

Factors Affecting the Access of Free Primary Education by Gender in Kenya

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Abstract: Countries world over have endeavoured to achieve gender equality in education given that education is central in empowering people and propelling national growth and development. Kenya, in its efforts to attain gender parity and increased access to education, the government in 2003 implemented the Free Primary Education (FPE). There was a positive impact on Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) which increased from 67.8% in 2000 to 82.1% in 2003. This study was occasioned by the fact that despite FPE being in place there are some children who are still at home in Kenya and have not accessed the FPE due to a number of reasons. This paper investigates the factors influencing the access of FPE by gender in Matete and Lugari divisions. The target population for the study was all the public primary head teachers, teachers, pupils and education officers in Matete and Lugari divisions. Stratified sampling technique was used to get the sample schools in the two divisions and random sampling done to get the schools at the zonal level. Purposive sampling was done to get the education officers. A sample of 20 head teachers, 200 pupils (100 boys and 100 girls) and 3 education officers were used. The main tools for data collection were questionnaires and interview schedules. Document analysis was also used in the study. Data was analysed by the use of frequency distribution tables, percentages and graphs. The findings of the study showed that increased access as a result of FPE showed increased cases of class congestion, shortage of teachers and dropouts in Matete division as compared to Lugari division.

Key words: Access, Free Primary Education, Gender

1. Introduction

IPAR (2003) observes that on Kenya's attainment of political independence in 1963, the Government, households and the private sector collectively endeavoured to enhance the development of education in the country. The increased development of education and training in Kenya was an aftermath of the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya. The Sessional paper

emphasized combating ignorance, disease and poverty. It was based on two long-standing concerns that: (i) every Kenyan child, irrespective of gender, religion and ethnicity, has the inalienable right to access basic welfare provision, including education; and (ii) the Government of Kenya has an obligation to provide opportunity to all citizens to fully participate in socio-economic and political development of the country and also to empower the people to improve their welfare. Thus education has proved to be a powerful tool in propelling countries the world over to higher levels of development. According to OECD (1983) African governments on attaining independence, set forth elaborate plans to structure the education system to produce the required manpower necessary to steer the country's economic growth and development.

Africa has experienced positive progress towards realizing the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) where the net enrolment rate increased from 54% in 1990 to over 60% in 2002. During this same period, Kenya recorded a decline in the net enrolment rate from 80% in 1990 to 74% in 2000 mainly due to the cost sharing policy. However, this situation was reversed when the government introduced a Free Primary Education policy and at the current trend Kenya is likely to achieve the goal on gender parity by 2015 since the enrolment, retention, completion and progression rates are almost equal (ROK, 2005).

According to ROK (2005), Kenya is working towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on education to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The indicators are (a) net enrolment in primary education – boys, girls, (b) proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 – boys, girls, and (c) literacy rates of 15- to 24-year-olds – women, men. Apart from Universal Primary Education (UPE), MDG number 3 on promotion of gender equality and empowering women aims at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015.

According to Riddell (2003), Kenya in an attempt to resurrect and strengthen their education systems abolished primary school tuition by offering FPE. Other countries in sub Saharan Africa that have abolished primary school tuition in order to increase both gross and net enrolment rate significantly include; Malawi (1994), Uganda (1997), Tanzania (2001) and Zambia (2002). Sifuna (2005) observes that since independence the Kenya government has always desired to offer free primary education programme in order to reach and support the children of the disadvantaged communities though nothing happened until in the early 1970's. Sifuna (2005) further observes that in trying to implement the FPE policy the government initially used a 'piecemeal approach' whereby in 1971 the first presidential declaration abolished tuition fees for the districts with unfavourable geographical conditions, that is, Marsabit, Isiolo, Samburu, Turkana, West Pokot, Baringo, Narok, Elgeyo Marakwet, Olkajuado, Tana River and Lamu districts of Kenya.

The second presidential declaration of 1973 abolished tuition fees for those in standards one to four in the whole country. Fee was also standardized for those in standard five to seven. Subsequent presidential declarations of 1974 abolished school fees in all primary education. These presidential decrees of 1974 resulted in significant rise in enrolment from 1.8 million in 1973 to nearly 2.8 million in January 1974. Some school management committees introduced 'building levy' in order to raise school revenue after the abolition of tuition fees and other levies. These caused serious frustrations to the parents with the result that many parents withdrew their children from schools (Sifuna, 2005).

