

School-Based Factors Influencing Performance of Pupils on Transition from Lower Primary to Upper Primary in Ekerenyo Division, Nyamira County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined school-based factors influencing performance of pupils on transition from lower to upper primary in public schools in Ekerenyo Division, Nyamira County, Kenya. The study adopted survey research design. A sample size of 109 subjects comprising, 90 teachers, 15 Head teachers and four QASOs were utilized. Various research instruments including questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists were used to collect data. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while qualitative data employed thematic analysis. The study revealed that the main school-based factors that negatively influenced performance of pupils in transition from lower to upper classes included inadequate teaching and learning resources, sketchy syllabus coverage due to inappropriate instructional strategies and poor attitude amongst pupils and teachers. The study made various recommendations specifically geared to teachers to use learner-centered teaching and learning strategies and cover syllabus for each level according to the stipulated timeframe.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Literature is abundant which attempts to relate the concepts of school-based factors such as teaching and learning resources and eventually on their overall influence on classroom management and effective curriculum implementation (Coleman & Anderson 2001; Birimana & Orodho, 2014; Orodho, 2013; Orodho, Waweru, Ndichu & Nthinguri, 2013; Sherman, Bohlander & Nell, 1996; Woodford, Jack, Gillard, Crazy, & Glennon, 2003). A study by Bizimana and Orodho on teaching and learning resource availability and teachers effective classroom management and content delivery in secondary schools in Huye District, in the Republic of Rwanda established that there was a positive and significant correlation between teaching and learning resources and teacher effective classroom management, content delivery and eventual students academic performance. This finding was in tandem with the findings documented earlier by Orodho, Waweru, Ndichu and Nthinguri (2013) in Kenya which established that the challenges of availability and adequacy of learning resources was found to negatively affect teacher effectiveness in the use of teaching methods as well as focus on individual learner, hence fostering discipline and good attainment of good academic results. The finding also echoed the results of a study by Waweru and Orodho (2014) in secondary schools in Kiambu District, Kenya on management practices and students academic which established that effective resource management is a prerequisite to enhanced students academic performance.

Few studies have specifically focused on school-based factors influencing pupils in transition from one level to the other (Republic of Kenya, 2013; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO, 2012; UNESCO, 2004). There are many educational levels through which a child or learner moves. Each time he/she moves from one level to the other, transition occurs. Transitions start right from pre-school to early schooling which in some regions start as early as age three or four. Early Childhood Education poses new experiences (such as learning new things, being in a new environment) as well as challenges (such as coping with new friends and environment) to the learners at this level. When these learners move to standard one, which is another level, they are faced with another set of new but different experiences (Republic of Kenya, 2013). For instance in early childhood classes, learning activities are different, their classes or normally guided learning activities end at eleven o'clock according to their syllabus but as they join lower primary, that is, standard one, they stay in class until 12.40 p.m. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO (2004) policy brief on early childhood states that the aims of early childhood education curriculum must be broad and contributive to the child's overall development as well as to their later success in school. The policy implies that the curriculum for early childhood education should be broad and provide for the overall development and successful learning. Experiences the children receive in their early years in school help them to undergo successful transitions in different levels of education and curriculum. Another very important transition in educational continuum for learners or children in their early years is from lower primary to upper primary. At this level, the child encounters new challenges, if

they were not prepared well. For instance, in lower primary, pupils interact with only one teacher, whom they own and none other is like him or her. As Johnson (2003) says, the basic understanding of transition is that it is the process of change that may require substantial preparation, planning and adjustment. Transition as a process of change requires preparation. To 'prepare' refers to making 'ready'. The teacher has a role in preparing the learner for a successful transition.

Leinhart (1989) and Westermann (1991) point out that teachers use knowledge about their children in classrooms – their backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses to create lessons that connect new subject matter to pupils' experiences. This means that the teachers must have an understanding of the content to be able to guide the learner through. Teachers use this knowledge to adapt their teaching to accommodate pupils who learn in different ways. Leinhardt and Westermann further add that expert teachers know and recognize pupils experiencing difficulties diagnose sources of problems in their learning and identify strengths on which to build. The teachers, who know their learners, provide for teaching and learning experiences and strategies that are suitable for the learners without compromising content as outlined in the syllabus or curriculum for the level of learners. Burrell and Bubb (2000) contend that the start of primary schooling had been perceived as one of the most important transitions in a child's life and a major challenge of early school. Initial success at school both socially and intellectually leads to a virtuous cycle of achievement while Ghaye and Pascal (1989) add that this can be a critical factor in determining children's adjustment to the demands of the school environment and future progress. This implies that all that surrounds the child should be conducive to his / her learning experiences. The environment of the child includes the parents who occupy the very first place of making the child emotionally ready, at home, to join school. Without prior preparation, planning and adjustment, the learners who perform very well in lower primary, do very poorly or relatively poorer in their first examination in standard four and may continue to get low grades unless there is an intervention to correct the situation (Ghaye & Pascal, 1989; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO,2012). It is against this background that this study that concerns the examination of school-based factors that influence pupils' performance on transition from lower to upper primary level in primary schools in Ekereny Division, Nyamira County, Kenya was premised.

