

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION (FPE) ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF MWITO PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL IN GITHURAI, KIAMBU COUNTY.

Nelly N. Thurairia, and Dr. Ruth W. Thinguri
School of Education, Mount Kenya University
P. O. Box, 342-01000, Thika, Kenya.
Corresponding Author Email: nellyngugi@gmail.com
P. O. Box 8193-00200, Nairobi, Kenya
Cellphone: +254726851517

Abstract

The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya in 2003 abolished school fees and any other levies paid by parent. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of Free Primary Education on the quality of education in Mwito public primary, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study adopted qualitative methodology of study with a case study design. Data was analysed by following the emerging themes. The study established that introduction of FPE in Kenya resulted into an influx of children into Mwito public primary school. The study concluded that the haphazard manner in which FPE was introduced lowered the quality of education in Mwito public primary school.

Key words: Free Primary Education, quality, education, public primary school.

1.0 Introduction

The Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya opened access to education through increased enrolment at the primary level but this did not translate into quality education. The global Nations set the stage to embrace education as means to ending illiteracy and improving the quality human lives. Indicators of quality include performance, dropout rates, attainment of basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic, and other skills necessary for the job market. The decline in the quality of education is a global problem that does not seem to support the United Nations agenda of achieving Education for All (EFA) (Dorsey, 1989). In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), quality universal education was given prominence. Education was recognized as a human right in 1948 and this gave the basis not only for universal education but also right to quality education. However, many hindrances come in the way to equal access of, and quality education. Key among these factors is resources which are known to greatly affect the input, access and the quality of education. In Kenya, quality is measured in achievements in the examinations. Various inputs such as infrastructure, learning and teaching resources, teacher-pupil ratio, positive home environment and others must be in place for quality education to be attained (Courtney, 2008). Quality education is a MDG goal to be achieved by 2015 and therefore should have a universal definition (Barrette and Tickly, 2011). Donors such as the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank majorly contributed to the financing of the FPE in the hope of realizing the MDGs

2.0 Statement of the problem

When the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003, it was a sigh of relief for many parents who were struggling to pay fees. The move came as a relief since the burden of keeping children in school had been taken off the shoulders of the parents by the government in collaboration with the development partners. The government aimed at increasing access and

improving the quality of education. But the programme came with new challenges, top being high enrolment that put pressure on the existing facilities. FPE was implemented without proper planning as the existing educational facilities were not expanded to accommodate the increased enrolment. This resulted into lack of basic facilities and equipment in a high large of public primary schools. Access to education is a right of every child according to the Universal declaration of Human Rights, 1948. Equally, every child has right to quality education. In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Universal Education is meant to be achieved by 2015. The access to education for many countries does not include quality or even equity. Having ratified the document on the right of a child to education, the government of Kenya declared its commitment to have every child access quality education. To realize this commitment, the government of Kenya introduced Free Primary Education in 2003. This increased the enrolment into public primary schools. However, the school infrastructure, teacher employment, and family socio-economic background remained the same. This greatly affected the quality of education accorded to children in public primary schools. There was an assumption on the side of the government that provision of instructional material resources would automatically translate into quality education. Many challenges resulting from increased enrolment have not been addressed ten years down the line. The study examined the effect of Free Primary Education (FPE) on the quality of education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County.

3.0 Objectives

1. To examine the effect of increased school enrolment on quality education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County.
2. To study the influence of school climate on quality education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County.
3. To observe the effects of school inputs on quality education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County

4.0 Research questions

1. How does increased school enrolment affect the quality education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County?
2. What influence does school climate have on the quality of education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County.?
3. What is the effect of school inputs on the quality education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County?

5.0 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this was to examine the effects of Free Primary Education (FPE) on the quality of education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County. Specifically, the study sought study the influence of school enrolment on quality education in Mwito public primary school in Githurai, Kiambu County. Secondly, the study evaluated the influence of school climate on quality of education in the same location of study. Lastly the study observed the effect of school input on the quality of education. in the same locale of study

6.0 Justification of the study

The findings of the study contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject in question. The outcome of the study forms a reference base for future researchers. The study brings to the fore the challenges of FPE and how they affect the quality of education. This is likely to ignite public debate aimed at improving the quality of education in public primary schools. The debate creates awareness which can catch the attention of policy makers and eventually lead to the improvement of education in the country

