

Influence of Free Primary Education Policy on Pupil Survival Rates by Gender in Public Primary Schools in Rongo Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy introduction in 2003 narrowed gender gap nationally; public primary school survival rate in 2005 was 90.4% (90.4% boys; 90.3% girls). However, Rongo in the same year posted survival rate of 99.1% (102.4% boys; 95.8% girls). This study was occasioned by the fact that despite FPE being in place there was still huge disparity in survival rate in Rongo Sub-county. The purpose of the study was to determine the influence on FPE policy on survival rates by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county. Ex-post-facto and descriptive survey designs were used in the study. The target population comprised of 42 schools, 1 Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (SQASO), 966 and 624 Class 7 and 8 pupils respectively. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussion and document analysis guide. The findings revealed that, FPE policy had a positive influence on survival rate on both gender. The study concluded that FPE Policy attracted girls who had dropped out of school hence overcrowding in classes in public primary schools lowering girls survival rate compared to boys in public primary schools, it was discovered these girls did not dropout as they constituted a higher proportion than boys in private primary schools hence explaining the huge disparity in survival in public primary schools. Study recommended provision of enough teaching and learning materials in public primary schools to eliminate congestion and overcrowding which led to transfers to private primary schools. Findings are significant to, educational planners, donor agencies, parents and community in making decision in improving FPE Policy to enhance gender parity in Public Primary schools in Kenya.

Keywords: survival, free primary education, policy, gender, disparity, rongo sub-county

INTRODUCTION

Studies have found a positive relation between education or human capital and economic growth (Stevens & Weale, 2004). Empirical literatures have also quantified private and social rates of return for different levels of education in many countries (Psacharopoulos, Patrinos & McMahon, 2004). These studies highlight the point that the social rate of return from primary education is higher than that from secondary and tertiary levels of education. The public and merit good aspects of education, especially in primary education, call for government intervention. The launching of Free Primary Education (FPE) Programme in January 2003 was a landmark policy decision by a new government of Kenya. Seen by donors as a key step towards school fee abolition, it opened the door to new level of donor support, and it has subsequently taken the bulk of Government and donor development funding for education. The World Bank gave a grant of Ksh 3.7

billion in June 2003, while British government through DFID had earlier given a grant of Ksh 1.6 billion to boost the Programme (Aduka, 2003). Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy introduction in 2003 narrowed gender gap nationally; public primary school survival rate in 2005 was 90.4% (90.4% boys; 90.3% girls). However, Rongo in the same year posted survival rate of 99.1% (102.4% boys; 95.8% girls). It is with this concern of the social rates of returns in primary education and heavy public investment behind the motivation of this study on the influence of FPE Policy on pupil's survival rate by gender at public primary school in Rongo Sub-county, Kenya. Thus the study sought to establish the Influence of Free Primary Education Policy on pupil's survival rate by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county in Kenya.

As depicted in Table 1.1 it is clear that Rongo Sub-county is faced with problem of attaining gender

equity. Following the 2011 KCPE result, it is notable that gender target in schools is almost met nationally, of the 776,214 candidates 51.6% were boys and 48.4% were girls. “That is very close “said the Education minister (Hon. Mutula Kilonzo) when releasing results (Hudson, 2011). Even with this increase, Rongo lagged behind the same year with more boys sitting examination 58.6% boys against 41.4% girls. This clearly shows that while the gender disparity is at 3.2% nationally, the Rongo Sub-county

has 17.2% gender disparity (Rongo Sub-county Statistics Office, 2012). Despite this progress, data from the World Bank show that girls still accounted for approximately 55 percent of the out of school children in 2006. As a result, the Millennium Development Goal target of gender equality in primary school by 2005 was not achieved and there is uncertainty surrounding the possibility of achieving this target by 2015 (Aduda, 2003).