State of the Art Review

The large body of literature on school-based factors influencing students participation in school range from teachers academic and professional qualifications, teaching and learning strategies, government policies guiding school operations , and the nature of the school curriculum (Ampofo & Orodho,2014, Bizimana & Orodho,2014; Orodho,2014; Ibrahim & Orodho,2014; Ndegwa,2005 ; Kingshorn et.al.,2004). With regards to teacher academic and professional qualifications, the literature notes that teaching involves sharing of knowledge between a teacher and a learner (Ampofo & Orodho, 2014). The teacher co-ordinates the teaching and learning process through appropriate teaching and learning activities (Ndegwa, 2005). To be able to co-ordinate the learning process, the teacher must have the right skills and mastery of the content for the correct level of learners and at the stipulated time as outlined in the curriculum, that is, the school syllabus (Bizimana & Orodho,2014; Orodho,2014; Ibrahim & Orodho,2014; Ndegwa,2005 ; Kingshorn et.al.,2004). The teacher's level of formal education is very important as this determines the quality of work he/she has to do. A teacher who is well-qualified academically is deemed to be knowledgeable and expected to guide his/ her learners well during teaching and learning activities(Bizimana& Orodho,2014; Orodho, Waweru, Ndichu & Nthinguri,2014). On the other hand, professional knowledge provides teachers with the necessary skills and etiquette necessary for his/ her day-to-day teaching and learning activities. According to Ndegwa (2005) teachers who were professionally qualified were favorable to child-centered teaching methods. This implies that teachers who are professionally qualified use child-centered techniques and these are techniques whereby the learner is the one who is actively involved such as discovery method. Kingshorn et al. (2004) point out that theoretical training should be enforced with practical training to increase the teacher's confidence. It is necessary for all teachers to have academic and professional qualifications.

With regards to teaching and learning strategies, it is widely documented that teaching is an art that requires those who have the ability, skill, knowledge and the interest which would act as the spring board for success to be realized (Orodho, 2014). Orlich et al., (2001) state that teacher artistry does not just happen, teachers develop their art by using carefully planned fine-tuned lessons that reflect on an understanding of many different teaching strategies. Each teaching technique is skillfully applied to gain the desired intellectual, social, affective or kinesthetic skills. The best teachers know their tools of the craft, when and how to use them. Teachers' main tools are: schemes of work, lesson plans, progress records, teaching and learning resources and appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Teachers develop artistry by being aware of both what they are doing and how what they do affects their learners. This means that teachers must know their learners as individuals, know their abilities and weaknesses so that they may plan various learning activities that the learners would be able to deal with for maximum achievement in the learning process.

Teachers should constantly be aware that what they do affect the intellectual, attitudinal and psychomotor skills of their learners. The strategies that they plan to use in a learning environment should cover those three major faculties for any meaningful learning to take place. A well-selected strategy would help the learners to remember the learnt content for a long time. Dale (1969) says that helping students to remember is one of the problems of teaching and learning. Certainly, every teacher often asks ‘why don’t my students remember what I teach them?’ and a pupil will search his/her mind for lost information and ideas that he/she thought he/she had learned. This implies that some strategies do not help the learner to remember what he/ she had learned for a long time. On this note, Kenya Educational Commission Report (1964) blames the drill method of teaching, neglect of activity and pupil participation. The commission advocates for activity-oriented methods which help the learner to learn more and sustains his/ her interest throughout the learning session. National Commission on Educational and Policies (1976) points out that the basic requirement of making education relevant to day-to-day problems and enabling the students to observe phenomena of the environment is to gather data about them, interpret the data and use them to solve problems. This is the whole essence of an appropriate teaching and learning strategy when it is correctly used. Some of the strategies that may be used are: inquiry approach, field trips, resource persons, discussions, dramatization, story-telling, lecture, question and answer, demonstration, group work, explanation and experimentation. Leinhardt (1989) and Westermann (1991) argue that expert teachers know and recognize pupils experiencing difficulties diagnose sources of problems in their learning and identify strengths on which to build. Teachers should use the experiences their learners are undergoing to lead them to the new learning experiences they are about to introduce to them.

With respect to government policies, the growing body of literature indicates that the type of government in power at a given time or period influences the type of education to be adopted and hence the type of educational curriculum to be developed for learners(Republic of Kenya,2012a,2012b; Republic of Kenya/UNESCO,2012; World Bank,2007). World Bank (2007) notes that universal enrollment clearly takes a political will, no country has achieved 100% enrollment without the government’s commitment from initial position of low enrollment levels, has achieved its goal overnight. Prior to the Second World War, it may have been that the greatest barrier to universal global education was political will. Since then, the greatest barrier has become time, the time to take to expand demand fast enough to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary completion by 2015, but still at a historical unprecedented pace. The time for ensuring universal access to quality education may be long.

