effective in increasing enrolment. Therefore, the following recommendations were made;

i) Hire more teachers.PTR emerged as a key determinant of school choice and as a factor which influence academic performance. In order to improve PTR in public schools, it is important to address teacher shortage by providing additional teachers in regions with high PTR. This recommendation is in line with vision 2030, which acknowledges the challenges of improving quality at primary school level.

ii) Strengthen adult education. This study revealed that there is a significant difference between the composition of parents in public and private primary schools in terms of highest level of education reached. It also revealed that the level of education of the parents plays a major role in choosing the type of schooling for their children.

This could require strengthening adult education programmes and other programmes targeting the youth who did not enroll in post primary education so as not to lapse into illiteracy which could lead into poor choices.

Suggestions for further research

i) It has been found in previous studies and this study that there is high unmet demand for private education. The magnitude of this needs verification.

ii) The analysis further shows that parents highly consider school quality when making a choice. Research utilizing school specific information such as school level KCPE scores textbooks to pupil ratio and PTR is necessary.

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