

Review Article

## Inequitable Access to Quality Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Kenya

Limo J. Beatrice<sup>1</sup>, Erastus Muchimuti<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Management, Policy & Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Management, University of Eldoret P O Box 1125-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

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**Abstract:** Education is a basic human right as was declared by the United Nations in 1948. Most governments including Kenya have tried to implement free and compulsory basic education. It also subscribes to various international protocols such as Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand 1990 and the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 2000. Since then, the Kenya Government in her Education Sector Strategic Plan and Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 has articulated how to attain goals for education. At primary school level where children stay longest in the schooling years and they develop more motor skill, further cognitive skills along with higher socialization than the early childhood education level, has children failing to access education due to poverty, gender imbalances, regional imbalances among other concerns. Secondary education which creates a human capital base higher than primary education along with training youth for further education and the world of work registers restriction to many children due to concerns of poverty, gender imbalances, and insecurity regional disparity among others. This paper articulates in detail the above concerns discussing their manifestations in Kenya. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations made on how to improve access to basic education in Kenya. Among the recommendations are: To make basic education free and compulsory, improve the provision of health services, intensify fight against demeaning cultures, give special attention to children with disabilities, avail employment opportunities to the youth, assure security to all in conflict-prone regions and tighten bursary disbursement procedures.

**Keywords:** Inequitable Access, Quality, Education, Primary, Secondary.

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## INTRODUCTION

Children and young people combined makeup around half of Kenya's population, making for a young populace in which women have an average of four children (Glennerster, 2011). Many children drop out of the free, public elementary schools before reaching eighth grade because of unmet needs for school uniforms and shoes, books, pencils, and notebooks. Many families cannot afford to provide their children with the school necessities (Smith, 2016).

According to UNICEF (2011), equity in education implies that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop and reach their full potential without discrimination, bias or favoritism regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location, or another status. OECD {2012} see equity in education as meaning that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or

family background are not obstacles to achieving educational potential and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills.

One of the most efficient education strategies for government is to invest early and all the way up to upper secondary. The highest performing education system are those that combine quality and equity (OECD, 2018). In this sense, education policies and programs aim to address root causes of inequality, to ensure the fundamental rights of all children, particularly those experiencing deprivation, including access to basic protections and services necessary for survival and development. Within discussions of equity and inequality, there are tensions over the principle of equality of opportunity and provision, versus targeted redress of unequal social location (Oketch, 2010).

Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling school failure helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation which often causes school failure (OECD, 2008).

In seeking equity in education, the targeted distribution of resources might therefore be necessary to redress historical inequalities (Wane, 2003). This has been the underlying argument for policy measures such as affirmative action and positive discrimination. Analysis of equity in education thus needs to be grounded in the contextual analysis of the country, existing socio-economic, cultural, political, and religious inequalities, and the resources, policies, and practices aimed at addressing them (Oketch, 2010). While economic dimensions of inequalities, or redistribution, are important, there are also other dimensions of inequality that require attention. Recognition refers to how culturally-related and identity-based issues manifest themselves, while representation concerns a sense of isolation from decision-making spheres. These reflect how different dimensions of inequity and inequality manifest themselves and highlight the need for a holistic strategy to redress the issue (Edwards, 2017).

Inequities in access to basic education are usually the consequence of unequal patterns of demand for education, and the unavailability of 'inputs' (that organizations such as UNICEF refer to as 'supply-side' barriers), which would include, for example, teachers or schools in a particular territory. The three different indicators of inequity of access to education: Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER), Net Enrolment Ratios (NER), and the Gender Parity Index. Both GER and NER show the general level of participation in a given level of education (Lawrence, 2014). However, while GER takes into account the total number of pupils of all ages in a particular grade level in school measured against the entire 'appropriate school-going' age for that grade level, NER only takes into account students of the 'appropriate school-age' for the corresponding grade level. The gender parity index is an indicator designed to measure the relative access of males and females to education. It is expressed as a ratio of girls to boys, with one representing perfect equality and values lower indicating lower participation of girls (Ongaki, 2014).

