

## **THE CAUSES OF THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS APPLYING TO PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

**CONTACT RESEARCHER: Prof. Isaac Njuguna Kimengi**  
**Department of Educational Foundations**  
**Moi University**  
**P. O. Box 3900 – 30100**  
**ELDORET – Kenya**  
**Email: [kin7559@yahoo.com](mailto:kin7559@yahoo.com)**

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
JAB	Joint Admissions Board
UON	University of Nairobi
MMUST	Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology
MSU	Maseno University
MU	Moi University
EU	Egerton University
MOEST	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
MOE	Ministry of Education
ICTC	Information Communication and Technology Centre
DEO	District Education Officer
CHE	Commission for Higher Education
TSC	Teachers Service Commission

### **RESEARCH ASSOCIATES**

Prof. G. Muriuki	-	University of Nairobi
Prof. I. N. Kimengi	-	Moi University
Prof. J. T. Kaimenyi	-	University of Nairobi
Prof. A. M. Simiyu	-	Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology
Prof. I.N. Kimengi	-	Moi University
Dr. F. Ang'awa	-	Maseno University
Dr. R. A. O. Odhiambo	-	Egerton University
Mr. J. M. Malombe	-	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
Mr. T. Okwach	-	Ministry of Education
Mr. B. M. Waweru	-	University of Nairobi

## ABSTRACT

*During the first meeting of the Joint Admissions Board of the 2007/2008 admissions, it emerged that the number of students applying for admission to public universities had declined significantly. The Board, therefore, felt the need to find out the underlying factors to this trend. It then decided to set up a sub-committee, whose terms of reference, included, inter alia, establishing the factors that have contributed to the decline and come up with appropriate recommendations. In order to exhaustively address the terms of reference given, the researchers applied a three-fold methodology viz, meetings, review of reports and other relevant documents and field survey. For the field survey, the researchers developed three sets of questionnaires as the tool for data collection. From the findings, it emerged that about 80% of registered KCSE candidates do not apply to public universities in any given year due to lack of access to application forms in their respective schools as well as lack of funds.*

*Among the factors established as having contributed to the decline included;*

- *Failure by many Principals to submit application forms for all registered candidates;*
- *Submission of application forms after the examination results, thus forwarding only the application forms for those candidates deemed to meet the cut-off points;*
- *Inadequacy in guidance on career paths;*
- *Selective guidance and lack of encouragement to fill the application forms;*
- *The perception that the cut-off points applied for admissions are too high and thus only the very brilliant candidates are considered;*
- *Inability of most parents and guardians to discuss university application by their children with the schools (50.0%);*
- *Failure by most parents to establish whether or not the application forms were submitted to JAB.*

*In order to stem the problem of decline in number of students applying to public universities, the Joint Admissions Board needs to, inter alia;*

- *Ensure application forms reach schools by June 30<sup>th</sup>;*
- *Explore the possibilities of reducing the long period of waiting between the KCSE examinations and the admissions to public universities;*
- *Liaise with the other stakeholders in organizing for regular career information for a for schools;*
- *Impress upon prioritization of training of career and vocational teachers;*
- *Review the application forms and application process to allow for on-line application which is less costly.*

## INTRODUCTION

From the statistical summary of the 2006 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations results, it emerged that whereas there was a notable increase in the number of Examination centres, the number of candidates applying to public universities had significantly declined. The Joint Admissions Board of 2007/2008 admissions divergent views were advanced to the possible factors contributing to such a trend, among them:

- High cut-off points
- Change in syllabi

- Lack of adequate awareness
- Inadequate career guidance

Being the officially recognized body in charge of admission of government sponsored students to all public universities, the Board decided to determine the underlying factors with a view to coming up with appropriate recommendations.

## OBJECTIVES

The study was tasked to establish the reasons for the decline of students applying to public universities and make recommendations on appropriate measures to stem this problem. Specific study objectives were:

- To establish the reasons for the decline in students applying to Public Universities
- To establish the facts that make students not to apply
- To make appropriate recommendations to the Joint Admissions Board on measures to be taken to stem the decline.
- Any other related matter.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied involved meetings, review of documents and reports and field survey.

The researchers held seven meetings on the following dates between August 2008 and March 2010:

Meeting	Date	Venue
First	August 1, 2008	Egerton University
Second	August 12, 2008	Egerton University
Third	August 28, 2008	University of Nairobi
Fourth	May 29, 2009	Egerton University
Fifth	June 19, 2009	Egerton University
Sixth	February 19, 2010	Egerton University
Seventh	April 16, 2010	Egerton University

During the meetings, brain storming and analysis of data collected were done as mechanisms of understanding and interpreting the data set.

## REVIEW OF REPORTS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

The researchers received and reviewed the following statistics regarding Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Examinations and other documents and reports related to applications to public universities.