Sandi (1997) notes that the extent to which educational change is driven by ‘external’, economic and social factors, and ‘internal’, specific education factors, is due to the lack of in-depth policy analysis and research which remains an open question and varies from country to country. Nevertheless, one important aspect of transition in Central Eastern European countries is the interdependence between economic and structural reforms on one side and reforms of public services on the other side. UNESCO, Education For All global monitoring Report (2007) emphasizes the importance of the intensive early childhood educational intervention as the most effective vehicle for securing sustainable educational success and for eroding the disadvantages of poverty, marginalization and the impact on parents with poor educational backgrounds. The government selects educational content, suggests teaching and learning strategies, objectives and lays policies to guide those who disseminate and implement the educational curriculum.

The committees and commissions that have been formed previously to look into some aspects of education, show how the government has been committed into the search for relevant education that will satisfy the needs of the learners and the society(Odhiambo,2012; Republic of Kenya,2012a. It is the government that: formulates educational policies; designs, develops and implements the curriculum; supervises delivery of the curriculum and evaluates the curriculum of education. All these activities are carried out by various agencies assigned by the government and the activities are geared towards improving the quality of education. Education cannot be separated from political governments in place. Education empowers people to live better lives free from disease, poverty and insecurity (Ibrahim & Orodho, 2014).

Regarding teaching and learning resources, Kirisikoi, Wachira and Malusu (2008), have aptly argued that teaching and learning resources are all materials and equipment used to enhance effective learning. A teacher selects, develops and reorganizes teaching and learning resources for effective teaching. A teacher is, therefore, the most important teaching and learning resource. Kiruhi, Githua and Mboroki (2009) contend that: the systematic design and selection of learning resources pre-supposes two important criteria, namely:

- a) That learning resources are appropriate for the purpose and group for which they are intended.
- b) That they are evaluated to make sure they work effectively.

The teaching and learning resources make a learning environment more realistic and interesting. Resources foster understanding of the content being learned. The teaching and learning resources therefore, enhance pupil performance and hence the transition from one educational level to another, less difficult. Mbithi (2007) says that just as well trained personnel are important for the success of schools, so are equipment and supplies. An educational curriculum will be meaningless without teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, chalk,

visual aids, maps, charts and other supplies. Improving quality of education should be a priority even where enrollment has not reached universal levels.

Filmer, Hassan and Pritchett (2006) note that PROGRESA, an education scheme in Mexico, improved attendance but did not improve school quality, which was low in many schools. Forty percent of fifteen-year old Mexican students fail an internationally comparable reading test passed by all but five percent of students in the average OECD country. The global policy agenda for primary education should no longer be more schools or more learners but quality teaching.

With respect to the concept of school curriculum, there has been no consensus regarding the definition of curriculum resulting into the term being variously defined by different educators. Kirisikoi, Wachira, and Malusu, (2008) define school curriculum as all that is planned to be taught and learnt in a set learning environment, including the time taken. The environment could be set indoors or outdoors. They add that curriculum includes all the learning experiences planned or unplanned for the learners to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, attitudes, values and skills. They continue to say that a school curriculum is made up of the following elements:

- i. Objectives.
- ii. Learning experiences/ activities.
- iii. Content/ subject matter.
- iv. Evaluation/ assessment procedure.

Shiundu and Omulando (1992) notes that curriculum is Latin word, “curere”, meaning to run a course. Therefore, curriculum represents a course of subjects covered by students and for which they receive a certificate at end of it. From the definitions, we note that a school curriculum is a means through which educational goals are achieved. It specifies what should be taught, when it should be taught, who should be taught, how it should be taught, how it should be evaluated and how much time should be taken to teach, learn and evaluate. It is through the school curriculum that the desired values, knowledge, skills and attitudes are acquired and developed for the benefit of the individual and the society. A good curriculum should meet the needs of the learner and his/her society.

A study of Danish education system indicated that it is easy for young people who have started one route through education and training system to change their minds and start again or to add another qualification to the ones they already have. The easy transitions from one educational level to another in Denmark are founded on the Danes practically invented lifelong education (OECD, 1998). This means that a school should be flexible and should be reviewed from time to time to allow new knowledge and skills.