There has been persistent gender imbalance in access to education world over; this has led countries to institute policies and programmes to address the situation. Kenya, being one of the countries faced by gender imbalance in access to Primary education, in its move to address this problem implemented the FPE programme in 2003. The government through the Ministry of Education Science And Technology (MOEST) thus launched the FPE on January 6, 2003 (Sifuna, 2005) hence re-introducing free primary education hence bringing an estimated 1.5 million children previously out of school back to primary schools. ROK, (2005) further observes that the introduction of FPE in January 2003, following the passing of the Children's Act in 2001, has led to significant educational achievements. According to ROK (2009) the implementation of FPE program resulted to a significant increase in enrolment (20 percent) in primary education, from 6.0 million in

2002 to 7.2 million pupils in 2003. Since 2003, the enrollment has further increased to 8.6 million as at 2008, an increase of 23.3 percent.

The access to primary education has been skewed in favour of boys (Akijakin, 2005) thus constraining the access by the girls due to a number of factors. These factors that have impeded the move towards gender balance in access to education include socio-economic, socio-cultural, geographical and family based factors.

2. Statement of the problem

According to Sifuna (2005) enrolments in public primary schools increased significantly resulting in a 17 percent increase; representing a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 99% (102% girls; 97% boys). But according to the Lugari District Education Office, there were more boys than girls in school between 2002- 2009 when the population census of 1999 showed that there are more girls of primary school age than boys in both Matete and Lugari divisions. Given the importance of education to the country and commitment of funds to the FPE Programme, children not enrolled in school are a drawback to the country's move towards Education For All (EFA) by 2015. The study thus investigates the factors that influence the access of Free Primary Education (FPE) by gender in Matete and Lugari divisions of Lugari district, Kakamega County.

3. The purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that affect the access of free primary education in Lugari and Matete Divisions in Kenya. The specific objectives were:

1. To determine the effect of FPE on gender enrolments in Matete and Lugari Division.
2. To determine factors that influence access of Free Primary Education by gender in Kenya in Matete and Lugari divisions.

4. Significance of the Study

The study is significant in that the results will contribute to awareness on the trends of enrolment by gender at the smaller units. The smaller units being closer to the people will shade more light and enable government design intervention policies in addressing the situation. The study also brought to light gender issues in education that may not have come to light when using large units such as the district for comparison. The study also proposed interventions policies to address education issues hence achieve gender parity in access to education in Lugari district.

5. Methodology of Research

A descriptive survey design was used in this study to investigate the current situation with regard to the impact of FPE on gender enrolments. Best and Kahn (1993) and Abagi (1996), describe descriptive survey design as a form of design that presents existing conditions, practices, beliefs, attitudes or opinions held, processes going on and trends for developing interpretation of meaning. Borg and Gall (1989) notes that descriptive survey research is intended to produce aspects of education that interest policy makers and educators.

Stratified random sampling technique was adopted for the study. Since all the public primary schools in the two divisions are mixed school, stratification of schools was only done according to zones. This technique was preferred because it took care of the schools in all the zones. Mugenda (2003) observed that for greater accuracy in the findings, the number of each stratum should be based on the relative variability of the characteristics under study. The sample of 20 schools was derived from all the 71 targeted public primary

schools which represent 28%. Gay (1992) asserted that at least 20% is a good representation when dealing with a small population. A sample of 50 boys and 50 girls in class eight from each division were used in the study. Random sampling technique was done to sample the pupils. All the head teachers of the sampled 20 schools were purposively used in the study. Purposive sampling technique was also used to sample the education officers. The schools were sampled through saturated sampling procedure to have the area under study well represented as in table 1.

Table 1: Sampling of schools in Lugari and Matete Divisions

Division	Zone	Number of Schools	Number of Schools Sample
LUGARI	Lugari North	13	4
	Lugari Central	12	3
	Lugari South	11	3
MATETE	Matete East	18	5
	Matete West	17	5
Totals		71	20

The researcher used questionnaires with close-ended and open-ended questions to gather data from students and head teachers. Structured interview schedule was used to gather data from the education officers at the division level. Document analysis such as class registers at school level and enrolment documents at the division level was also used to gather data for the study. These were used to supplement, validate and ascertain the responses in the questionnaires. Mwiria and Wamahiu (1995) assert that document analysis is the best method of accessing the valid information since it cannot create, waver or withhold information required by the researcher. The study was piloted by administering the questionnaires to two schools which were not included in the study sample. Then, using the Split half measure of reliability, the piloted questionnaires were then used to determine their reliability. A correlation coefficient of 0.77 was obtained and accepted as high enough to judge the instruments as reliable for the study. The data collected from questionnaires was analyzed by the use of frequency distribution tables, percentages and graph.