7.0 Literature Review

7.1 Increased school enrolment and quality teaching

Generally, quality denotes something that is highly valued, distinct and customer specific. Quality education has both national and global perspectives to fulfill the requirement of universal quality education (Adams, 1993). Quality of any education comes through national curriculum and instruction, methodology and the nature of outcomes. Indicators of quality in an educational system have a direct bearing on the learners' sense of identity, creativity, critical mind, appreciating others beliefs and respect for learners' environment (Gewirtz, 2000). However, the cultural context and the school need consideration when assessing the quality of education as they are major determinants of quality education as well. Society, both immediate and larger society feel appreciated and would accept and support the education system and participate in its improvement if important aspects of their culture are considered in the curriculum and/or the teaching content. The teacher plays a key role in ensuring quality education is imparted to the learners. This demands that the teachers should possess the necessary competence and that the working environment is conducive for the performance of their duties. The congested classrooms and lack of basic instructional facilities do not motivate the teacher into providing adequate instructions necessary for quality education (Hoy and Miskel, 1995). The teacher and the learner require support of good environmental conditions to be able to fully exploit their potentials.

The Millennium Development Goal on education aims to provide quality universal education by 2015. This can only be realized when all children are exposed to equal opportunities. Comparatively, children in the developed countries have better opportunities than their counterparts in less developed countries. Even within the same country, opportunities are diverse. Taking Kenya as an example, children in Arid and Semi-arid lands (ASALs) have conditions that can easily compromise the quality of education. Equally, in some urban areas of Kenya, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teachers cannot guarantee quality education of universal standards. The unequal opportunities are encouraged by the very institutions that advocate for equity and equal opportunities for all. The United Nations through its agencies has gone short of its obligation to help the poor countries to meet the cost of educating their children (Steer and Wathne 2009). The major challenge that comes with increased enrolment in poor countries is the provision of basic instructional materials, infrastructure, and teachers and other resources for supporting quality education (Sifuna, 2007). Lack of support from the developed countries to the less developed countries widens the gap in the quality of education accorded to children in these two areas. This is worsened by the increased enrolment to education in many countries as a result of fee waiver. For the quality of education to be universal, the disadvantaged countries, regions and groups require the help of necessary resources to support education.

7.2 School inputs and quality education

To realize quality education, necessary inputs must be in place. Key to the inputs are enough and relevant books for teachers and the learners to support curriculum implementation. This issue again brings disparity among schools in developed and the less developed countries and in different regions and locations. The developed countries donate books to the poor countries. These donations cannot be taken as an act of philanthropy but it is meant to create space in their libraries for more stock of books (Amos, 2011). This explains why books donated are outdated and are not in line with the curriculum of the beneficiary countries. The burden of providing books and other learning and teaching resources is on the government and the parents (Courtney, 2008). This is a big challenge in poor countries that are already struggling to cope. Sufficiency of these materials in schools cannot be assured and this compromises the goal of providing Universal Quality Education as only the privileged few benefit from quality education. Quality education cannot therefore be said to be universal.

Resource provision is the key to quality education as it supports all other school programmes including staff development programmes necessary for quality education. Provision of resources to schools is compromised

by other competing needs in the society together with corruption, lack of focus and unplanned emergencies. The quality education relies not only on the provision of resources but also their quality. In less developed countries such as Kenya many schools are said to have resources but on close scrutiny these resources are of poor quality. The physical infrastructure, books, teachers and other materials are not only poor, but also not enough. The process of learning includes what takes place in the classroom and the school as a whole (Sifuna, 2007). To be in line with MDGs, many countries offered to provide free education. How free this education is leaves questions in the minds of many. The funds from the government cannot provide a pupil-textbook ratio of 1:1. Parents provide basically all the materials to support education of their children which compromises quality of education. Pupils in less developed countries attain education of lower quality than their counterparts in high income countries even after spending the same duration in school.

7.3 School Climate and quality education

Teachers and pupils have very high expectations of one another. Teachers expect high responsive pupils and pupils expect the best from the teachers. In the process of interaction, these hopes are either dashed or are confirmed. The expectations are the basis of teacher-pupil relationship and positive attitude towards teaching-learning process which culminate in school climate (Coleman and Peter 2005). Schools should therefore create and maintain the climate to support the expectation of teachers and learners to ensure quality education. School climate creates characteristics unique to each school (Williams 2001). Warm school climate connects teachers and learners to schools. It results from the relationship between the school management, teachers and learners (Vengesayi, 1995 and Courtney, 2008). The school leadership works with the staff and the community for them to identify with the school and make possible the realization of school goals (Hoy and Miskel 1987). In a school with warm climate, work is effectively and efficiently done with quality outcome. The individuals are aware of their roles, which they perform with minimal supervision. On the other hand, a leader can create climate that kills the morale of individuals in the school, thereby requiring strict control in order to perform their duties. Regulations may strictly be followed but quality may be compromised. Such a climate does not encourage innovation and creativity from teachers which are necessary in teaching and learning and recipe for quality education. Unfavorable school climate results in poor work ethics and consequently low quality education. The low quality is manifested in poor performance and strained relationship between the parents, community and the school. The learners do not benefit from the investment in education (Schultz, 1997). Climate is a major determinant for quality outcome in education as it influences the process of teaching and learning. The management works well in a supportive climate and the expectations of stakeholders in education are met. Recognition for achievement is a form of motivation that boosts the morale of teachers and learners to create a warm climate responsible for producing quality education (Courtney 2008).