A study in Hungarian education, improving quality of education and striving against mounting inequalities are major challenges for all types of education. Some of the contributors that pose challenges to quality and equity particularly within schooling are the present demographic trends that are heightening competition between schools. The competition leads to some schools selecting their students from a wider ability or academic achievement range and offering a broader curriculum suited to the needs of a wider range of students. This trend is important in improving the possibilities for students to move between pathways and is a positive contribution to educational quality and to equity. The earlier competitive selection, before 8th grade, as a means of ‘capturing’ the more able students at an earlier age is likely to increase inequality by attenuating streaming within Hungarian schooling. Teachers’ salaries are very low in Hungary. This has adverse effects on the motivation of teachers and reduces possibility of attracting good people into the teaching profession. The low pay is also a disincentive for teachers to seek second jobs, which often consume time and energy that might be devoted to improving quality teaching. There are many smaller and isolated schools which have limited facilities and equipment, and difficulty in offering a broad range of subjects to meet students’ different interests and talents. The rise of the private educational sector has implications for educational quality and equity. They appear to fill gaps the public sector has failed to fill but deny opportunities for learning, those who are not able to pay fees. These are examples of challenges that impact on educational transition in Hungary (OECD, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

Education has been accepted as a basic human right that is to be provided to all children or citizens of a country (UNESCO, 2004). According to UNESCO educational opportunities should be offered to every child in all countries. The government of Kenya has made an effort to make education accessible to all and improve the quality of education at all levels by revising the curriculum, availing teaching and learning resources and recruiting and staffing of qualified teachers. Despite these efforts, there are still factors affecting performance at lower primary and upper primary levels. Poor performance of a learner at one level leads to poor transition from one educational level to another. For instance, a learner who at standard three obtains very low marks, say below 20% in all subjects, if moved (transits) to standard four, is likely to continue performing poorly in academic programmes because the child did not master the content in the previous class. In Ekerenyo Division, upper primary pupils do poorly in their examinations than pupils in lower primary as depicted by the tables from the

two zones. The high performance in lower primary and sudden drop in performance in upper primary raised concern for the study. It is against this background that this study concerned with examining factors influencing performance from lower to upper primary level in public primary schools in Ekerenyo Division, Nyamira County, Kenya was premised.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine school- based factors influencing performance of pupils on transition from lower to upper primary level in Ekerenyo Division in Nyamira County, Kenya. The study had three fold objectives, namely to:

- i. Determine the performance profile of pupils in transition in Ekerenyo Division
- ii. Determine teacher related factors influencing performance of pupils on transition from lower primary to upper primary in public schools in Ekerenyo Division.
- iii. Find out school-based factors influencing performance of pupils on transition from lower to upper primary in public schools in Ekerenyo Division.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Classical Liberal Theory as stipulated by Harace Mann (1796-1889). The Classical Liberal Theory asserts that every person is born with a given amount of capacity and abilities. According to this theory, educational systems should be designed with a view to removing barriers of any nature, such as economic, gender, geographic, that prevent individuals from developing their inborn talents, which enable them to social promotion (Sherman & Wood, 1982). Horace Mann (1796- 1889), who was a liberal progressivism, termed education as “the great equalizer of opportunity and chance”, which enhances life chances of those born into humble circumstances. This theory calls for further going through education at different levels from primary to secondary levels to which access would be determined on the basis of an individual’s merit and not on social backgrounds. According to this theory, educational opportunities should be availed to all such that accessing it to be according to one’s desire and motivation and not a few individuals are allowed to receive it. Thus the U.N declared education as a basic right and should be made available for all.

The introduction of free primary education in Kenya by the government in 2003 increased educational opportunities of over 3 million children in primary schools. This was a positive move made by the government to alleviate barriers of social injustices to equity in education for all citizens. The Classical Liberal Theory was relevant for this study because it emphasizes on the need for removing barriers to educational opportunities. It is true that each learner has his/ her own capacity. The talents or capacities can be developed through educational opportunities that are offered. Equitable distribution of educational resources and facilities enhances pupil’s good performance and this eventually serves as an incentive for transition from one educational level to another. The home-based factors such as poverty, gender bias, cultural beliefs, attitudes of the learner and parent’s on education and school-based factors such as rules, curriculum, teachers, and instructional resources affect pupil performance and transition from one level to another. Children who go to school from poor families lack even very basic needs for schooling like a pen, school uniform and other writing materials. They also lack food or suffer from malnutrition and this leads to infection of nutritional diseases. Such pupils are not able to concentrate in class and their performance will be low and even much lower as they become more aware of their state as they grow.

When school-based issues come in such as inadequate staffing, lack of teaching and learning resources, inappropriate teaching and learning strategies, performance of pupils continue to be poor. Such are the barriers that need to be dealt with, some at school level for instance, maintaining discipline, provision and utilization of available resources while some require solutions at family level for instance, provision of basic materials to children such as food and clothing including school uniform and other requirements.

Research Methodology

The researcher used survey design for the study. According to Orodho (2009a), a sample survey research design is the type of design that facilitates description of the nature of the existing conditions, identify the standards against which existing conditions can be compared and determine relationships that exist between specific events. The method was deemed more preferable because of its cost effectiveness in terms of time as data were collected within the stipulated period.