6. Results of Research

This section reports the findings of the study on factors influencing the access of FPE by gender in Kenya with a focus on Matete and Lugari divisions. Data on enrolment in primary schools and reasons to why boys and girls do not enroll in schools was obtained from the Head teachers of the primary schools, pupils and education officers. Enrolment in schools was examined by gender. Factors associated with non- enrolment in schools within the two divisions were also identified and examined.

6.1. The impact of FPE on gender enrolment in Matete and Lugari divisions

6.1.1. Enrolment in the sampled schools by gender

Table 2: Matete division enrolment in sampled schools in 2011

	School	Boys	(%)	Girls	(%)	Total
1	Maungu	123	(52)	112	(48)	235
2	Marukusi	213	(51)	202	(49)	415
3	Mukhalanya	300	(51)	285	(49)	585
4	Chepusai	315	(53)	229	(47)	594
5	Makonge	318	(53)	286	(47)	604
6	Mayoyo MHM	339	(49)	346	(51)	685
7	Lukhokho	358	(52)	328	(48)	686

8	Luandeti DEB	249	(55)	201	(45)	450
9	Nzoia DEB	298	(54)	254	(46)	552
10	Kwambu	318	(52)	288	(48)	606
	TOTAL	2831	(52)	2581	(48)	5412

Table 3: Lugari division enrolment in sampled schools in 2011

	School	Boys	(%)	Girls	(%)	Total
1	Sipande	342	(55)	280	(45)	622
2	St. Kizito	620	(51)	616	(49)	1236
3	Mlimani	412	(51)	402	(49)	814
4	Mbaya	432	(51)	416	(49)	848
5	Lumama	517	(55)	417	(45)	934
6	Munyuki	523	(52)	487	(48)	1010
7	Lumakanda	512	(51)	492	(49)	1004
8	Chekalini	318	(49)	336	(51)	654
9	Koromaiti	474	(52)	431	(48)	905
10	Baharini	198	(45)	243	(55)	441
	TOTAL	4348	(51)	4120	(49)	8468

From the schools sampled in Matete (table 2), enrolments of boys is 52% and 48% for girls in 2011 and in Lugari division girls are 49% and boys 51% in 20011 (Table 3) showing a marginal disparity between the gender. Out of the twenty schools seventeen schools had more boys enrolled than girls. Only three schools, Lukhokho (Matete division), Chekalini and Baharini (Lugari division), showing that there were more girls enrolled than boys. From the documents analysed it was also observed that the dropout rate of girls is higher than that of boys in the two divisions.

6.1.2. Age of pupils in standard 8

The ages of pupils in standard eight in the sampled primary schools was also sampled to give an overview of the type of students enrolled by gender.

Table 4: Age distribution of pupils' in Standard 8 in Matete division.

Ages	Boys N=48		Girls N=49	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
12-13 years	6	12.5	12	24.5
14-16 years	25	68	34	69.4
Over 16 years	17	19.5	3	6.1
Totals	48	100	49	100

Table 5: Age distribution of pupils' in Standard 8 in Lugari division.

Ages	Boys N=48		Girls N=50	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
12-13 years	10	20.8	17	34
14-16 years	32	66.7	30	60
Over 16 years	6	12.5	3	6
Totals	48	100	50	100

From table 4 it can be observed that in Matete division only 12.5% of the boys in class 8 qualify to be still in primary school while 87.5% are overage. For the girls only 24.5% qualify to be still in primary schools while 75.5% are overage. This is because the primary school age ranges from 6-13+ years.

In Lugari division only 20% of the boys qualify to be in primary school while 80% are overage. Only 34.7% girls qualify to be still in primary schools but the 65.3% are overage. Thus, Matete division has more overage children as compared to Lugari division. This is an indicator that there are high incidences of repetition and underage or overage enrolments. Being overage in primary school has more adverse effects on girls than boys. This is because girls are bound to be approached by older boys or teachers for sexual favours which can lead to them dropping out of school early. For those who are overage and come from poor families they are bound to drop out of school due to lack of finances to purchase sanitary towels which are essential in their life in school.

6.2. Factors affecting gender access and enrolment in Matete and Lugari Divisions

(i) Family factors

In Matete division the pupils cited poverty (26.8%) and being orphaned (12.4%) as the reasons why some children were unable to access primary school education, while in Lugari division the reasons given by pupils were poverty (23.5%) and child labour (18.4%). Comparatively between Lugari and Matete divisions the leading reasons for children not enrolling in school was poverty (66%) which made parents unable to pay some school levies and provision of school requirements for their children. The education officers (86%), the DEO (100%) and AEOs (90%) also cited poverty at family level as a factor that makes it difficult for some parents to provide for their children in school hence failure to enrol in school.