One of the biggest inequalities that perpetuates the cycle of poverty is gender. When gender inequalities in the classroom is addressed, this has a

ripple effect on the way women are treated in the communities. Girls in the classroom can build skills, gain knowledge and socially grow during their formative years establishing a foundation for lifelong learning {Olivia, 2020}. Olivia {2020} further observes that the right type of education is one of the best conflict strategies available to any society. In 2018, concern worldwide worked to promote education for all reaching almost 350,000 children directly and another 372,000 indirectly. Over 360,000 of those students were female. In Marsabit, 70% of the population is illiterate. Of those children who attend primary school, only 39.5% go on to secondary school. Through a network of communities, concern worldwide assisted 205 girls in 20 projects schools. 86% of these girls went to secondary school or vocational training centre (Olivia, 2020).

Inequitable allocation and distribution of resources does not receive great attention in well-established education systems but can be an important source of inequity and grievance in fragile and conflict-affected nations (Lawrence, 2014). Schools with inadequate provision of teachers, books, or infrastructure will have more difficulty offering fulfilling educational experiences and effective opportunities for learning to their students. Several investigations have analyzed the allocation of educational funds between regions, but indicators of student-teacher ratios or school infrastructure are better proxies to measure if these resources have reached schools in a particular territory (Glennerster, 2011). Student-teacher ratios measure the level of human resources (teachers) available to students. A higher ratio indicates that students have lower access to teachers, which is an indicator of the inequitable distribution of teachers among regions (Wane, 2003).

### **Problem Statement**

Inequity in access to education, particularly in basic education, is one of the challenges Kenya still faces today (Oketch, 2010). Statistics indicate that access rates are associated with economic and social development and the occurrence of conflict at the international level. In the case of Kenya, there is higher access to primary and secondary education and higher levels of gender equality than international averages for fragile and conflict-affected nations (Odebero, 2007). Although the level of access to primary education in Kenya is similar to the international average for middle-income nations, access to secondary education is much lower in Kenya than in these nations. In 2014, only 47.4 percent of students of the corresponding age (9-12) were enrolled in secondary education in Kenya, and for every 10 boys in secondary school, there were nine girls (Andrew, 2014).

The total number of students in secondary education increased by 58.3 percent in five years, with a

growth of 63.3 percent among female students. The net enrolment rate in secondary education is still under 50 percent but has grown by 14.3 points during the period (Glennerster, 2011). The gender parity index - the ratio of girls to boys - rose by 5 points. There was no significant improvement in net enrolment in primary education and gross enrolment decreased by 4.2 percent. The reduction in gross enrolment in primary education should be attributed to a reduction in age-grade distortion and grade repetition, or, put more simply, improved quality and performance of the education system (Oketch, 2010). Statistics further show that a high level of inequity in access to secondary education across populations living in different regions. In Central and Eastern counties, secondary school gross enrolment rates exceed 80 percent, and net enrolment rates exceed 70 percent, while in Nairobi and North Eastern counties enrolment rates are less than 30 percent. It is important to say that in the regions with the highest enrolment rates (Central and Eastern counties) the difference between net and gross enrolment rates is quite large (>15 percent), indicating a significant proportion of over-age school populations in these counties (Smith, 2016).

### **Inequalities in Basic Education**

The KNBS and SID inequalities report shows that over half of Kenya's population (52 percent) is educated to the primary level and another 22.8 percent has secondary-level education or more. The other quarter (25.2 percent) has no education (Odebero, 2007). Education levels are lower in some regions than in others as well as for rural populations and female-headed households. For example, counties with the highest proportion of secondary education and above are found in central and western regions, while those with the lowest proportions are found in the country's northern and eastern regions (Andrew, 2014). In Turkana, Wajir, and Mandera, this is less than 5 percent, while in Nairobi it is 50.8 percent (KNBS & SID, 2013). Kiambu County has the second-highest proportion with at least secondary education, and only 12 percent of its population has no education. Conversely, Tana River falls in the bottom ten counties both in terms of secondary education and primary education levels with over half of its population (56.2 percent) receiving no education. Both Kisumu and Nakuru have over 80 percent of their population with at least primary education and over a quarter with at least secondary education. Nakuru is in the top ten counties as far as the proportion of people with at least secondary education is concerned (Ongaki, 2014).