The study targeted all teachers and education officers in Ekerenyo division, which was, 460 teachers in 56 public primary schools and four QASOs. Therefore, the study sampled 90 teachers, 15 teachers, one divisional education officer and three zonal education officers. Teachers were targeted because they are in direct contact with pupils in day-to-day teaching and learning activities which includes use of recommended teaching and learning strategies and resources. They are also involved in the implementation and delivery of the curriculum. The head teachers were targeted because, apart from being classroom teachers, have administrative role of

coordinating and supervising teaching and learning activities in the schools. Hence, were in a position to required information. The divisional and zonal education officers were targeted because they were charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the educational curriculum and government policies were delivered and implemented by teachers and other stakeholders.

From the 15 schools sampled, all the headteachers were purposively sampled and 90 teachers randomly selected yielding a total sample size of 105 subjects as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Population and Sampling

The main research instruments were: questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists to collect data. After following the correct protocol for data collection including getting authorization from the National

Name zone	No. schools	No. sampled schools (N)	Population (N)	No. of teachers sampled (n)	No. of Head teachers (n)
Ekerenyo	21	5	168	30	5
Nyaramba	19	5	154	30	5
Kiabonyoru	16	5	138	30	5
Total	56	15	460	90	15

Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), data was collected from the sampled schools. The in-depth interviews were conducted after the questionnaire administration. Descriptive statistics were generated from the questionnaires with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Computer package (Orodho, 2009b). The data from interviews and observation checklists were analyzed thematically and reported in direct quotes and narratives.

Findings and Discussion

The Performance Trend of pupils from lower to upper classes

The first objective sought to examine the performance profile of pupils in transition from lower classes to higher classes as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Pupils' performance in two zones in Ekereny Division

Zone	Class	2006	2008	2009	2010
Nyaramba	1.	364.07	417.17	410.70 (ZCAT)	643.10
	2.	390.79	395.05	394.58	657.94
	3.	372.74	370.16	340.28	643.21
	4.	209.00	222.06	227.90 (DCAT)	229.17
	5.	207.92	217.10	218.00	246.08
	6.	221.83	214.51	238.73	258.46
	7.	218.03	230.17	216.49(DICAT)	213.44
	8.	232.56	224.13	229.75	252.25
Ekereny	1.	550.18	572.79	565.67 (ZCAT)	582.45
	2.	501.80	548.58	584.67	625.88
	3.	547.66	550.04	557.77	592.68
	4.	231.07	227.20	243.39 (DCAT)	242.50
	5.	225.36	226.79	236.41	241.17
	6.	237.07	229.14	224.56	244.49
	7.	220.84	200.10	242.47(DICAT)	213.81
	8.	238.28	255.12	245.03	249.69

Source: Zonal / Divisional mark lists at school (2006, 2008, 2009 and 2010)

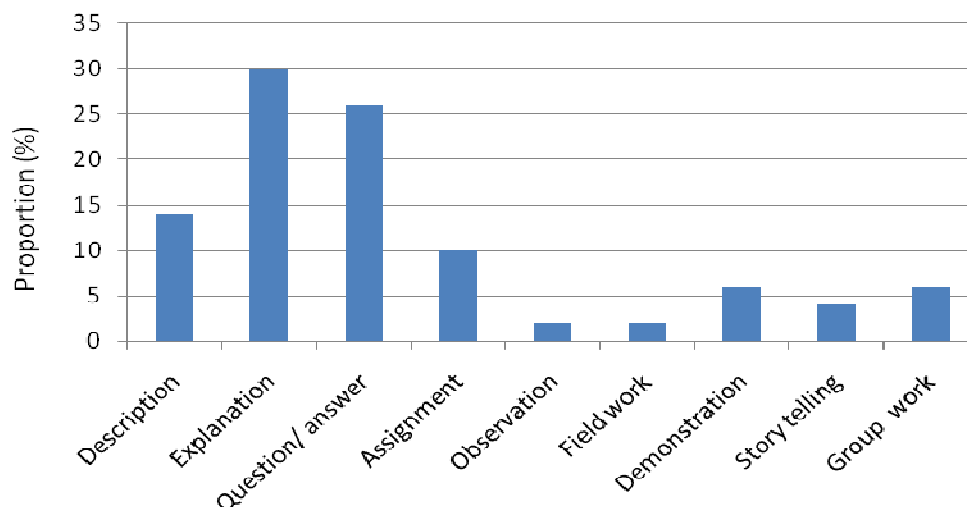
Table 2 shows the average marks of pupils in Ekereny and Nyaramba from standard one to eight, for four years. The results in the table indicate that pupils score high marks in lower than in upper primary. This implies that as the pupils advance to upper primary, there are some factors that influence their performance in education. From the academic or instructional perspective, the child was dependent on adult instruction in academic knowledge and skills necessary for a good start for later academic achievement (Katz, 1996). According to Katz, a learner depends on an adult for academic knowledge and skills, and if the instruction is given with a good start, the learner has good academic achievements. The adult is the teacher or any other person who has knowledge of the content to be learned (instruction).