- (i) Registered KCSE candidates by centre type for the examination years, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.
- (ii) Yearly summaries of application status for the period 2003 to 2007.
- (iii) Analysis of students not applying to public universities as a percentage of the registered candidates by centre and category for the 2005 and

- 2006 KCSE.
- (iv) A brief report from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology on decline of students applying to public universities.
  - (v) Joint Admissions Board University application forms together with accompanying documents, which included:
    - a. Guide notes for candidates
    - b. Degree cluster subjects
    - c. Degree coding and titles by university/university college
    - d. District codes
    - e. Degree courses offered in more than one university (similar courses)
    - f. Weighted cluster table
    - g. Application for admission summary form (filled in by schools administration).

## FIELD SURVEY

The researchers found it prudent to allow for a complete JAB admission cycle in order to utilize the revision of degree choices period to capture former KCSE candidates, who had not applied for university admission in their respective schools. In addition to capturing data from KCSE candidates, the field survey was used to gather information from other stakeholders. Subsequently, a task force was formed to draw a sample for research and develop a questionnaire for data collection.

Three sets of questionnaires were developed; one for the school principals who are the key players in ensuring completion and returning of the application forms and the other two of parents/guardians and students.

For sampling purposes, the researchers used the 2006 KCSE statistics of schools in the provincial, district and private categories whose non-compliance was 90% and above.

Furthermore, the researchers formed four research teams to cover all the provinces as well as to maximize on time. The teams were distributed as follows:

Team	Region	Personnel
A	Western and Nyanza Provinces	Dr. Francis Ang'awa – Team leader Prof. A. M. Simiyu
A	Rift Valley Province	Prof. I. N. Kimengi – Team leader Dr. R. A. O. Odhiambo
C	Central and Nairobi	Mr. B. M. Waweru – Team leader Prof. G. Muriuki
D	Coast, Eastern and North Eastern	Dr. A. N. Wausi – Team leader Mrs. S. K. Kiuna/Ms. J. M. Horo Mr. M. W. Mativo

## **FINDINGS**

The researchers interviewed six hundred and seventy eight (678 respondents distributed as follows: 22.4% principals/school administrators, 14.7% parents/guardians, 62.8% students.

## **GENERAL FINDINGS**

- (i) Eighty three point eight percent (83.8%) student who never applied cited lack of access to the application forms and funds as the main reasons for not filling the application forms.
- (ii) The information regarding the application forms did not reach students in time. A key contributory factor to this scenario was that the forms reached some schools long after the students have left school.
- (iii) Ignorance on the part of parents, low income and to some extent low literacy levels also contributed to students not applying as they did not discuss the issue with their parents.
- (iv) Many students held the opinion that the cut-off points applied by the universities were too high and that only the very brilliant students benefit.
- (v) The cut-off points for specific degrees are not constant and at the time of applying, one is not certain of the points to be applied for his/her examination year.
- (vi) The introduction of the self-sponsored programmes in the public universities was appreciated by some students who believed that as long as one could afford the fees, then one would not require scoring very highly. If a candidate scored an aggregate mark of B plain, for instance he or she would still secure a place in a public university for a course that he or she would otherwise not have qualified for under the Joint Admissions Board criteria.
- (vii) Lack of proper guidance on careers in schools contributed significantly to students not applying to public universities. Secondly, some of these teachers were not conversant with university opportunities and admission criteria. Whereas some schools had no guidance and counselling departments, those which had were not any better as most of them focused more on behavioural related counselling with little emphasis given to career guidance.
- (viii) The time allocated for guidance and counselling was reported to be inadequate given that the teachers assigned these responsibilities were not given lesser (normal) teaching loads. Moreover, these were not recognized by the Teachers Service Commission as equivalent to teaching subjects.
- (ix) The application fee charged was more often than not perceived to be an extra burden as it was not clearly incorporated in the fees structure. In some cases, the students paid for and filled the forms but the same were not remitted to JAB.
- (x) The long period of waiting for university admission after KCSE examinations discouraged students from applying. Most students impressed upon their parents to enrol them as self-sponsored, in local universities and universities abroad.

## SPECIAL FINDINGS

### PRINCIPALS AND OTHER SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

- (xi) A total of 152 schools were visited, with the highest number being the District schools (42.1%) followed by provincial schools accounting for 34.9%.
- (xii) 82.9% of the schools have career masters/mistresses).
- (xiii) 78.3% of the school career masters/mistresses carry out guidance on filling of application forms mainly during the third term.
- (xiv) In 94.7% of the schools, the principals/other administrators indicated that they encourage students to complete JAB university application forms, a trend that is not reflected in the actual forms submitted.
- (xv) 75% of the principals/other school administrators interviewed admitted that they do not submit application forms for all their registered candidates.
- (xvi) 35% of the principals/other school administrators interviewed admitted that guidance and encouragement was selectively given to those candidates, who academically ranked at the top.
- (xvii) 19% of the sampled schools reported to have held career talks in their schools.
- (xviii) 50% of principals/other school administrators indicated that the forms reach their stations in the third term, sometimes well after some candidates had cleared their examinations.
- (xix) After the forms are delivered to JAB secretariat to the District Education Officer's offices, they end up not reaching the schools.
- (xx) 65.1% of the schools collected application forms from their respective District Education offices. However, it was noted that some schools had a challenge of obtaining the application forms despite the JAB Secretariat having delivered them to the DEO's office. The schools' administration said they were never informed in good time.
- (xxi) There were not significant difficulties highlighted with regard to filling the summary forms.
- (xxii) The reasons advanced by principals/other school administrators for not submitting application forms for all their registered candidates were mainly centred on financial constraints and lack of confidence by the candidates.
- (xxiii) 43% of the principals indicated that they submitted forms for only those candidates who paid the required application fees.
- (xxiv) Some principles did an assessment of their candidates and decided not to submit it any forms at all, if they felt that their candidates might not attain the anticipated JAB cut-off points.
- (xxv) 82.2% of the principals indicated that they submitted the application forms after the KCSE examination results are released despite 67.8% of the principals being aware of a submission deadline.
- (xxvi) No significant problems were identified with regard to the method of submission of the application forms back to JAB Secretariat.
- (xxvii) 29.9% of the principals preferred to have the forms returned through the DEO's offices.

