

# An Investigation on Impact of Free Primary Education on Quality of Education in Kenya Primary Schools

Wilfred K. Njeru, Moses N. Muiruri, George M. Njeru, Dr. Ruth Thinguri\*  
School of Education, Mount Kenya University, P. O. Box, 342-01000, Thika, Kenya  
Corresponding Author Email Address: [njeruwilfred@yahoo.com](mailto:njeruwilfred@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

Primary education in Kenya has become a constitutional right for every school going child. This was in fulfillment of international obligations like Education for All by 2015, in order to achieve this Kenya government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 to achieve universal primary education (UPE) by 2005. This noble policy in Kenya benefited 1.3 million school going children who would not have afforded many levies charged by primary schools. This notwithstanding the programme was implemented without proper preparation compromising the quality of education. The study looked at the implication of text book ratio, teacher's pupils' ratio and teachers' perception on the quality of FPE in Kenya. The study used survey design whereby quantitative and qualitative data was generated. The target population was 71 public primary schools in Embu East Sub- County in Kenya. Simple random sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 30% of target population. The instruments used included open and closed ended questionnaires which were administered by the researcher to the respondents mainly schools head teachers and teachers. The data was analyzed through statistical programme where percentages were got and deductions made. The study found out that FPE had improved enrolment by 68%. Over 50% reported that the text book ratio was 1:3, teacher pupil ratio was observed to be more than 1:40 in 31.8% of the sampled cases and the perception on quality was found to be good at 86.4% of the respondents. The findings recommended adequate funds should be availed for FPE programme to ensure adequate teachers and textbooks to improve quality of education in Kenya Primary schools.

**Keywords:** Free Primary Education (FPE), quality education, teacher-pupil ratio, text book ratio perception, pupil, teacher, head teacher

## INTRODUCTION

The universal declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, declared that every child has a right to education. Many other International forums that followed the right to education have been realized in the whole world. These include the world Conference on Education for All (EFA), held at Jomtien, Thailand 1990 and world forum held in Dakar and Senegal 2000. The millennium development goals target among other things to ensure that by 2015 children worldwide will be able to access free primary education. In African states education is valued but faced by many challenges due to scarcity of resources and therefore education is not totally free.

The government supports free primary education to make it affordable to its citizens. The non-governmental organizations support Free Primary Education in order to make it accessible to the needy. The Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya was introduced by NARC government in 2003 to fulfill the campaign promise of 2002. This was due to the fact that the Kenya government had accepted and signed the recommendations on International protocols as above cited. It also considered Universal Primary Education as a development strategy. As expected in a country where a substantial proportion of children were out of school the responses were overwhelming. According to UNESCO policy brief 2006 Free Primary Education had enabled 1.3 million children from poor background benefit from primary education for the first time through the abolishment of fees and levies for tuition.

The policy of FPE came along with ban on school fees. The government laid down some conditions for request to institute levies which were very cumbersome. Ironically, head teachers were charging levies which were unauthorized and had seriously affected FPE attendance. There had been serious complaints on delayed funds and several cases of mismanagement both at school level and at ministry of education headquarters (UNESCO, 2005).

In Kenya teachers attrition rates had been reported to be high and Teachers Services Commission (TSC) was poorly funded to cope with the high teacher attrition. The study therefore, intended to investigate on the impact of FPE on quality of education in public schools in Embu East Sub- County in Kenya.

### Statement of the problem

The introduction of FPE in Kenya 2003 by NARC (National Rainbow Coalition) government has been reported to have many benefits. According to (UNESCO, 2006), FPE enabled 1.3 million children from poor background access education for the first time through the abolishment of fees and levies for tuition. The FPE did not require parents and communities to build new schools but they were to use the existing facilities. However, despite the many benefits of the FPE it also brought many challenges in equal measure especially on text book and teacher students' ratios which this paper was to investigate in public primary schools in Kenya.

### **Purpose of study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate on the impact of text book and teacher- pupil ratio on quality of education in public primary schools in Embu East Sub- County Kenya.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. Establish on text book ratio and its influence on quality education.
2. Identify the teacher pupils' ratio and its effects on curriculum delivery.
3. Investigate on teachers perception towards FPE and its effect on quality education

### **Research question**

1. How does text book ratio affect quality?
2. What is the teacher pupils' ratio how its' effects curriculum delivery?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions in FPE?

