

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS: THE CASE OF EDUCATION IN KENYA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

CHANG'ACH KOSKEY
MOI UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
E-mail: jkchangach@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Education reforms in less developed countries have aimed at making education an effective vehicle for national development. Governments' policy makers and civil society have emphasized that such countries need to invest more in education and ensure that these systems of education are efficiently managed. The limited funds allocated to the sector should have maximum impact, and that the output and outcomes of these systems are satisfactory. This paper is motivated by the growing concern by various stake holders about the status of education in Kenya. It shows that, in spite of the major studies made in the school system, there are several factors behind the low efficiency in the system. Finally it enumerates a set of possibilities and prospects that may be explored to make the situation better. These recommendations are intended to improve efficiency and stake holders' satisfaction.

Introduction

Education reforms in less developed countries have aimed at making education an effective vehicle for national development. Governments' policy makers and civil society have emphasized that such counties need to invest more in education and ensure that there showed systems of education are efficiently managed. The limited funds allocated to the sector showed have maximum impact, and that the output and outcomes of these systems are satisfactory. This paper is motivated by the growing concern by various stakeholders about the status of education in Kenya. it shows that, in spite of the major studies made in the school system, there are serious shortcomings and obstacles in Kenya's education system. The paper identifies several factors behind the low efficiency in the system. These include: education policies and management processes misallocation of educational resourses, school based factor for example teachers attitudes, time utilization, school environments and household based factors not classified in the above categories. Finally the paper enumerates a set of possibilities and prospects may be explored make the situation better-these recommendations are intended to improve efficiency and stakeholder's satisfaction.

LOW INTERNATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Many children, who enter the school system at primary level, do not complete the cycle. Pupils drop out at various stages of the education system, especially in standard 6, 7 and 8. the situation is grave worsening, a trend which contradicts the national goal of promoting literacy and fighting against ignorance.

There are a number of factors divided into three categories that are behind the low competition rates at primary level:

a) *Education policies and institutional processes:-*

- Limited budget-90% used to pay teachers and 1% for instructional materials.
- Costs of instructional materials, school uniforms, tuition fees, activity fees. erection of physical structures etc
- Political will, lack of educational goals in the political spheres
- Loop-sided priorities
- Poor monitoring and feedback

a) *School based factors:-*

- Rising poverty, makes the school demands on children to have uniforms, textbooks, stationery extra tuition fee and activity fees which is not by most children/parents
- Over-loaded curriculum-the overloaded 8-4-4 curriculums is of the factors, which affect pupil's participation in school negatively (Brock and Commonish 1991, kinyanjui, 1987: world bank 1992). the curriculum that increase the time in school while shortening holidays and playing time affects the motivation for learning
- Teacher's attitude: the negative attitudes teachers towards their work and pupils their classroom management and their interaction with pupils have a great impact on the academic achievement and the retention in school of their pupils, particularly girls. Observations shown that teachers neglect, abuse, mishandle and sent out class pupils during teaching/leaning periods.

This un conducive learning atmosphere make children hate school leading to absenteeism, poor performance, and non-completion of the education cycle.

- Sexual harassment and pregnancies pose a great threat to girl's participation and retention in education (Njau & Wamahiu, 1996, Wamahiu et al, 1997). Reports by the forum for African women educationalists (FAWE) indicate that more than 12,000 girls drop out of Kenyan school annually due to pregnancy. such a hostile environment has two negative effects:
 - i. It discourages parents from sending their daughters to or pulling them out of school and
 - ii. Pupils lose interest in education, and, if pregnant, are kicked out of the school system altogether.
- Classroom dynamics
- Pupil motivation

c) Households/community-based factors

- Households/community attitudes-due to the rise in the level of poverty in Kenya, parents and by extension communities are not in a position to meet the ever increasing cost of schooling adequately.
- Opportunity costs-child labour has become crucial for family survival .Child labour is increasingly employed in domestic activities, agriculture, and petty trade rural and urban Kenya. After analyzing the opportunity costs of education, parents send their daughters into the labour market-mainly as domestic workers in urban centers, while boys in the coastal region and rich agricultural areas abandon school in to earn money as beach boys-and tea or coffee pickers, respectively. The consequences are a high drop out rate.
- Initiation and traditional ceremonies- in areas where tradition circumcision is still highly practiced some pupils are pulled out of school to participate in initiation ceremonies. Once initiated, some pupils develop negative attitudes towards teachers and school. In this respect, some circumcised boys are not ready to be taught by women whom they are now grown up men who should get married. This is because in some communities, girls or boys are expected to get married immediately after they have been initiated. Pressure is therefore put on them to leave school and met traditional expectations.
- Gender issues and socialization
- Religious factors

UTILIZATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING FORCE

• Pupil – Teacher Ratio (PTR)

Available studies suggest that very low pupil-teacher ratio is one of the main reasons for the poor quality and low efficiency, which characterized primary education in Kenya. Many policy makers consider a 40: 1 ratio reasonable in developing countries. World Bank-financed primary education projects are usually designed with an average pupil-teacher ratio of approximately 41:1. In Kenya the ratios vary between rural public, urban public and private primary schools. Education in and administrators of private schools believe that a low pupil-teacher ratio, which characterizes their schools, boosts pupil's performance (Abagi, 1997e). However, in public schools, especially the ones in slum areas, ratios are above 70:1 and more in lower classes. Low rations means underutilization of teachers, whereas , high ratios will complicate classroom management and effective teaching.

• Qualification of teachers

Traditionally, education researchers and planners have believed that professionally trained teachers are more efficient and effective than untrained ones. However, trained teachers are paid higher salaries that hinder the expansion of primary education, as more teachers will raise the recurrent expenditure on salaries, which is already very high.

TEACHING LEARNING CONTACT HOURS

A survey done by Okwach Abachi and George Odibo indicate that the stipulated teaching learning time in schools is usually not utilized efficiently. This means that extra tuition has been organized and teachers get extra pay for the extra services they offer to pupils. Some of the activities that was waste pupils time in school include:

- School assemblies
- Tea break
- Lunch break

Rural public primary school waste an average of 29 minutes per day, 13 minutes for urban public schools and 4.2 minutes for private schools. Other factors that leads to variation in the time wasted include

- i. Morning school cleaning exercise – sweeping classroom and paths, clearing grass, cleaning toilets and other chores.
- ii. Inefficient school management, which makes teachers lax.

- iii. Verbosity, unnecessary long speeches during morning assemblies
- iv. Teachers low morale which lead to teachers developing negative attitude towards their work.
- v. Lack of supervision and inspection from local education of officers.
- vi. Preparation of duty rosters and development of time tables
- vii. Absenteeism by teachers and pupils

It is important to note that pupils in private primary schools seem to enjoy more learning time than those in public schools. Especially the ones in rural settings. It is also important to note that extra tuition activities take more time in private school than in public schools. Private tuition is expensive, and raises the cost of education drastically especially because parents have been paying for private coaching.

GENERAL PROBLEMS

- The substandard physical resources and infrastructure. Most schools in Kenya lack essential physical resources such as classrooms, laboratories, playing fields, and other related facilities for an educational institutions including toilets, officers, staff houses e.t.c
- Changing curriculum without involving teachers who interpret the curriculum make it irrelevant and unmatched with the national goals of education.
- Parallel curriculum within the system of education exists. Some schools have opted for foreign curriculum such as the British General Certificate curriculum while other learners opt to study in other neighbouring countries.
- Poor governance, with most school heads starting their work without formal training and hence frustrating the running of schools, as the managers are novices.
- Corruption exists in the promotion of teachers, admission to colleges, the recruitment of teachers, and admission to national and provincial schools. This kills the spirit of the poor in the society. It includes charging fees above the recommendation of the ministry without regard for the prevailing poverty levels in the society.
- The teacher turnover, many teachers leave the profession for other better paying jobs. Some teachers seek to move from the primary level to the secondary level or from secondary to university level after acquitting higher qualifications. In most cases their needed experience is lost with that movement.
- Trade unionism- The trade unions in some instances disrupt the learning process by calling their members to strike over non-payments of salary increments.

National Examinations Management

The examination system has been faced with a number of frauds. Some schools collude with examination officials to cheat in the examinations. This has negatively led to the scrutiny of the national examining body over the issue of administering examinations.

HIV/AIDS Pandemic and orphans

There are many children who are orphaned by the scourge of HIV/AIDS that require special support. At the same time a number of teachers have either been infected or affected, reducing their efficiency. Those who die cause staffing problems in the education system whose policy is to replace once a year.

Physically challenged persons

The education system lacks facilities to provide satisfactory learning to this group of persons. The integration program may not work well for a long time in the future as the available man power is far below the demand, and there no plans yet to supply enough.

Child prostitution

Because of the harsh economic conditions at home, young school going children resort to prostitution to get quick money. These children are exposed to risky situations where they can get pregnant or HIV/AIDS.

Drug abuse

The problems of drug abuse and substance abuse are common in most schools. This is partly due to easy availability and many other predisposing factors.

Political interference

Politicians leadership in schools; The Daily Nation on 10th August 2007 mentioned four MPs who struck out the names of applicants who were not from their homes district.