## **PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

- (i) One hundred parents were sampled from across the eight provinces and 83% of them were aware of the JAB university application forms.
- (ii) 70% of the parents did not discuss university application with their children's school.
- (iii) 54% of the parents interviewed got involved in the application process when they filled the application forms for their children's university applications, while 49% were involved when they paid the application fee.
- (iv) 25% of the parents made payment for the university application forms in the third term.
- (v) 50% of the parents indicated that they did not follow up with the schools administration to establish whether the University application form was submitted to JAB.

## **STUDENTS**

426 questionnaires were administered to students. 50.5% of the students were drawn from the KCSE class of 2007, and 45.5% from the KCSE class of 2008.

- (i) 25.6% of the students were from the Rift Valley province compared to 3.3% from the North Eastern province.
- (ii) 72.9% of the students were male compared to 27.1% of female student respondents.
- (iii) 50% of the students did not obtain the application forms in school.
- (iv) 44.1% of the students indicated that the information and explanations on the application procedure was not adequate.
- (v) 65% of the students interviewed preferred to fill their university application after the KCSE examination results are released.
- (vi) About 25% of the students who had filled the application forms in school indicated that they were guided by career masters, principals/other teachers and parents. The guidance was observed to be as follows: 10.6% by career masters, 9.9% by principals/other teachers, 4.9% by parents.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

From the findings, it was established that there has been indeed a significant decline in the number of candidates applying to join the public universities under the Joint Admissions Board in the last five years. Lack of access to the application forms and funds were found to be key factors that have contributed to the decline. The example, in some instances, the forms reached some schools long after the students had left school. The overall and specific degrees cut-off points applied by the Universities were considered to be too high, thus many students get discouraged. The introduction of the self-sponsored programmes, in the public universities has had an impact in that parents and students have an alternative to the Joint Admissions Board option. Lack of proper guidance on careers in schools contributed significantly to students not applying to public universities. The application fee charged was more often than not perceived to be an extra burden as it was not clearly incorporated in the fees structure.

The long period of waiting for university admission after KCSE examinations discouraged students from applying. Many students pressurized their parents to enrol them as self-sponsored in local



universities and universities abroad. A majority of the parents do not discuss university application with their children's school and, therefore, never get to know whether or not their children ever apply. This was attested to by the high percentage (75%) of the principals/other school administrators interviewed, who admitted that they did not submit application forms for all their registered candidates. Selective guidance and encouragement to the students who were academically ranked at the top of their classes contributed to many students not applying.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recognized that JAB being in charge of admission of undergraduate students to all public universities has an obligation to play a pivotal role in addressing this worrying trend. To realize the above objective, there is every need for collective responsibility involving the board (JAB), all public universities, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Education, Commission for Higher Education, the Teachers Service Commission, Higher Education Loans Board and other relevant government ministries and stakeholders in the education sector. The committee therefore recommends as follows:

1. The Joint Admissions Board ensures that the application forms are ready and dispatched to schools by June 30 of every year and in turn District Education Officers ensure that all the schools return the forms by 15<sup>th</sup> January of the following year.
2. In view of the long period candidates wait after KCSE examinations, the universities, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Commission for Higher Education, Higher Education Loans Board and other relevant Government agencies, should explore the possibilities of eliminating the student back log.
3. The commission for Higher Education (CHE), in liaison with the Ministry of Education, play a central role in organizing for a through District Education Offices for regular dissemination of information on careers.
4. Individual universities prepare and distribute information booklets containing the degree programmes on offer with guidance on career paths,
5. All universities prepare and provide information to the Secretary, Joint Admissions Board on new programmes and/or review existing ones briefly highlighting their objectives, what the degree programme entails and career opportunities.
6. The universities and teacher training institutions, in consultation with the Teachers Service Commission, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education start training programmes for career and vocational teachers.
7. The schools' management to ensure that encouragement and guidance on application to public universities is given to all students and NOT selectively to the top ranked candidates only.
8. Involve parents, guardians and sponsors in assisting students to appropriately fill the university application forms.
9. Review the application process to allow for on-line application as an alternative method.
10. Review the guideline notes with a view to making them easier to follow and comprehend.
11. Implementation of the recommendations to be monitored closely and continuously by the Joint Admissions Board.