### **Theoretical framework**

This study was guided by the theory of socialist economics of education, a theory that was propounded by a French writer and historian called Louis Blanc. The theory underscores the need to create an economy that redistributes income from the rich to the poor so as to create equality of well-being (Selowsky, 1979). The socialist economics theory also forms the basis of the Lorenz curve, which advocates for the geometric representation of the distribution of income among families in a given country for quality output, at a given time (Baumol and Blinder, 1979). The Lorenz curve measures the cumulative percentage of families from the poorest to the richest on the horizontal axis, while the cumulative percentage of income is put on the vertical axis. In the present study, the cumulative percentages were described in terms of quintiles. When quintiles are used, the population is divided into five equal portions. The measures are then used to compare the relative share going to specific groups such as the top quintile or the bottom quintile.

According to the socialist economics of education theory, free education can help enhance equity in access to secondary schools. Otherwise, if education were offered without bursaries only those who can afford to pay school fees and other related costs would enroll in school. Under such circumstances, inequalities would be perpetuated. In this particular study, if the recipients are identified impartially based on their parentage, academic performance and socio economic status, the Lorenz curve will not show a lot of sagging, an implication of equity inequality free educations. However, in the event of partiality in the selection criteria, the sagging will be distinct, implying the presence of inequalities in the allocations. Equitable quality and affordable education can help enhance those children from poor economic background access equitably quantity and quality education. The enhanced access to education on the other hand helps to redistribute income and to raise the incomes of the poor and effectively making their purchasing power to afford their children more quality education. As a consequence of these, an equitable society is created.

This theory is applicable in this study since primary school education is very basic and critical in any education system because of the crucial role, it plays in catalyzing national development and thus the level and quality education achieved should never be compromised. Consequently, maintaining a high pupils' enrolment at this level should be a priority for all countries. With the communal involvement in decision-making, it was anticipated that there would be fairness and efficiency in the free education process. However, contrary to the high expectations; cases of complaints about the quality of free education still persist thus making the end impact lower than anticipated.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Free Primary Education context in Kenya**

The provision of education in Kenya has been the government's standing objective since independence in 1963 as it is considered by many stakeholders as vital vehicle for self- advancement, socio- economic and political development. In 2003, the Kenya government abolished fees in public primary education schools. Under FPE policy the government abolished payment of development levies in the public primary schools for maintenance, desks, books and other non- salary expenditure. The schools were to get grant from central government which was deposited into the school accounts to be administered by the school committee. (Tessa , Mwangi, Germano & Sanderful, 2010) noted that the FPE policy was heralded by international donor communities as a major step in achieving universal free primary education by 2015. On that note, the British Department for International Development contributed nearly \$ 90 million and World Bank gave \$ 100 million to assist the policy. In order to engage all stakeholders in education sector, the government and development partners established the Kenya Education Sector Program (KESSP) to harmonize the procedures and approaches in funding FPE. The implementation of KESSP was in pursuit of achieving Universal Primary Education(UPE) by 2005, which was a likely strategy for achieving overall (EFA )goal by 2015. The January 2003 FPE resulted in an increased enrolment of children, from 5.9 million in 2002 to 7.2 million in formal schools alone in 2004: another 300000 primary schools-age children in non-formal schools. This increased enrolment, putting pressure on class management by teachers in terms of discipline and effective teaching and learning (Alubisa, 2005).

### **Pupils' teacher ratio in the public primary schools in Kenya**

Brewer et al. (2001) in Majanga et al., (2010) noted that class size as actual number of pupils taught by a teacher at a particular time. It is also defined as teachers who spend all or part of their time doing school work. It is also the global measure of human resources brought to bear, both directly and indirectly, on the learner. The difference between the ratio of pupils/ teacher can vary depending on teachers' roles outside the classroom and the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom during the day. In 1999 a study done by World Bank shown a wide disparity in the relationship of teacher/pupils ratio (MOE, 1999). In 1996, a total of 7,224,200 pupils were enrolled at primary school level in Kenya against a teaching force of 184,393. This gave a ratio of 1:37 whereby in past years the ratio was 1:31 and 1: 29 in 1993 and 1997, respectively (Majanga, 2010). Teaching large classes makes it easy to ignore the importance of human interaction when having a large class, Kent (2006). The researcher noted that large classes result to lecturing method of teaching where teaching and learning is impersonal and overwhelms the pupils. Kent, (2006) also pointed out that in such a scenario the teachers usually have unsolved examples which should be worked in class. This made pupils make mistakes in calculation, getting stuck in an explanation, losing a train of thought and forgetting formula. Majanga (2010) pointed out that FPE resulted to high enrolments, teacher shortages and high teachers load. The classes with teacher/pupils ratio of more than 80 limit teacher/Pupil interaction resulting to poor learning.