(ii) Economic factors

In both Matete and Lugari divisions, pupils agreed that expenditure on educational needs exceeded ksh. 1500 per year. Matete division responded by 53.6% while Lugari division at 44.9%. Most of these funds were spent on uniform, holiday tuition, books, exams and school lunch programmes. Pupils in both Matete division (51.5%) and Lugari division (59.2%) agreed that educational costs - uniform (34%), transport (18%), lunch (27%) and stationery (21%) - in some situations contribute to non-enrolment in school since some parents were unable meet the pupils needs due to poverty. Pupils agreed that when a choice had to be made who goes to school between boys and girls, they were in agreement that the girls lost out to boys. Headteachers agreed in both divisions that FPE funds were not sufficient, hence the need for parents to supplement in the provision of the school requirements. The education officers (79%) agreed that where financial constraints became an issue the girl child was likely to suffer as compared to the boys.

(iii) Socio-cultural factors

Pupils in both Matete division (28.6%) and Lugari division (78.6%) had a positive attitude of taking the girl child to school since they viewed the need for the girl child education just like the boys. According to the pupils responses, the main socio-cultural factors leading to non-enrolment in school in Matete division for boys includes being orphans at 46.8% and other reasons 42.6%. These included sickness by pupils, broken families among others while for girls it included pregnancy at 95.7% and early marriage at 83.2% which contributed to most dropouts in schools. While in Lugari division the leading causes for boys not enrolling were; being orphans, indiscipline, negative attitudes and being orphaned towards FPE while for girls the leading reasons were early marriages and pregnancy.

Comparatively in the two divisions the pupils agreed on the reasons for non-enrolment i.e. for boys being orphaned and for girls, early marriage and pregnancy. This strengthens the need to stem these reasons that were curbing Kenya's move towards EFA. Head teachers in Lugari (78%) and Matete (86%) agreed that socio-cultural factors such as funeral rites, circumcision festivals adversely affected education and most girls got pregnant during such functions. The education officers agreed that socio-cultural activities interfered with schooling of children leading to early marriages and pregnancy in girls.

(iv) Geographical factors

In Matete division respondents agreed that most pupils were able to reach schools with ease since 63.9% of pupils in Matete and 67.3% in Lugari division live in homes that are less than 3 km from school. Head teachers disagreed that distance was a barrier to access primary schools in Matete by 70% and Lugari division by 80%. It emerged that geographical factors do not adversely affect access to primary education by both girls and boys. Where distance and other barriers are a problem, education officers suggested that more schools should be built and for barriers such as rivers, bridges should be constructed to ease pupils movement.

(v) FPE related factors

It emerged from the study that congestion in classes was one of the most serious problems which affected FPE in both Matete (58.8%) and Lugari (55.1%) divisions. Shortage of teachers came out as another problem that affected FPE in Matete (78.4%) and Lugari (64.3%) divisions. The leading causes for pupils dropping out of school in Matete division as cited by pupils were; for boys, child labour (51.1%) and poverty 33.0% while for girls it is pregnancy (43.3%) and early marriage (37.1%) while in Lugari division for boys it was child labour (45.9%) and poverty (28.6%) while for girls pregnancy (67.3%) and early marriage (43.9%).

Comparatively in the two divisions the problem of dropout could be addressed by having policy interventions put in place to help stem the problems so that FPE could benefit a large chunk of children in the two divisions. The study also found out that poverty and orphan status affected pupils' access to education. It emerged from the study that among those children who have enrolled in school in Matete division boys (50%) were the ones mostly affected by poverty as compared to girls (48%), while girls (35.0%) were more affected by the orphan status than boys (32.0%). In Lugari division boys (25.5%) were affected by poverty as compared to girls (20.4%) while orphan status also affected boys (22.4%) more than girls (18.4%). This brought to the fore the need for intervention to cushion the orphans from adverse effects of poverty so that they could access education.

According to the head teachers the leading reasons why some children were not in school include child labour, poverty and being orphans which affected both boys and girls. The head teachers observed that poverty incidence was higher in Matete (46%) than Lugari (39%) division hence the pupils in the area could not afford non-discretionary items. The head teachers in Matete (70%) and Lugari (60%) suggested the following measures to be taken to curb dropouts and non-enrolments: use of the provincial administration e.g. using the chiefs to ensure that all children in their areas of jurisdiction are in school; reviewing the funding of FPE so that more pupils in Matete (65%) and Lugari (55%) are cushioned from adverse economic effects. The education officers in Matete (85%) and Lugari (75%) suggested reinforcement of guidance and counseling services in schools. The education officers in Matete (45%) and Lugari (30%) also requested the local NGOs to assist in funding the FPE especially in education of the girl child.