8.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative methodology with a case study design. A single case of Mwito public primary school was examined in Kiambu County was examined. The main sampling technique adopted was purposive. Participants who were thought to yield rich and specific information were approached. Other participants were randomly selected. In-depth structured and unstructured interviews were used to collect data. Data was analyzed thematically.

9.0 The Research findings

9.1 Introduction

From a distance, Mwito primary school exhibits no outward sign of a struggling institution. Everything looks normal until a closer scrutiny and interaction with pupils, teachers and the parents. The total school ground measures (86 by 84) m, with a population of 2700 pupils. The pupils who sat for the National examination in 2013 were 520, a number that is more than the entire population of many Nairobi city schools within the Central Business District (CBD) in Starehe Division. Teachers in the school are overwhelmed by the number of pupils as they lack basic facilities such as classrooms, washrooms, desks and playground.

9.2 Increased school enrolment and quality education

The increased enrolment has greatly affected the learning facilities in the school. The school has a population of 2700 pupils and 67 teachers, a teacher-pupil ratio of approximately 1:40. However, the numbers of pupils in different classes vary and so is the teacher-pupil ratio. There are no additional facilities to cater for the additional pupils and the classrooms are congested with many of them holding over a hundred pupils, which is beyond international limit of 50 pupils in a class. A desk is shared by up to five pupils, a situation which compromises the comfort of the pupils, teaching and learning environment. Teacher-pupil interaction is minimal, correction of pupils work and follow-up for those who evade doing homework is a difficult task for the teacher. Individualized attention to pupils and close monitoring of their progress is compromised by the large number of pupils in a class. Therefore many pupils play truancy, others avoid doing classwork and homework since they know the teacher seldom checks their work. Teacher movement in the class is curtailed by congestion in the class, which gives allowance to the cheeky children to hide and avoid doing their work without being noticed. This increases cases of indiscipline in the classroom. All these factors lower the quality of teaching and learning in the school and consequently the quality of education. The school pupils' president concurred with this when he said the population affects the quality of learning. The Kiambu County quality Assurance and Standards Officer felt overcrowding in the school is not a big issue since "it is common in rural schools across the Country". FPE not only led to more children accessing education but also over age children enrolling in school. Over age children are found in all the class levels as they want to take the opportunity offered by the FPE to enroll in a school. Such children fail to realize their full potential in education as they feel intimidated. As a result, the quality of education is compromised.

9.3 The school climate and quality of education

The school climate includes the totality of factors in the school that attract pupils to a school and enable them to utilize their potential fully. They range from safety; relationships, quality teaching and learning and leadership. The pupils in the school are not secure from the expression of the parents. The school lacks a playground. This creates a high probability of pupils injuring one another during play time as they compete for the small available space. This is one of the reasons parents expressed fear for the safety of their children while in school. The parents only get relieved when their children get home safe. However, this does not deter them from participating in games and athletics competition with the other schools within the County and in the country. According to the head teacher, the school has to close one of the adjacent roads to practice for games and sports, a situation that compromises movement and business of the local community. This practice also compromises the safety of the children in that monitoring and controlling over two thousand children from sneaking out is challenge for teachers. The congestion in school is equally unhealthy for children in case of an outbreak of a communicable disease. The school size is so small for the number pupils enrolled that even the school assembly is held in shifts in a day. The large number of enrolment in the school reduces teacher-pupil interaction. Teacher-pupil relationship builds confidence in the pupils as they feel teachers care for their wellbeing. The kind of teacher-pupil relationship in the school makes it difficult for the pupils to approach their teachers in case of any problem, may it be social or academic. A warm climate enables teachers to discover the social problems and academic difficulties their pupils face and be in a position to provide professional help. According to the school pupils' president, many pupils do not do their homework and he felt that the teachers cannot effectively monitor the progress of the pupils. Truancy and absenteeism are a common phenomenon. These issues affect the discipline of the school and create school disconnectedness that results from lack of warm school climate. According to the head teacher, the pupils in the school are disciplined. The perimeter wall that was recently erected with the assistance of the area Member of Parliament makes it easy to contain children in school, and felt that discipline has improved. The situation was worse before when the school was not fenced. Pupils would sneak out without being spotted. Such pupils would engage in all sorts of anti-social behavior, thus affecting the overall discipline of the school and lowers the quality of education.