### **Pupils' text books ratio**

The MOE (Ministry of Education) in Kenya allocates Kenyan shillings 1,020 (US \$ 12.3) for every student in public primary school. This money is distributed in two deposits per year, usually, six months. The schools under guidance of DEO (District Education Officer) had to open two accounts namely account 1 and 2. Account one was meant for instructional materials like text books, pens, exercise books, charts and writing chalk among other requirements. The account 2 was for school operation purposes like paying salaries, water, electricity and general repairs. The account one receives shillings 650 (63.7%) which is managed by a committee of seven. The committee comprises of the head teacher, deputy head teacher, School Management Committee (SME) chair person, two parents not members of school committee and a teacher representative of every class.

A study done by UNESCO (2005) pointed out that FPE funds were not disbursed on time where most schools receive funding in second term of the year. This implied that most pupils had limited access to text books in the first term. The study also recommended that books be procured from established professional bodies at district or national level: because a lot of time was been spent on selection panels and this would limit time spent to travel to buy books by teachers. This central body for book selection and procurement would, therefore, ensure books were supplied to all the schools.

**Table 1: Overall pupil/book ratio by subject and district (source UNESCO 2005)**

District	Maths	Kiswahili	English	Science
Kajiado	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:4
Kericho	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:6
Kisumu	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:4
Kwale	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:4
Mwingi	1:2	1:3	1:2	1:3
Nairobi	1:3	1:2	1:2	1:3
Tait- Taveta	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:3
Embu	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:4
Gucha	1:3	1:3	1:3	1:4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1:3</b>	<b>1:3</b>	<b>1:3</b>	<b>1:4</b>

As can be seen above most of the sampled districts achieved a moderate ratio of an average of 1:3 in almost all subjects. The study pointed out that sharing of text books among three or four students affect the private use of the book like when doing home work. To improve quality of education in the public primary schools the government should desire to give text books to core subjects like languages and mathematics to every pupil, UNESCO (2005).

### **Teachers' perception on FPE**

UNESCO, (2005) pointed out that teachers, parents and pupils agreed that enrolments had increased highly after inception of FPE in 2003. This was most evident in the lower classes where mostly pupils from vulnerable groups joined the schools. The teachers also perceived provision of textbooks and other learning materials as a milestone of the FPE programme. However, many teachers observed that the fewer textbooks and other materials compared to number of pupils compromised quality of education. Despite to many positives to the programme, most of the teachers had deep concerns over the failing quality of education. Teaching and learning had been compromised by large classes some of 60, 70, or even over 100 pupils. In such cases hardly pupils get the deserved attention.

A study done by Wachira (2011) revealed that the government had no prior preparation before the initiation of

the programme. The concern arose of the government ability to maintain the quality of instruction as the government wage bill soared and its capacity to employ more teachers; provide enough text books to the pupils was not plausible. This was complicated by most of donor funding withdrawal resulting from squandering and pilfering of FPE funds. Daily Nation news paper of December 18, 2009 reported that Kenya Shillings 178 million had been squandered by senior education ministry officials and school teachers. Tessa et al., (2010) found that the increased enrolment resulted to bigger class sizes and reduced quality of education in government primary schools.

#### Research Design

The study used descriptive survey design. According to Creswell (2003) a survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. The design has an advantage because it is easy to apply research instruments such as questioners and which also allows for data collection from large number respondents. The target population was 71 public Primary Schools in the Embu East Sub- County. The stratified random sampling was used as the area divided into five educational zones which participated in the study .The sample size for the study was 30% of target population was 21 schools. Borg and Gall (1988) suggested that a sample of 30% of population is adequate for a study. Open ended questionnaires were advantageous as they permit greater depth of responses as stated by Orodho, (2003). The data collected after the study was analyzed in both qualitative and quantitative methods.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed that 40.9% of the head teachers in Embu County had an experience of 6 to 10 years in headship while 27.3% had below 5 years. The average was 10 years. The percentage of male head teachers was 72.3% and female 27.3%.

**Table 4.1: Gender of the respondents**

	Frequency	Percent
Male	16	72.7
Female	6	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4.2: Head teacher's experience**

	Frequency	Percent
Below 5 years	6	27.3
6-10 years	9	40.9
11-14 years	2	9.1
Above 15 years	5	22.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Regarding the role of the government of Kenya on FPE, respondents opined that major roles include providing funds for instructional material and general operation of the school; employing teachers and providing money for stationary, funding and monitoring for instructional material and running the school as well as general education support.