(vi) School Management

Many head teachers are not keen on children access to education. They pay little attention in knowing what

causes a pupil to drop out of school. Many pupils drop out of school but few head teacher, 20% in Matete division and 25% in Lugari division, have records to show why the pupil dropped out of school. A bigger percentage (94%) of those who had records of the drop outs had an experience of more than ten years in administration.

Table 6: Head teachers experience in Matete and Lugari divisions

Experience (years)	Matete N=10		Lugari N=10	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 10 years	8	80	7	70
10-20 years	2	20	3	30
More than 20 years	0	0	0	0

From table 6, eight head teachers in Matete division, had less than 10 years experience in the job while 2 had 10-20 years experience on the job. In Lugari division, 7 head teachers had less than 10 years experience in the job, while 3 had more than 10 years experience. This shows that Lugari division had more experienced head teachers hence building confidence in parents as regards to school management and performance.

7. Discussion

Akijakin (2005) study relates with this study as he observed that due to home and school based factors among others, the girl child had disproportionate access to education as compared to boys, hence recommended the need to increase funding for education to stem out these problems.

Noor (2003) in his studies in North Eastern Province also observed that the boy child was favoured in accessing primary education. The same was observed in this study which assessed the situation in Lugari and Matete divisions and proposed measures to be put in place so that both girls and boys can benefit from FPE. Korir (2000) and Wachira (2001) also observed in their studies that poverty, school levies and increasing costs of education had caused school dropouts and non-enrolment. This agrees with this study which has pointed out education costs as one of the factors that hinder boys and girls in accessing education in Lugari and Matete divisions. Abagi, Wamahiu and Owino (1997) in their study on the effect of household based factors on girls' participation in education, recommended policies that would increase girls' participation in school so as to benefit from education. This is in line with the recommendations of this study which has found out that girls lag behind boys in accessing the FPE.

Commonwealth (2007) cites socio-economic and cultural factors as barriers to girls' access to education. So as for countries to achieve education goal of UPE by 2015, Commonwealth (2007) recommended several policies such as provision of more qualified female teachers and need to eliminate the cultural factors that prevent girls from accessing education. This study aims at removing barriers to enable children, both boys and girls in Lugari and Matete divisions to access primary education.

UN (2005) highlights that a large number of children amounting to 115 million were out of school hence denying them the benefits that education brings to people, such as mothers bringing up healthier children and ability for women and girls to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS. Kenya being one of the countries badly affected by HIV/AIDS, education especially for girls affords them the opportunity to learn how to protect themselves. Poverty being one of the factors affecting access of FPE, girls' education provides the key to stronger role for women in the fight to eradicate poverty. Fighting poverty brings about improved health and welfare of the family on a large scale, hence the need to bridge the gap between the boys and girls in education (Danida, 2008).

Glick (2006) in his research observed that there were gender gaps in access to education between boys and girls in sub-Saharan Africa. He came up with policies to close the gap between boys and girls in education, this study compares well with this research of analyzing the impact of FPE and suggested measures to be put in place to improve access to primary education in Lugari and in Kenya in general.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, factors that affect access to primary education such as socio-cultural, economic, geographical and family factors seem to adversely affect the girls as compared to boys. It was established that factors such as class congestion, staff shortage and dropout pose a real threat to the gains made by FPE. If factors that affect access to FPE are addressed in both Matete and Lugari divisions, the school going children will benefit a lot from the FPE programme hence a big move in reducing the levels of poverty in Kenya.

9. Recommendations

It is recommended that the government, as a policy intervention, should review the funding of FPE by increasing allocations per child from the current KShs 1,020 per year. This will help to curb dropouts in primary schools. Cases of early marriage and pregnancy seem to be big impediments to girls' access to primary education hence the need to step up measures to curb the problem. In addition cases of those orphaned seem to be on the rise due to adverse effects of HIV/AIDS thus measures should be put in place to assist the orphans who fail to enrol and dropout of school due to economic problems. The Ministry of Education should stop the illegal levies being sneaked back to public primary schools, hence making it difficult for children from poor families to access primary education. Uniforms in primary schools should be abolished so that pupils can use clothing they wear while at home.

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