### **The manifestation of Inequality in Education**

The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education has over the years put in place measures meant to enhance access to education by the Kenyan child (Edwards Jr, 2017). These measures have started at the early and basic education level. The

introduction of free and compulsory education in Kenya in (2003) by the NARC government led to increased enrollment in Primary and Secondary education. Most of the pupils and students who had dropped out due to the levies and fees required to be in school had an opportunity to rejoin and revive their investigations. Similarly, the introduction of FDSE (Free Day Secondary Education in 2008) saw the government meet the full cost of tuition in Secondary School (Glennerster, 2011). Hence, students attending Sub-County schools, which are majorly day schools, are only left to meet the cost of their lunch program. Further to this, the government has confirmed to provide bursaries through the CDFs, and county governments for the needy students to access education by paying part or whole of their fees. Some CDF committees have committed to paying full fees for students who qualify to join National and Extra-County Schools from their constituencies. In 2013, the MOE issued strict fee guidelines to schools and Boards of Management. This regulated the fees charged and hence paid in school. Extra levies were outlawed and schools required approval of the ministry to charge any. Hence, the cost of education was very strictly regulated. Acquisition of uniform was made with parents allowed to shop in the open (Edwards Jr, 2017).

A survey on Public Primary schools in Kenya today shows infrastructural facilities that are stretched beyond limits against the surging student population (Oketch, 2010). In the urban regions, particularly primary schools have extra-ordinary large student population due to the history and traditions of the schools that have won the confidence of the parents. The discipline and academic performance culture being the main determinants. Such schools have enrollments over 2000 pupils. Example is Bungoma DEB Primary school in Bungoma County with 3218 (Smith, 2016).

A stampede at a primary school in Kakamega County in 2019 resulted in the death of 14 pupils. The school had a population of 3218 pupils with 51 classrooms. The average class size of 61 pupils. While the enrolments look good, the class sizes are getting overstretched in urban counties, the rural counties have extremely crowded classes. For instance, Turkana has an average of 92 learners per teacher, Mandera has 80 and Garissa has 67. In contrast, counties like Nyeri, Machakos, and Nairobi have 25, 32, and 40 respectively. However, overcrowding is also more common in urban poor areas where there are many more pupils and more pupils and not enough schools (Oketch, 2010).

The foregoing discussion leads to the conclusion that the ability of a child to access education is dependent on where their parents live (Andrew, 2014). Those in urban or the suburbs have a chance to better access to education. Further to those in the urban

from the less crowded areas, have better access compared to those from the crowded regions. The distribution of learning institutions is skewed and not in proportion to the population. The number of learning institutions in rural areas is inadequate leading to a scramble for changes in the existing (Lawrence, 2014).

At the secondary school level, the government policy of 100% transition since 2017 has seen all the KCSE graduates transit to secondary schools. The increase in enrollment at secondary has not been proportioned to the expansion of the school infrastructure. There has been an overstretch in the existing facilities resulting in a school class size of over 60 students, Dormitories having more than double the original capacities, and even school opting for makeshift facilities. Some schools have converted dining halls into dormitories and laboratories into classes to cope with the pressure (Wane, 2003).

The question “Is access to education equals crowding?” The large numbers or rather crowds deny the pupils and students to access quality education. Most of them miss out on the much-desired teacher attention, especially at the early learning levels. The outcome is much talked about, pupils in class 5 and 6 who are unable to read and write. This is the prize of the crowds (Edwards Jr, 2017). Since national education resources are limited, government needs to ensure that they are being directed to the poorer students and regions so that minimum standards are met everywhere. Schemes need to be developed to ensure extra resources are used to assist those most in need and avoid labelling schools as disadvantaged (OECD, 2008).