9.4 school input and quality of education

The size of the school is so small that the available classrooms have taken up much of the available space. Further horizontal construction is not possible. This explains why the parents are planning to build a high-

rise to accommodate several classrooms. The classrooms available were meant to accommodate a smaller number of pupils. The head teacher of Mwito public primary school resolved never to turn away any pupil seeking a vacancy in the school despite the facility shortage in the school. This explains the high number of pupils in the school. Lavatory is the other area that is in a serious shortage. The toilets are so few that pupils always have to queue for access. This consumes class time as the pupils stay longer outside during breaks or leave the class earlier. This reduces quality time for learning and as a consequence, the quality of education is lowered. In many classrooms, desks and textbooks are shared. Pupils struggle to do their work in such uncomfortable situations. This cannot allow for the exploitation of the pupils full potential. Teachers are also not enough in the school. This partly explains the overcrowding in the classrooms. This negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning as the teachers cannot effectively monitor the pupils work. Once pupils feel they are not properly monitored by their teachers, there is laxity in doing their school work and this lowers the quality of education. Generally, the school infrastructure and faculties are not only enough but also in deplorable conditions. This has negative effect on the quality of education the children receive.

9.6 The future plans

A member of the Board of Management in the school complained that the Ministry of Education has not given due attention to the school despite several pleas. This was attested by a senior official in the Ministry of Education who acknowledged that the government was aware of overcrowding in the school and would address it. The Quality Assurance and Standard Officer (QASO), Kambu County acknowledged that their office is aware of the congestion in the school but felt it is not an isolated problem of the school but a common problem ailing many schools in especially in the rural Kenya. The parents have decided to take over the matter and organize a fundraising to expand the school. They hoped to raise 40 million shillings to construct a five-storey building to alleviate the acute shortage of classrooms. They set a target of collecting 24 million shillings in the month of October and 16 million early 2015 to fund the construction of the classrooms. The 2500 parents in the school were to contribute 2000 shillings each. The rest of the funding was hoped to come from well-wishers.

10.0 Discussion

The study captured views expressed by the teachers, head teacher, pupils, parents and education officers. The data was collected under broad categories of categories of increased enrolment, input and school climate. School enrolment was found to be too high for the school. Inputs were found to be inadequate ranging from the size of the school land, classrooms, playground, teaching and learning materials and teachers. The inadequate inputs affected the quality of learning in the school. The school seems to be performing well but on critical analysis, the performance is below par. The government is fully responsible for the provision of school inputs and the schools are prohibited from charging extra levies to fill the gaps left by the government. The parents cannot collaborate with the school to alleviate some of the problems affecting the school.

The school enjoys the services of very qualified teachers, 70% of whom are degree holders and five with master's degree. This accounts for the good performance realized in the school when compared with many other schools in Kiambu County. In the 2013 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), 10 pupils qualified for National schools. This is an excellent performance in the midst of all the challenges the school faces. However, the class eight of 2013 had 520 candidates and 10 pupils out of 520 is a very small fraction. The above identified challenges affect the quality of education in the school

The enrolment in the school is high and this is attributed to a comparatively better performance in the school as opposed to other neighbouring schools. This signals the low quality of learning and education as is reflected in low performance. In Kenya achievement is gauged in examination performance. Access to education goal has been achieved but not access to universal quality education. This is an area that calls for universal policy to provide a universal solution. Over-enrolment in the school overwhelms the teachers who find it challenging to give homework and make a follow-up or attend each pupil individually. This implies ineffective administration of teaching-learning process and consequently low quality education.

The high pupil-teacher ratio also affects the pupil-teacher relationship. The fact that the teacher cannot attend to pupils individually implies that the teacher does not understand individual problems that pupils undergo. Pupils in primary schools are in the turbulent period of their growing process and demand answers to many challenges they experience in their lives. Lack of close relationship with their teachers dashes hopes of pupils ever getting these answers from their teachers, who not only spend most their active lives with, but also would offer expertise advice. The absence of warm school climate disconnects pupils with school who decide to seek answers to their problems elsewhere. This has landed many into the wrong company resulting into anti-social behavior and school drop-out. However, these factors do not work in isolation. One factor affects all other factors and consequently affects the quality of education. . Despite this, the parents cannot withdraw their children either to take them to other public schools around or to private schools. This is because other public primary schools post not so good performance compared to Mwitio primary school and the private schools are beyond reach for these parents in terms of affordability.