School-based Factors influencing performance of pupils in Transition

Instructional Strategies

The second objective of this study sought to examine school-based variables, starting with teaching and learning strategies used by teachers during teaching and learning sessions. The most common teaching strategies used by teachers in the study were: explanation (30%), followed by question and answer (26%), description (14%) and assignment (10%) as portrayed in Figure 1. Other strategies which were rarely used are; demonstration (6%), group work (6%), story- telling (4%), observation (2%) and fieldwork (2%). During lesson observation sessions in both lower and upper classes, it was noted that three teaching and learning strategies were mainly used in the delivery of the content, that is, explanation, question and answer and description where pupils are less involved in the learning activities except question and answer to some extent. The teaching and learning strategy such as fieldwork, observation and story-telling helps the learner to comprehend content and retain it in his /her memory much longer.

Figure 1 : The proportions (%) of teaching and learning strategies



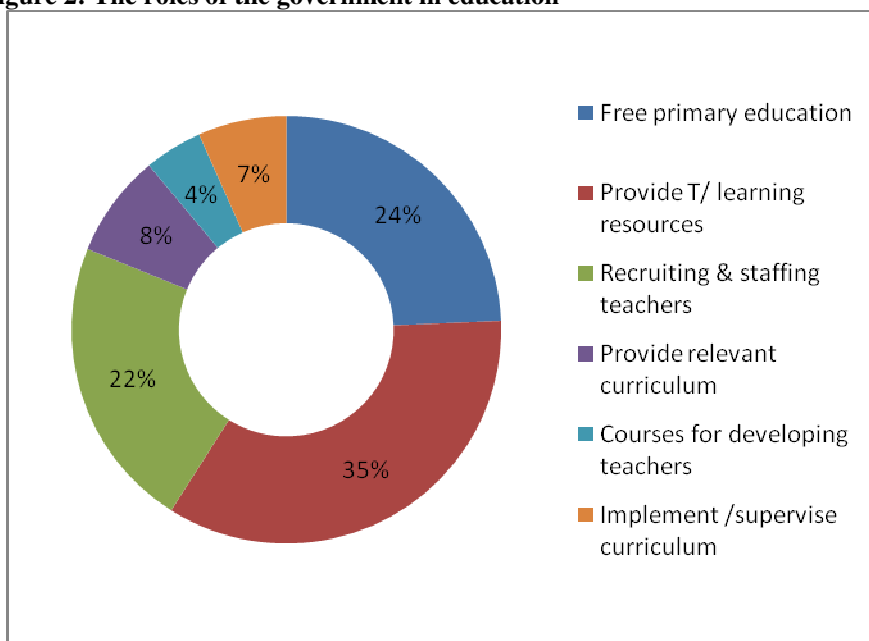
When the teachers were asked to say what they would do to improve performance of pupils in their areas of teaching, use of proper teaching and learning strategies ranked first, with one quarter of the total teacher population citing the strategy. This response showed the importance of teaching and learning strategies in the day-to-day teaching and learning activities. If these strategies would be varied according to the content and pupils' abilities, the performance would be improved from its current state. When teaching and learning strategies are used properly, they make teaching and learning activities interesting, motivating, and more real and enhance understanding. The learner becomes interested in carrying out designated roles in the teaching and learning process. UNESCO and Council of Europe (2007) emphasizes on an education system that ensures coherence and continuity of learning experiences and approaches from early childhood to primary schooling that are most beneficial for children and their families. OECD (1998) gives an example of the easy transitions from one educational level to another in Denmark which was founded on the Danes practically invented life-long education. Appropriate teaching and learning strategies were essential for the success and good performance of pupils. Leinhart (1989) and Westermann (1991) argue that expert teachers know and recognize pupils experiencing difficulties diagnose sources of problems in their learning and identify strengths on which to build.

Government Policies and School Operations

Teacher was requested to indicate their perceptions regarding the role of government policies in pupils' education, especially on transition from lower to upper classes. Their responses, as indicated in Figure 2 were: provision of teaching and learning resources (35%), provision of free primary education (24%), recruiting and staffing of teachers (22%), provision of relevant curriculum (8%), implement and supervise the curriculum (7%) and offers in-service courses for developing teachers (4%).

The findings indicated that respondents were aware of the role of the government policies and provisions in school operations. Teaching and learning resources were ranked highest because the government invariably provides grants in terms of capitation to all schools in the form of cash to purchase textbooks and other requirements of the school as outlined in the guide given to schools. Teachers were members of the committee that identifies needs of the school, which is, teaching and learning resources. Implementation and supervision of the curriculum and in-service courses were ranked lowest in response.

Figure 2: The roles of the government in education



The study found that the respondents, the teachers, head teachers and educational officers, were aware of the roles of the government such as provision of free primary education to all learners, provision of teaching and learning resources, recruiting and staffing of teachers, provision of relevant curriculum, in-service courses for developing teachers and implementation and supervision of the curriculum. These important roles for which educational policies are formulated to ensure they are carried out as designed. In an interview of educational officers, the findings showed that the government policies had an influence on the type of educational curriculum to be in place. In fact, 100% of the educational officers said the government was fully involved in educational matters.