**Table 4.3: Benefits of FPE**

	Frequency	Percent
Increased enrolment	15	68.2
Low drop-out rates	3	13.6
High retention rates	4	18.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.3 elucidates the benefits of FPE where majority (68.2%) expressed that as a result of FPE, there has been increased enrolments while 18.2% said that the retention rate has been considerably high. Others (13.6%) equally expressed a decrease in the drop-out rate.

**Table 4.4: The text book ratio**

	Frequency	Percent
Ratio of 1:1	2	9.1
Ratio of 1:2	6	27.3
Ratio of 1:3	11	50.0
Ratio of 1:4	3	13.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Regarding the text book to pupils ratio, half (50%) of the respondents indicated that the ratio is 1 text book for 3 pupils and only 9.1% disclosed that the ratio is 1:1 in their respective schools. This implies that at least 3 pupils share one text book. The high ratio is a result of increased enrolment in public primary schools.

**Table 4.5: Whether the respondent are satisfied with the ratio in their school**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	9.1
No	18	81.8
No response	2	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The researcher also sought to know whether the respondents are satisfied with the ratio in their school. A vast majority (81.8%) supposed that they are not at all satisfied with the text book to pupils' ratio in their respective schools. Only 9.1% said the ratio is satisfactory with the remaining 9.1% not responding on the issue.

Concerning the extent to which textbooks affect curriculum delivery in schools, respondents indicated that the effect is above 50% meaning that it has been adequate although there are a lot of changes in curriculum. Other respondents opined that there has been improved curriculum delivery thus teaching is improved despite the revelations that, pupils are not able to study on their own because the books are shared and are also unable to do the assignment well.

**Table 4.6: Teachers pupils' ratio in schools**

	Frequency	Percent
1:20	2	9.1
1:25	3	13.6
1:30	1	4.5
1:35	6	27.3
1:40	3	13.6
Above the ratio given	7	31.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

On the teachers to pupils ration, 31.8% unveiled that the ration is greater than 40 pupils for one teacher with only 9.1% indicating that the ratio is 1:20. This implied that more than 40 pupils depend on one teacher.

**Table 4.7: Comment on teacher student ratio**

	Frequency	Percent
Adequate	6	27.3
Inadequate	13	59.1
Highly inadequate	3	13.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.7 shows the comment on teacher to student ratio and majority (59.1%) said that the ratio was inadequate and only 27.3% approving the ratio. The respondents designated that, the poor teachers to students ration has bad effect on curriculum delivery in schools since they are not able to syllabus on time, the attention given to each pupil is not adequate, Marking of pupils work is not easy thus very little is given in practical work; no adequate delivery especially for slow learners and no enough teacher student contact which eventually leads to poor performance.

**Table 4.8: Quality of education offered in public schools after the implementation of FPE**

	Frequency	Percent
Poor	1	4.5
Good	19	86.4
Very good	2	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Findings from the study revealed that, the quality of education offered in public schools after the implementation of FPE was good (86.4%) with only 4.5% disapproving the quality of FPE terming it as poor.

### Conclusions

The study revealed that Free Primary Education came for as an approval of government effort in ensuring students have access to affordable education. However, there has been poor resource representation where text book to students ratio has been dissatisfactory since it has been very low (1:3). Each student need a book for homework purposes; change of syllabus and textbook frequency; changes in the syllabus; maintenance and replacement of the materials; increased funds and the ration does not meet the pupils need. There was affirmation that, the ratio should be 1:1 for easier management of pupils work because with the current ration, little work can be covered due to the sharing of books. It was also noted that most pupils are not able to access books especially at home and during the holidays and that they are unable to complete homework given from school. Over and above, some subjects require every pupil to have a course book to make it easier for teachers to give home work to pupils.

The perception of teachers on FPE was also analyzed where most head teachers said that teachers are able to

cover the syllabus due to high retention rates; but there is need for increment of funds to cushion schools from inflation; the programme is good but the challenges need to be addressed and has greatly assisted pupils since many could not be able to meet the cost of learning materials. However, more teachers should be employed and a policy to introduce hardship allowance in remote areas without it should be formulated to reduce teachers' turnover rate or transfer rate.

### Recommendations of the Study

Given the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that,

- i. The government through the Teachers Service Commission, the Ministry of Education and that of finance should ensure adequate funding of the FPE to ensure adequate resources in public schools including fair text books and teachers ratio.
- ii. Head teachers should ensure proper management of the available resources in public primary schools which calls for competence and high managerial skills. This demands regular leadership trainings for head teachers and teachers.
- iii. Parents through the school management committee should create a rapport with the school authority to ensure proper cooperation to effectively management the surging number of pupils in schools.

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