Ethnicity

The introduction of the 85% policy in the 1980's with the decentralization of the teacher recruitment has led to large decentralization of the teachers as well as the recruitment of new teachers. The political polarization along ethnic lines has made things worse with the recent post election inter-ethnic scuffing all over the country.

Religious interference

The voices of the sponsors are strong in the running of the schools. Many discuss national interests or the learners' interests.

The private sector issue

Many private schools are run in unconducive environments, which endanger the lives of the learners. From the site, the facilities and the quality of teachers, not ignoring the teaching methods, all are below standard. However, there is some which do well and have tried to cover the gap in the provision of education.

Mass media

They publish examination results and highlight the schools, which perform well. This further leads to unprofessional system in handling teaching and learning just to be at the top.

POSSIBILITIES AND PROSPECTS

Following the introduction of free primary education (FPE) in 2003 and free secondary education in 2008, the government has assumed large responsibilities for the education of her population. However, the level of poverty in the country constraints parents and communities from effectively contributing towards the other private requirements by the pupils in school. The recent post election skirmishes have complicated the matter further, given that well over a half a million people among who 100,000 are thought to be school going live as internal refugees. Some cost recovery policy options need to be tried to improve the efficiency of the Kenyan school system:

- i) A comprehensive review in bid to transform education, weed out inefficiencies and stop wastage is necessary. The 8-4-4 curriculum, where pupils learn so many subjects, some of which are not examinable should be reduced further. Meanwhile, the nature and objectives of the school system should be clearly conceptualized. And in an effort to save the education from collapse, a comprehensive reform of education ranging from policy formulation, curriculum, teachers' education and remuneration to the management of schools- should be undertaken.
- ii) To check on the increasing number of people seeking education in neighbouring countries and some opting for parallel curricular within the country, there is a need to experiment with new forms of education systems. Relying on traditional linear expansion of an expensive and inappropriate system could be the factor that decline as well as Kenyans opting for parallel non- Kenyan systems.
- iii) The pupil: teacher ratio should be aimed at the World Bank recommendation of 40:1. This needs to be accompanied with the improvement of teacher's terms and conditions of service.
- iv) The incorporation of the shift double system to the revised 8-4-4 system of education. In this respect, there could be two shifts for standard 1-4 while the first shift reports at 8 am and leaves at 12 pm, the second shift reports at 2 pm and leaves at 5:30 pm. This arrangement could create more learning opportunities for pupils and utilize teaching –learning time efficiently. Experiences from Zambia, Botswana and Burundi should be studied in this connection.
- v) A need to reformulate and re-structure the inspection in the Ministry of Education, redefining its role, focus, modalities and staffing.
- vi) Reduction of government expenditure on teachers –while data on most efficient and cost effective Pupil: Teacher ratio is unavailable, the current number and the level of inefficiency of teachers suggest that it makes economic sense to have fewer but efficient teachers. This could be achieved through an increase of the average pupil: teacher ratio to 40:1 after an extensive survey of teacher's workload.
- vii) Intensify the guidance and counseling work in school to help in handling the problems associated with drug abuse, child prostitution, HIV/AIDS and related ones. This means that the schools should have teachers trained in this field.
- viii) Establishment of community networks- through training and support teachers and village committees can be set up to identify children that are vulnerable check a drug abuse, child prostitution, etc.
- ix) The implementation of the master plan in education and training to guide the development of the education sector to 2010 and beyond.
- x) The inclusion of the education sector in the on going National Dialogue and reconciliation talks so that future skirmishes do not negatively affect the education sector.

CONCLUSION

In the end, considering the high number of problems that face the Kenyan school system that lead to high wastages and low pupil teacher ratio, there is a greater need for a comprehensive transformation of the system and not just piece-meal reforms. The transformation should promote efficiency, quality, effectiveness and competitiveness in the entire system of education. It involves all the stakeholders in a bid to shape education for the benefit of the entire nation.

REFERENCES

Abagi Okwach (1997a) “The impact of Political Education Reforms on Quality of Primary Education: Experience from Kenya”. In Watson-K et al. Educational Dilemmas: Debate and Diversity- London; CASSEL.

Abagi Okwach (1997b) “public and Private Investment in Primary Education in Kenya: Agenda for action”. Discussion paper, No. ED/001/97. Nairobi IPAR.

Stephen Bass M.A: Poverty Eradication in Kenya: Institute of Social Studies.

Makau B.M (1986): Education Planning and Development in Kenya: the 8-4-4 school Curriculum and Its implications for self –employment Nairobi: IDS.

Mitha, N.J, Njogu K Ngeta K and Madha A (1995), Cost and Financing of Education in Kenya: Access, Quality and Equity in Primary Education, Nairobi: The World Bank and M.O.E

Daily Nation; - 10th August 2007-NMG.