The results of this study are in tandem with that done in Denmark which found that the approach and change in the 1990s is coherent with a trait inherent in Danish educational policies through history, namely; emphasis on personal choice and consensus. Danes are more likely to add new programmes to the already existing ones rather than replace one system with an entirely new one. Compulsory education (taught at the Folkes kole for nine years) was formed in 1994 when it was given a new act that intended to provide children with a better preparation for their adult life by inter alia improving the teaching in basic subjects like Danish language, mathematics and foreign languages as well as encouraging use of new information technology. It is easy for young people who have started one route through education and training system to change their minds and start again or to add another qualification to the ones they already have. The easy transitions from one educational level to another in Denmark are founded on the Danes practically invented lifelong education (Organization for Economic co-operation and Development, 1998).

The results of this study are also in line with the Swedish government which spends a high proportion of its national wealth on education. For instance in 1995, direct public expenditure on educational institutions represented 6.6% of gross domestic product (GDP). Financial aid to students is substantially higher than in many countries. In primary and secondary education, students' financial aid was 12% of total expenditure compared to an OECD mean of 4%. This encourages students to learn and complete their studies hence minimum or no dropout at any level of learning (OECD, 1998). The findings of the study indicated that the government roles influence the performance of the pupils. For instance, if teaching and learning resources, recruiting and staffing of teachers and provision of relevant curriculum are not done in time, they influence negatively the performance of pupils.

Teaching and Learning Resources

In establishing whether teaching and learning resources were used, teachers were asked to say whether they used teaching and learning materials, the majority of teachers comprising over three quarters of the total admitted that they used them. Although 21.1% of teachers who admitted that they were not using teaching and learning resources are a smaller proportion compared to the proportion of teachers who use them, they, on the other hand, represented a large proportion that would considerably affect pupil's performance. This meant that for every ten teachers in any school two teachers did not use teaching and resources. Head teachers also said that of the 21%,

who did not use teaching and learning resources were from upper primary. The educational officers also concurred with this by saying that about 90% of teachers who used teaching and learning were teachers teaching lower primary. This was one of the causes of low performance as learning was more abstract than being real and practical. Low performance in upper primary would be attributed to lack of using appropriate teaching and resources. Similarly, use the teaching and in lower primary encouraged good performance as learning sessions were more practical and hence child – centered.

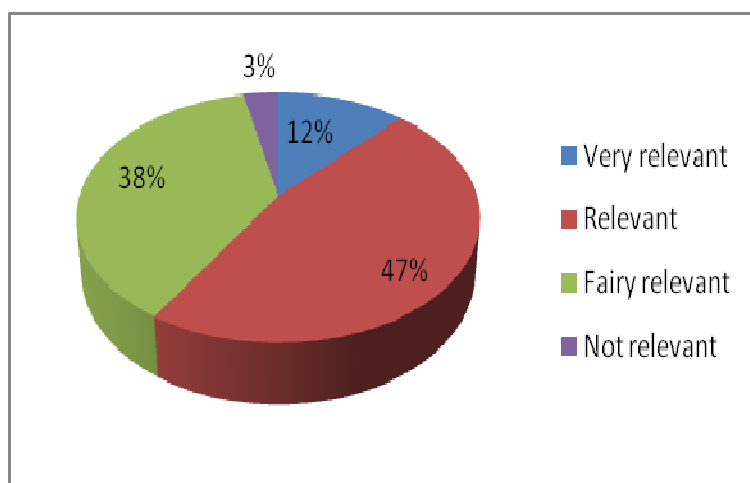
The study sought to find out teaching and learning resources which were being used by teachers. They included pieces of chalk, charts, maps, paints, invited guests for giving lectures on areas of interest, tours, study rooms/ lecture halls/ class rooms, and textbooks. Instructional materials were teaching and learning items or things that got finished or worn out with use such as pieces of chalk, ink, paint, pencil, erasing rubber. They were also referred to as teaching and learning aids. Facilities were things like classrooms, laboratories, and equipment that were used for the purpose of teaching and learning activities. The study revealed that 78.9% of the respondents used teaching and learning resources while 21.1 % did not bother to use them, other than facilities like classroom.

Kirisikoi, Wachira and Malusu (2008) assert that teaching and learning resources are all materials and equipment used to enhance effective learning. A teacher selects, develops and reorganizes teaching and learning resources for effective teaching. A teacher is, therefore, the most important teaching and learning resource. Among the problems that cause low performance enlisted by teachers, when asked to list problems that pupils face, was lack of teaching and learning resources which accounted for 40%. Teaching and learning environment is another very important resource for teaching and learning activities.