The basic structure of educational system affect equity. Traditionally, education system has sorted students according to attainment. Evidence from studies of secondary and primary schools suggest that such sorting increases inequalities and inequities, particularly if it takes places early in the education process (OECD, 2008). In Kenya, the performance of pupils and students in national examinations has taken a particular trend over years. At the primary school level, the academies

(Private primary schools) have dominated the list of best performing primary schools at KCPE. More often than not, the top candidates are from the academies. Most of the top academies are again found in the urban regions and perform better compared to those in rural regions. Hence, when merits are applied on admission to high school, then pupils who took KCPE in academies in urban regions have higher and better chances of joining the top secondary schools compared to their counterparts from rural academies and public primary school. Who is these children in the urban region academy? They are children from high social-economic family backgrounds. Since education is a tool of economic, social, and political empowerment, their pupils from the HSE background are better placed for future opportunities (Ruto, 2004).

While the affirmed action that was applied in the year of 2014/2015 in admission from the public primary and academic bridge the gap. It was equally counterproductive as pupils in the public primary were admitted to national and extra-county schools without achieving meaningful results while students with good grades were left out. Other parents then opted to register their children who studied in academies in public primary schools first to sit KCPE and stand a big chance of joining national and extra-county schools (Andrew, 2014). Selecting pupils on the basis of academic achievements tends to create great social differences between schools. It also increases the link between socio-economic status and performance. It tends to accelerate the progress of those who have already gained the best start in life from their parents (OECD, 2008).

It suffices to point out that academies in urban regions charge more fees as compared to academies in rural areas (Oketch, 2010). Public primary schools do not charge any fees. The fees are charged to assist the academies to equip themselves and promote adequate teaching and learning that lead to better performance. The level of resources, on the other hand, limits public primary schools in the acquisition of resources, facilities, and equipment (Ongaki, 2014).

SCHOOL CATEGORY	RANK IN RESOURCES	RANK IN PERFORMANCE
Urban Academy	1	1
Rural Academy	2	2
Public in Urban	3	3
Public in Rural	4	4

At the secondary school level, the performance in national exams is equally in the order of hierarchy of schools in terms of categories. The national schools top the list of best performing schools, followed by extra-county, the county then sub-county schools. The top-

performing students at KCSE are majorly from the national and extra-county schools (Edwards, 2017).

On average, the percentage pass rate of students in each category of the schools that qualify for direct university admission is as below:

CATEGORY OF SCHOOL	AVERAGE % PARS RATE
National School	85%
Extra-County	60%
County	45%
Sub-County	4%

Therefore, students investigation in national or extra-county schools have greater chances of joining university compared to students investigation in county and sub-county school. Since the students are

enrolled at county and sub-county schools, few of the students from the small proportion at the extra county and national that have greater chances to access university education (Smith, 2016).

SCHOOL CATEGORY	FORM 1 ADMISSION (%)
National	10%
Extra-County	20%
County	30%
Sub-County	40%

Company fees payment by school category, national and extra county schools charge higher fees compared to county schools. Sub-County schools do not charge any fees except the lunch program and purely depend on FDSE. In essence, fees are utilized towards the provision of teaching and learning resources and appropriate infrastructure in schools. Schools that

collect more are therefore better placed to finance school activities and infrastructure to aid in a good performance. On the other side, schools that collect fewer fees are limited and often unable to acquire prerequisites of enhancing good performance (Odebero, 2007).