Table 1.1: Primary School Completion rates by Gender of Rongo Sub-county, Nyanza Province and Kenya from the period 2000-2010

Year	Rongo		Nyanza		Kenya	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
2000	57.6	44.5	63.8	58.2	63.1	57.4
2001	68.9	53.8	72.2	59.4	66.6	57.9
2002	67.7	52.6	73.6	59.3	72.4	58.6
2003	78.3	50.8	80.2	63.7	74.7	65.3
2004	78.6	50.7	88.0	69.8	77.3	67.2
2005	78.5	51.7	89.3	69.7	79.6	70.9
2006	79.8	57.9	86.7	68.0	80.4	76.3
2007	80.6	62.0	89.9	72.0	83.7	79.3
2008	81.7	66.6	89.4	72.1	84.3	82.9
2009	81.3	61.7	88.6	69.5	86.0	80.7
2010	83.9	64.1	89.3	70.2	84.7	81.8

Source: Ministry of Education, Statistics Section 2000-2010

Public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county, between 2003 and 2010, the girls have lagged behind in primary school participation. From Table 1.2 it is clear in 2003, the enrolment of girls was 23,640 (44.3%) against boys' enrolment of 29,710 (55.7%). In 2005, girls' enrolment was 25,110 (43.6%) against boys' enrolment of 32,450 (56.4%). In 2010, the girls' enrolment trend for girls in Rongo Sub-county remained the same, girls 25,056 (42.0%) against boys' enrolment of 34,559(58.0%).

Despite the introduction of FPE Policy in January 2003, the NER of female pupils in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county is intermittently low as shown in Table 1.2; therefore, the need to conduct a study on influence of Free Primary Education Policy on participation by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county. The introduction of FPE Policy by government had some objectives to accomplish that is; reverse the declining enrolment, to enhance access, survival and graduation rates, to implement sector policy goals i.e. EFA, MDGs which Kenya is a signatory, relieve parents from burden of cost of primary education, streamline and rationalize utilization of educational resources in schools, implement provision of child rights Act 2001 and to improve learning. From the initial data at Rongo Sub-county even after the introduction of FPE policy it shows girls participation is still wanting even when the population census of 2009 shows as per Table 1.3 that girls of school going age are more than boys and this is what prompted the study on the influence of FPE policy on pupil participation by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county, Kenya.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy which narrowed gender gap nationally; public primary school survival rate in 2005 was 90.4% (90.4% boys; 90.3% girls) with a disparity of 0.1%. However, Rongo in the same year posted survival rate of 99.1% (102.4% boys; 95.8% girls) with a wide disparity of 6.6%. This study was occasioned by the fact that despite FPE being in place there was still huge disparity in Rongo Sub-county. This raises the study's concern on why this big disparity exists, when the population census of 2009 showed there were 39,121 (56.7%) girls of primary school age compared to 30,366 (43.7%) boys in Rongo Sub-county. Given the importance of education to the country and commitment of funds to FPE programme, children dropping out of school are a drawback to the country move towards Education For All (EFA) by 2015. The study thus investigates the influence of FPE Policy on pupil survival by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county, Kenya.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The researcher was not able to use all the schools in the country due to financial constraints and time but this was covered by taking a representative fraction of schools in Rongo sub-county, thus the findings can be applied in other Sub-counties in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted through a combination of an Ex-post facto and descriptive survey research designs. A simply random sampling was used to

select 20 schools from the 42 schools that were established by 1995. All the 20 head teachers and 40 class teachers of the selected schools were purposively used. Glen Israel formula was used to select 320 pupils from a total of 1,590 pupils of class seven and eight of the sampled schools. The Glen Israel formula 1992 used was applied as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \times (e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1590}{1 + 1590(0.05)^2}$$

$$= 319.598 \approx 320 \text{ pupils}$$

Where n -the sample size, N -the population size, e - the acceptable sampling error and * 95% confidence level