Relevance of the curriculum

The respondents were asked to rate the relevance of the curriculum and they rated it as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Teachers perceptions regarding relevance of curriculum



The results in Figure 3 indicate that over half of the teachers considered the current curriculum as either relevant or very relevant to the needs of the learner. Those who said the curriculum was fairly relevant to the needs of the learners were 37.8% of the total of those involved in the study. The general message portrayed by results in Figure 3 is that over 90% of teachers concurred that the current curriculum was relevant. The small number of respondents, comprising of 3.3% who considered the curriculum as irrelevant qualified their position by stating that the current curriculum did not provide for slow learners or those who were not good in academic work.

Teacher related factors influencing performance of pupils

The study found that all teachers, who were teaching in lower and upper primary, in the Division who were involved in the study had attained secondary education with a few reaching form two (K J S E) and the majority attaining form four education (K C E/ K C S E) and were qualified as professional teachers even though at various levels ranging from certificate (P1) to a degree level. It was noted that since teachers who were teaching in lower primary had the same academic and professional qualifications with those teaching upper primary, then neither high and good performance in lower primary nor low and poor performance in upper primary would be attributed to academic and professional qualifications of the teachers. This implies that other factors are responsible for the difference in performance in lower and upper primary. On teaching and learning strategies, the respondents enlisted explanation, question and answer and description as commonly used teaching strategies and assignment, observation, fieldwork, demonstration, story-telling and group work as rarely used teaching

strategies. It was found that teachers used explanation strategy than any other, and this made teaching and learning sessions teacher-centered. Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of strategies in teaching and learning activities. More practical- oriented approaches such as field work, observation and assignment, should be used in carrying out teaching and learning activities. The role of the teachers is to use the most appropriate strategy / strategies that facilitate the understanding of the concept or content at hand and ensure its reinforcement. The study noted that due to the use of approaches that were not practical-oriented, pupils would not perform well in their learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main thrust of this study was to examine the school-based variables influencing pupils' smooth transition from lower primary to upper primary classes in selected primary schools in Ekerenyo Division, Nyamira County, Kenya. Pupils in public schools were capable of performing well at all levels had it not been for the shortcomings that had been revealed by this study. Specifically, the teachers in the division did not make good use of their academic and professional qualifications to improve the performance of pupils given that their qualifications equipped them with knowledge, skills and training to do it. In addition, the teachers did not employ a wide spectra of teaching and learning strategies including description, explanation, question and answer, assignment, observation, field work, demonstration, story-telling and group work, experimentation, discussion, etc., as the content at hand and teaching and learning environment and level of learners may dictate. Teachers did not adequately play their role as academic motivators and develop positive attitude towards all subjects through various techniques.

The study identified the role of the government in provision of relevant curriculum, free education, and provision of teaching and learning resources, conducting in-service courses for updating teachers' skills and knowledge, implementing and supervising the curriculum and recruiting and staffing teachers. These roles were not fully exploited by the teachers and headteachers for the benefit of the pupils. If these were done, no doubt the performance of pupils would improve and hence their transition from lower to upper primary enhanced. The study revealed other school based factors such as: lack of teaching and learning resources, inadequate syllabus coverage, inadequate preparation from pre-unit, high enrolment of pupils per class, poor attitude to some subjects like mathematics, frequent changes in subject teachers, understaffing, lack of textbooks, and poor teaching and learning resources. The school had a role to ensure that the challenges enlisted above were dealt with to make teaching and learning activities more interesting, realistic and motivating. The study indicated that all these factors had serious impacts on performance and transition of pupils from one level of education to another.

From the findings, the overall conclusion made by this study was that school-based factors highly influenced transition of pupils from a lower level to a higher level. Pupils who did well in learning became more motivated and interested in proceeding to the next levels of learning. In fact, all head teachers confirmed that they promoted pupils to next levels (classes) on merit that was according to the marks attained by individual pupils. Those who got low marks were made to remain in the previous level for another year while those who refused to repeat ended up dropping from schooling.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommended that:

1. Teachers should use their academic and professional experience to help pupils to improve in their performance as they transit from lower to upper levels in the primary education cycle. They should motivate their learners to love all subjects equally and this would be possible if teachers use appropriate teaching and learning approaches and resources.
2. Teachers should use a variety of practical-oriented teaching and learning approaches such as field work, observation, role- play, assignment, demonstration alongside other strategies. These enhance learning and retention for a long time of the learnt content for they were child-centered.
3. Teachers should teach all subjects as in the curriculum regardless of whether a subject is examinable or not. They should also cover all contents of the syllabus.
4. Government, through the Ministry of education, should disburse to schools bursaries and other free primary grants to help them purchase teaching and learning resources and other requirements on time. Delays on disbursing of grants experienced every year impact on performance of pupils' performance.
5. All teachers should use a variety of teaching and learning resources in all classes during all teaching and learning sessions to make it more real and practical.
6. The curriculum should be reviewed from time to time to remove any irrelevant concepts or add content that is relevant to the learners since knowledge is dynamic. This may be more effective if all stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents, education officers and other interested non-governmental organizations) would be involved.

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