

Challenges Facing Effective Implementation of Free Primary Education in Public Primary Schools: A Case Study of Githunguri District Kiambu County

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Abstract- The purpose of the study was to determine the challenges facing implementation of free primary education in Kenya today using Githunguri district in Kiambu County as a case study. The study sought to identify the factors that have led to poor implementation of the free primary education. The target population is the 30 public primary schools in the district. A census method of data collection was used. The study revealed that public primary schools in Githunguri district are facing numerous challenges in terms of performance, administrative, and financial. This has in turn impacted negatively on the smooth implementation of the program.

Index Terms- Free primary education, public primary school

I. INTRODUCTION

Education forms the basis upon which economic, social and political development of any nation is founded. Investment in education can help to foster economic growth, enhance productivity, contribute to national and social development, and reduce social inequality (World Bank, 2004). UNESCO (2005) argues that the level of a country's education is one of the key indicators of its level of development. Globally, education is recognized as a basic human right.

Education has been defined as the process through which knowledge; skills, attitudes and values are imparted for the purpose of integrating the individual in a given society, or changing the values and norms of a society. For individuals, this process is lifelong. It begins at birth and ends with death. The UNESCO International standard classification of education defines education as comprising organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning (UNESCO, 2005). In Kenya, as in any other country, this sustained communication is organized and managed through a coherent system put in place by the Government.

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research (www.wikipedia/wiki/education). Education is often viewed as one of the primary drivers of economic development. In conjunction with donors and non-governmental organizations, developing countries have invested heavily in efforts aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. School fees have often been

found to be a major deterrent to educational access, and to have large negative effects on take-up of educational services in a variety of settings (Holla and Kremer 2008).

One of the millennium goals is to achieve universal primary education, more specifically to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Currently there are more than 75 million children around the world of primary school age who are not in school. The majority of these children are in regions of sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia and within these countries, girls are at the greatest disadvantage in receiving access to education at the primary school age. Since the millennium development goals were launched, many developing countries, such as China, Chile, Cuba, Singapore and Sri Lanka, have successfully completed a campaign towards universal primary education (UNESCO, 2005).

Most governments believe that educating the population of a country is one way of combating poverty in their countries yet many children do not have access to education due to lack of school fees. Hence school fees is viewed as a hindrance to access in quality education, due to this the government of Kenya in 2003 under the leadership of the third president of Kenya Mwai Kibaki announced the introduction of free primary education in Kenya.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

Free Primary Education refers to the waiver of all forms of contributions to education by the parents in the primary school level. The government shoulders the financing of education. This applies to the public primary schools only. Free primary education was introduced in January 2003 by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) under the leadership of the former president of Kenya Mwai Kibaki. Its aim was to provide more opportunities to the disadvantaged school age children. The program created a positive outcome because it resulted in significant increase in enrolment in a majority of the schools. (Otach, 2008)

The free primary education had an impact on the gross enrolment rate (GER) which increased from 92% in 2002 to 104% in 2003 of the school age children population, resulting in more than 1.5 million children who were previously out-of-school joining primary schools. (UNESCO)

Not all children learn at the same pace or in the same way (Hetherington and Parke 1999). Some learn faster than their classmates but others, some of whom have various mental, emotional and physical handicaps, learn more slowly. Of the more than 5 million United States children classified as disabled (about 11% of all students), a little more than 50% are considered learning disabled, about 20% have speech or language difficulties, almost 12% are mentally retarded, 9% are emotionally disturbed and another 8% have various other kinds of handicaps (US Department of Education 1997).

A major question in recent years has been whether these "special" children should be placed in separate classes or integrated into regular classrooms. Statistics showed in 1997 that 44% of the United States pupils spend most of their school days in regular classrooms, whereas 56% are generally relegated to "special education" classes (US Department of Education 1997). Advocates of human rights argue that any practice that restricts a person's equal access to an opportunity is detrimental to equal rights. Arguments cited for the defense of mainstreaming are that the handicapped children (particularly the mentally retarded) are likely to learn from the interaction with classmates who are brighter than they are (Taylor *et al.* 1987).

However, skeptics argue that handicapped children who are "mainstreamed" will suffer serious loss of self-esteem (not to mention an undermining of their achievement motivation) should they fail to keep pace with their non-handicapped classmates and post-poor score (*ibid.*). Researchers have found relatively small differences in academic achievements between students who have been included in regular classrooms and pupils in special classes (McMillan *et al.* 1986). Integration of children with mild retardation into regular classrooms can lead to increased rather than decreased social rejection (Taylor *et al.* 1987). Although the causes of this rejection may vary – for example, mildly retarded children are shy and avoid people, whereas others are aggressive and disruptive – the children who are rejected are lonelier and more dissatisfied

Free education posed a great challenge on teachers shortage in public primary schools since FPE worsen the working conditions of teachers since it increased the workload of teachers due to increase in enrollment levels in public primary schools yet salaries remained the same. According to Sanders (2007) free primary education caused qualified teachers to transfer to private primary schools due to deteriorating working conditions in public primary schools and hence public primary schools were left with few number of qualified teachers hence causing a shortage of teachers in public primary schools. According to Mills (2009), some qualified teachers were moved to secondary schools where shortage of teachers was more acute.

According to a study by Bold *et al* (2009) reports that while inequality in education access declined with introduction of FPE in 2003, there has been massive transfer of pupils from public to public schools due to decline in the quality of education in public schools. Studies by Tooley *et al* (2008) parents are opting to enroll their children in private schools where they are required to tuition.

The researcher support Bold *et al* (2009) report that FPE caused massive transfer pupils from private schools due to poor performance in public schools but the report ignored the fact that some parents are transferring their children from private primary

schools to public primary schools since some public primary schools perform well than private primary schools

This study adopted descriptive research design and utilized structured questionnaire in collection of primary data from all head teacher.

III. RESULTS OR FINDING

It was established that the performance of the schools before introduction of the Free Primary Education in 2003 was average, 70% of the respondents indicated most of the schools had an average performance before the introduction of the free Primary Education, 25% of the respondent agreed that the performance was good while 5% of the respondent agreed that the performance was poor. After adoption of free primary education it was established that performance of the public primary schools rapidly deteriorated, 67% of the respondents strongly agreed that the performance was poor. 30% of the respondent indicated that the performance was average, while the lowest percentage of the respondents at 3% indicated that the performance was good. It was also established that significant change in the performance of the schools was attributed to increase in teacher pupil ratio, 93% of the head teachers.

Majority of the respondents at 83% indicated that the enrolment caused administrative challenges while 17% of the respondent indicated that the enrolment caused no administrative challenges. The respondents were asked to list the administrative challenges they encountered, inadequate facilities was the major challenge followed by increased student teacher ratio then student mobility from public to private and within private .

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