**SCHOOL FEES CHARGED PER STUDENT (P.A)**

SCHOOL CATEGORY	FDSE	PARENTAL OBLIGATION	TOTAL
National school	22,244	53,554	75,798
Extra-County	22,244	40,535	62,779
County	22,244	32,000	54,000
Sub-county	22,244	_____	22,244

The resources are therefore at the disposal of county and sub-county schools are far much limited compared to extra-county and national schools (Andrew, 2014). Further to it, then students from national and extra-county schools stand greater chances of benefitting from bursaries that counterparts from the county and sub-county school owing to the number of fees required to pay the national and extra-county school students would show higher figures and balances, therefore, seem most to be more in need. Hence, benefit more from the bursaries, since lunch programs are least considered for bursaries (Oketch, 2010).

education is among the most expensive social service. Most people cannot access it.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Whereas education is the backbone of all growth and development of individuals and nations, its achievement continues to elude and haunt Kenya's efforts. Right from primary to secondary education, several hindrances challenge Kenya's desire to educate her youth people who are tomorrow's asset in development. The most persistent negative forces in the fight to achieve basic education for most learners include:

**Health:** Besides education, medication for the sick is another expensive social service in Kenya. For people who are financially constrained, it is difficult to access both education and health. This concern is crucial in this HIV/AIDS pandemic era. It denies many Kenyans access to basic education as victims fall sick and/or are orphaned and/or drop out of school to take care of their sick.

**Culture:** As long as some Kenyan communities remain loyal to their cultural practices and other related crimes like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages for girls, access to complete basic education for the affected group of citizens remains a dream. **Insecurity:** Increase in crime such as cattle rustling, land /tribal clashes and rape destabilizes communities and denies the young people opportunities to access basic education.

**Dropout Rates:** This concern is closely related to concerns such as culture, poverty, and HIV/AIDS pandemic. Young girls in some communities drop out to be married off. Young boys and girls are forced to drop out due to a lack of fees both statutory and non-

**Poverty:** With about 50% of Kenyans living below the poverty level in an environment where

statutory. The Aids scourge has academically maimed much youth either directly or indirectly. These and other factors singly or together deny many young people access to complete basic education in Kenya.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It must be acknowledged that the Government of Kenya has made huge strides towards the achievement of basic education for Kenyans. In particular, since the present government, NARC took over, 2003, improvement in access is evident through such undertakings as the provision of “Free” Primary Education, streamlining of the primary education policy, and provision of bursaries and grants for poor children at the secondary education level. Nonetheless, to achieve optimal access to basic education, more effort is required.

**Improve provision of health:** Government’s move to provide free treatment for primary goes in public health facilities is a welcome idea. Should this service be extended to other constituents of basic education, improvement in retention, and completion rates would be recorded. But this undertaking also means that hospitals should be located within reach of the people. They should also be well-equipped – a very expensive venture; but who says education is cheap.

**Intensify the fight against demeaning cultures:** In this twenty-first century, all efforts should be made to eliminate non-progressive cultures that force people out of schools. Such are cultures like early marriage for girls and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in some communities in Kenya. People who insist on practicing these cultures should be punished by law.

**Special attention:** In particular, girls and youth with disabilities should be given special attention to enable them to complete basic education. Thus, in families where girls and disabled cannot access basic education due to poverty or culture, the state would ensure the reverse of the situation.

**Increase attention to youth employment:** The government kitty to assist youth get economically stable through soft loans is just but the beginning. What is suggested here is that the radius of reception is widened through a mechanism that is not seen to be segregative. Let young people in both urban and rural areas be encouraged to participate in this program. Moreover, the program should be made a national policy, not a political maneuver. Achievement of complete basic education should eventually be a requirement to participate in the program.

**Tighten disbursement of bursaries and grants for basic education:** This idea would buffet learners from poor homes against dropping out of school. The government initiated this noble idea except that in many places it is seen to be misused. Sometimes non-deserving friends and relatives benefit from the fund at the expense of the poor and disadvantaged. Streamlining of this system is necessary.

**Enhance security:** Security should be tightened in all war-prone regions. Most of these regions are in Rift Valley regions where people fight over land, cattle, and tribe. The most disadvantaged people are youth who are not only displaced but also drop out of school to fend for themselves. This situation is redeemable.

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