Then proportionate random sampling was used to select 195 and 125 pupils from the pupils total sample size of 320 Class Seven and Class Eight respectively (Kothari, 2004) which represented at least 20.2% of the population. Gay (2008) asserted that at least 20% is a good representation when dealing with a large population. Data was collected using questionnaires, document analysis guide, interview schedule and focus group discussion. Face and content validity of the instruments was determined by experts in the Planning and Economics

of education, whose input was in co-operated in the final drafts. Reliability of the instruments was determined through a pilot in 4 public primary schools. The instruments were administered through test-retest method. Data obtained were correlated using Pearson r at an alpha level of 0.05. The Pearson r coefficient of head teachers' and class teachers' questionnaires obtained after calculation were 0.82 and 0.79 respectively. Since the coefficients were higher than 0.70 which is conventionally acceptable reliability, the instruments were considered reliable. Quantitative data were analyzed using combination of descriptive statistics in the form of percentages, frequency counts and means; Cohort analysis of the male and female pupils based on grade and cohort. Qualitative data from interviews, open-ended items of the questionnaires and focus group discussions were organized into themes and sub-theme as they emerged from the content analysis.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: The research question responded to was: What is the influence of FPE Policy on the survival rates by gender in Public Primary Schools in Rongo Sub-county?

The responses to this research question by head teachers and class teachers were represented in figure 1 and 2

Year	CLASSES								Graduates
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1995	1320								
1996		1290 *112							
1997			1121 *58						
1998				1094 *123					
1999					1040 *128				
2000						978 *141			
2001							940 *113		
2002								813 *96	810
2003	2115								
2004		1900 *18							
2005			1849 *87						
2006				1641 *53					
2007					1583 *163				
2008						1339 *141			
2009							1226 *132		
2010								1186 *152	1183

* Repeaters

Figure 1: A Flow Chart showing the flow of the 1995 and 2003 cohorts' female pupils

Year	CLASSES								Graduates	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
1995	2170									
1996		2080 *16								
1997			1989 *11							
1998				1947 *9						
1999					1872 *6					
2000						1818 *9				
2001							1762 *7			
2002								1640 *12		1638
2003	3715									
2004		3567 *42								
2005			3510 *0							
2006				3469 *3						
2007					3313 *0					
2008						3268 *4				
2009							3095 *5			
2010								3000 *0		2999

* Repeaters

Figure 2: A Flow Chart showing the flow of the 1995 and 2003 cohort male pupils

Figure 1 and 2 gives the enrolments for the 1995 and 2003 cohorts and the figures asterisk are the repeaters the 1995 and 2003 cohorts got in the successive grades when they moved. (They are not part of the cohort survivors and are therefore subtracted from the grade enrolments to get real survivors).

Figure 1 shows decrease in the number of female pupil as they move to successive grades up to the final grade both before and after the introduction of FPE Policy. Overall there was decline in enrollment as pupils moved to successive grades up to the final grade. For the 1995 and 2003 cohort female pupils, enrolment was highest at class one of 1320 and 2115 and reduced subsequently to 813 and 1186 at Class Eight representing a decrease of 38.3% and 43.9% for the 1995 and 2003 cohorts respectively. For 1995 cohort, this may mean that pupils repeat due to reasons like low grades in end year examinations, drop outs due to teenage pregnancies, early marriages, inability to pay school fees and social pressure emanating from home. UNESCO (2005) argues that household barriers such as family resources level, poverty and level of education of parents are a contributing factor. These possible drop outs from the school system greatly affect internal efficiency.

To calculate AGSR of 1995 and 2003 cohort female and male pupils based on grade, following formula by Chesswas (1969) was used:

$$AGSR = \frac{N_{t+1}^{k+1} - R_{t+2}^{k+1}}{N_t^k}$$

N=Total enrolment, k=First/Initial Class, Class or Grade and k+1=second Class after the initial Class, Class/Grade, for instance, in the 1995 cohort k are the Class one female and male pupils in 1995 whereas k+1 are the Class Two pupils of 1996. T=Year 1 of study, t+1=Year 2 of study and t+2=Year 3 of study, for example, for the 2003 cohort t is 2004 and t+1 is 2005.

R=Repeaters, for instance in the above formula the repeaters (R) are in their 2nd class (k+1) in Year 3 of study (t+1).

Research Question 2: To establish Actual Grade Survival Rate , AGSR for the 1995 cohort at Class Eight was calculated as shown: The results were presented in percentages.