11.0 Conclusion

Increased enrolment of boys and girls in Kenyan public primary schools resulted from the Free Primary Schools offered by the NARC government in 2003. The government, together with its development partners offered to meet the cost of financing education in public primary schools. Rather than building more classrooms, employing more teachers, schools were required to use the existing resources within their environment or where parents felt there was need to expand schools, they would seek for approval from the Ministry of Education. Increased enrolment had created a lot of challenges. The existing facilities were overstretched by increased in the number of pupils in schools. There was pressure on the existing facilities and overcrowding in the classrooms and yet the parents could not collect any levies to improve the situation. This had a direct negative impact on the quality of education.

The problem of quality was exacerbated by the government ban on teacher employment. The decrease in the number of teachers increased the pupil-teacher ratio and negatively affected children and parents' attitude towards schooling. The children already in school started dropping out and enrolment dropped in subsequent years. The information in the public domain is that the providers of FPE feel that it is working work perfectly though the consumers think otherwise. This has created uncertainty on the quality of education under FPE. It is certain that the quality of education provided under FPE was low. Indicators of this include poor performance in the national examinations compared with their counterparts in private schools, mushrooming of private schools and many parents withdrawing their children from public primary schools to private schools, decreased enrolment and increased dropout rate. Some parents have opted to enroll their children in the informal schools where the payment is low. Many of the parents would prefer to have their children enrolled in private schools but the cost is beyond their reach. However, the FPE has achieved its goal of having more children access education. The provision of learning and teaching materials has also been achieved. These achievements are slowly changing the trend in performance and improved quality of education in public primary schools.

In the overcrowded classrooms, teachers cannot effectively monitor the learners work. This greatly compromises the quality of education in such schools. Indiscipline goes unabated since indiscipline pupils can easily hide in the crowd. In the modern social set up, there are many distractors to the children that easily lure children into antisocial behaviour such as drugs and teachers may not be in a position to discover and help them due to the demands of the curriculum and expectation to meet the target. Learning may seem to be taking place when teachers contain children in class but in actual fact, little learning is realized. This cannot contribute to quality education

12.0 Recommendations

1. The government needs to employ more teachers to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio.
2. The government should motivate teachers through good remuneration automatic upgrading of teachers who attain degrees.

3. The government should allow the schools to directly solicit for donors to fund various school projects and programmes.
4. The Quality Assurance and Standard Officers (QASO) should beef up the supervision of schools to ensure quality.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Don. 1993. —Defining educational quality| IEQ Publication #1: Biennial Report January 6, 1993, USA: University of Pittsburgh.
- Amos M. (2011), Challenges and Prospects of Quality Primary Education in Zimbabwe Rural Schools. University of Fort Hare, South Africa
- Barrette A.M and Tickly L. (2011), ``education Quality for Social Justice`` *Journal of Education Development*, 31, (1), 3-14, UK, University of Bristol
- Coleman, M. and Peter, E. (2005), Leadership and Management in education: cultures, change and context. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Courtney J. (2008) ``Do Monitoring and Evaluating Tools designed to Measure Improvement in the quality of Primary Education, Constrain or Enhance Educational Development? ``. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28, 546-559
- Dorsey J. B. (1989), Educational Development and Reform in Zimbabwe: *Comparative Education Review*, 33, (1): 40-58. The University of Chicago Press
- Gewirtz, S. (2000), “Bring the Politics Back In: Critical Analysis of Quality Discourses in Education|, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48: (4), 332-370.
- Hoy, W., K. and Miskel, C., G. (1987). Educational Administration: Theory, Research and Practice (Third Edition). New York: Random House.
- Schultz, T., W.(1997), Education and human capital In Power and ideology in education, eds. Karabel Jerome. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sifuna, N., D.(2007), ``The Challenges of Increasing Access and Improving Quality``. *International Review* 53: 687.
- Steer, L. and Wathne, C. (2009).|Achieving Universal Basic Education Constraints and Opportunities in Donor Financing, Draft for consultation. UK: Overseas Development Institute. www.odi.org.uk.
- Vengesayi, C. (ed.) 1995. Educational leadership and supervision. Module EA3DC103 (A&B), Zimbabwe: Centre for distance education.
- Williams, J., H. (2001). —Learning for Future Refugee Education in Developing countries|. [http://people.umass.edu/educ870/post conflict/resources/Quality Edu](http://people.umass.edu/educ870/post%20conflict/resources/Quality%20Edu).