AGSR for the 1995 cohort at class eight for girls;

$$1) \quad AGSR = \frac{N_{t+7}^{k+7} - R_{t+8}^{k+7}}{N_t^k}$$

$$AGSR = \frac{813 - 96}{1320} \times 100 \% = 54.3\%$$

AGSR for the 1995 cohort at class eight for boys;

$$2) \text{ AGSR} = \frac{N_{t+7}^{k+7} - R_{t+8}^{k+7}}{N_t^k}$$

$$\text{AGSR} = \frac{1640 - 12}{2170} \times 100 \% = 75\%$$

Similarly, AGSR for the 2003 pupils at Class Eight was calculated as is indicated:

AGSR for the 2003 female pupils;

$$3) \text{ AGSR} = \frac{N_{t+7}^{k+7} - R_{t+8}^{k+7}}{N_t^k}$$

$$\text{AGSR} = \frac{1186 - 152}{2115} \times 100 \% = 48.9\%$$

AGSR for the 2003 male pupils;

$$4) \text{ AGSR} = \frac{N_{t+7}^{k+7} - R_{t+8}^{k+7}}{N_t^k}$$

$$\text{AGSR} = \frac{3000 - 0}{3715} \times 100 \% = 80.8\%$$

The findings show that the 1995 and 2003 cohort female pupils who survived up to class eight were 813 and 1186 girls representing AGSR at Class Eight of 54.3% and 48.9% respectively. These findings give a decline in the survival rates of the 1995 and 2003 cohort female pupils by 5.4%, meaning that FPE Policy did not have a positive influence on the survival rates of the girl-child in the Sub-county. While Table 4.8 shows that 1995 and 2003 cohort male pupils who survived up to class eight were 1640 and 3000 boys representing AGSR at Class Eight of 75% and 80.8% respectively.

Research Question 3

Table 2: Influence of FPE Policy on the survival rates by gender rated by the Head teachers (n=20) and the Class Teachers (n=40) Mean Rating

Influence of FPE Policy on Survival Rates	Mean Ratings (MR)	
	Head teachers	Class teacher
a) FPE Policy has improved attendance for both boys and girls in public primary schools	4.22	2.33
b) FPE Policy has reduced challenges faced by pupils in public primary schools	2.89	2.84
c) FPE Policy has enhanced pupils' learning with minimal interruptions in public primary schools.	3.62	2.68
d) FPE Policy has reduced repetition rate of both gender in public primary schools	3.62	3.42
e) FPE Policy has reduced social pressures from home such as pregnancies, early marriages, educational costs etc. hence continuous learning	3.52	2.79
f) FPE Policy has enabled most parents to enroll their children to successive grades without interruptions.	3.22	3.10
g) FPE Policy has reduced drop outs of both girls and boys in public primary schools	3.26	3.11
Average mean rating	3.47	2.90

Table 4 gives the ratings of head teachers and the class teachers on the influence of FPE Policy on the survival rates by gender in Public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county. This statement that FPE Policy had improved attendance of girls and boys in public primary schools was highly rated at 4.22 by the head teachers but lowly rated by the class teachers at 2.33. The low rating of the class teachers may be due to the fact that there could be many irregularities in girls and boys attending classes as evidenced from the class registers despite the introduction of FPE Policy. The high rating by the head teachers may have been mere assumption on the part played by FPE Policy. Hidden costs of the girl-child education include sanitary towels, and transport among others. Maruko (2011) observed that girls stay out of schools for a number of days monthly due to sanitary pads and as such affirmative action had been taken to provide girls with sanitary towels to keep them in school. During the focus group discussion the female pupils most of them agreed that they attend school most of the days in the week. Asked what could at times prevent them from coming to school daily, they mentioned cases like monthly periods and one courageous female pupil had this to say: "Mwalimu I normally have heavy bleedings and for the second and third day I avoid coming to school to skip that embarrassment from my colleagues and more so my male counter parts." The views of the pupils agree with the findings in Tables 3 and 4 since despite the introduction of FPE Policy, the survival rate of the girl-child of the 2003 cohort went down to 48.9% from 54.3% of the 1995 cohort representing 5.4% decline as compared to boys who increased from 75% to 80.8% of the 1995 cohort representing 5.8% increase.

DISCUSSION

Head teachers rated FPE Policy at 3.26 as a factor that had positively affected the survival rates of the girl-child in terms of reducing dropouts, but the class teachers gave it a rating of 3.11. Another reason as to why the head teachers may have a higher rating than class teachers is because he looks at the school dropouts in totality which to them may be a drop in the ocean, whereas to the class teachers one or two dropouts in a class may look significant in terms of the class ratio. However, the head teachers alluded to the fact that dropouts of female pupils still existed though at a reduced scale due to other factors affecting the girl-child other than school fees. A number of the head teachers gave peer influence, unwanted pregnancies and early marriages as some of the reasons that led to the dropouts of the girls in their schools and one of them had this to say: "Fees may just be a cover up to the reasons for dropouts of the girls but the major challenges that affect the girl-child is peer pressure that in most cases leads to early marriages and unwanted pregnancies". Another head teacher supported early marriages as a factor that

leads to dropouts by saying this: “Two of female pupils in class seven dropped out after eloping with men in third term. One of the girls had fallen pregnant while the other had records of poor performance in class.”

FPE Policy having enhanced pupils’ learning with minimal interruptions was rated at 3.62 by the head teachers and 2.68 by class teachers. The discrepancy in the ratings of the head teachers and the class teachers may be argued from the basis that the head teachers are not in a better position to know the various interruptions affecting pupils in their day to day operations in the school. This is unlike the class teachers who mark the pupils’ registers, enter their classes on daily basis and interact with them more often enabling them to know the challenges affecting them both at home and in school. During the focus discussions with pupils, they agreed that FPE Policy had enhanced promotion of girls from one class to the other as there was less interruption such as going home to look for fees leading to lack of continuity in learning. One of them had this to say: “FPE Policy has motivated my parent to struggle and get the remaining amount of money and this allows me to come to school regularly.”

Another male pupil concurred by saying this: “Free Primary Education has helped many parents buy school uniforms with less difficulties and this makes most of us to be in school and concentrate unlike without FPE Policy where most of us would keep on going home for examination fees as was the case with my elder sister in 2000 when I was in class four. In fact she dropped out of school at class eight in 2002”.

According to the Ministry of Education, EMIS unit (2003) Nyanza Province recorded the highest dropouts of female pupils in primary schools of 39% against the national which was 26.9%. According to Barasa (2003), drop outs are considered as a waste because each school cycle is taken as an entity which should be attended in totality if the pupil is to reach some level of competency.

The head teachers rated FPE Policy to have reduced social pressures such as pregnancies, early marriages, educational costs among others at 3.52, whereas the class teachers gave it a rating of 2.79. This implies that the head teachers viewed FPE Policy as having positively affected the survival rates of the girl-child because the girls’ education is minimally interrupted and therefore they spend most of their time in school leaving them with little chances of falling as prey to social pressures such as early marriages and pregnancies. One of the head teachers had this to say: “To some extent FPE Policy has helped the school in quelling social pressures that was a big problem in the past as most of the female pupils do not go home

frequently to look for fees which is an added risk to their survival”.

These findings give an increase in the survival rates of the 1995 and 2003 cohort male pupils by 5.8%, which means that FPE Policy has a positive influence on the survival rate of the boy-child in the Sub-county. Therefore FPE policy had a positive influence on survival rate of boy-child compared to girl-child in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county as many girls transferred to private schools as indicated by head teachers and SQASO

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that factors such as class congestion/overcrowding, staff shortage and transfer of girls to private schools pose a real threat to gains made by FPE Policy. If the factors that affect pupil survival by gender in Rongo Sub-county are addressed, the school-going children will benefit a lot from FPE programme hence a big move in narrowing gender gap and reducing the level of poverty in the country as education is central to economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that government should come up with affirmative action to promote more female teachers to head public primary schools who will be role models to female pupils to enhance survival; some girls are still locked out or drop out due to lack of role models. Provision of public boarding girls primary schools in Rongo Sub-county to ensure girls are in school always to curb issues of absenteeism due to child labour that always leads to repetition and finally drop out. Provision of enough teaching and learning materials in public primary schools to eliminate congestion and overcrowding which has led to drop out and transfers to private primary schools.

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