

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya



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ABSTRACT: Although the Government of Kenya has been boosting effort in implementing free and compulsory education policy, transition from primary schools to secondary schools, retention and completion at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) have remained below 100 percent. Hence the study purposed to determine the relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya. The study was underpinned on Liberal Educational Theory (LET) and used a descriptive study research design. The target population for the study was 655; 327 public day secondary school principals, 327 Parents Associations (PA) chairpersons of those schools and Kitui County Director of Education (CDE). Data were collected from a sample of 182 respondents; 164 principals, 17 (PA) chairpersons and the Kitui CDE. Data were collected by use of questionnaire for principals, interview schedules for CDE and PA chairpersons and document review analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed based on emerging themes, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Hypothesis testing was done using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pr) method at a significance level of 0.05. The study findings showed that there was a negative and significant relationship between learners' entry behavior and the implementation (transition, retention and completion) rates ($r = -.678$; $p \leq .01$). In view of the forestated results, the study made conclusion that the indirect relationship between the study variables negatively affected the implementation of free and compulsory education. On this basis, the study recommended, among others that secondary school principals should adhere to the policy of admitting candidates regardless of marks obtained at KCPE and promote learners to the next class regardless of performance in previous formative examinations. This, would enhance prospects of 100 % transition, retention and completion in public day secondary schools in Kitui County and Kenya in general.

KEY WORDS: learners' entry behavior: implementation: free and compulsory education: public day secondary schools.

STUDY BACKGROUND

Balestrino, Gazzimi and Loporini (2013) explain that education is a lasting social process by which persons acquire knowledge and skills that are important to empower them adapt to the culture of their community. Free and compulsory education is a system of tutelage that is funded using public funds and assets and is required of all children of school going age to attend. By enforcing free and obligatory schooling, countries ensure that no child of school attendance age is deprived an opportunity to acquire education, for children from both humble and rich households get opportunity to do schooling (Heyman, 2014). Balestrino et al (2013) affirm that secondary schooling is an instrumental level in the education cycle, for it links early childhood and primary education to tertiary education. Moreover, the secondary education connects education system to the labour market. Besides, secondary education improves development, supports regard for social liberties and rights, and empowers individuals to optimally interact in a free culture.

The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948). Its free and compulsory aspects especially for the fundamental stages are articulated in Article 26 (1) of UDHR. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), embraced in 1989 also underscores the right of the child to schooling. Segment 28 (a) and (b) of CRC require each state to enact legislations that reduce social and monetary bottlenecks to basic education (CRC, 1989). Notwithstanding the endorsement of the CRC and confirmation of Education for All (EFA) 1990, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015, by most nations, some of them have relentlessly charged educational expenses on students. The levying of educational expenses presents unreasonable strain to getting secondary schooling by students from monetarily deprived families (Heyman, 2014). This then implies that states ought to enact legislations and strategies that ensure that basic education is free, mandatory and executable, depicted by high rates of transition, retention and completion.

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

All education establishments in Cuba are public and the education sector gets one of the best yearly budgetary allocations in the world, currently estimated at 13 percent of Cuba's annual budgets (Lopez, 2017). Cuba's state supported education is absolutely free, for government funds cost of the public education at the tune of 100 percent. A 2014 World Bank report communicated that Cuba has the best education structure and universal literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The free education is also compulsory for all children aged 6-16 years and who attend primary school for six years and secondary school for 3-4 years. Completion rate at primary schooling is estimated at 99.3 percent and all graduates transit to basic secondary level and subsequently to higher secondary or technical institutes. Individuals who qualify join university education or technological polytechnics. This enables Cuba to meet the target of Education for All (EFA).

The establishment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, in 2009 in India propelled Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) to 101.56 percent in the elementary schooling in 2014 (Mukherjee & Singh, 2015). Having instituted the RTE, the Indian government turned its consideration towards accomplishing Universal secondary education (USE). To guarantee improved admission to and quality of the secondary education, the public authority of India instituted a centrally sponsored scheme for secondary schooling. This brought about huge expansion in enrolment at secondary schools from 27.6 million in 2001 to 59.6 million by 2014 (Mukherjee & Singh, 2015).

A World Bank (2018) report indicates that primary level education in the Dominican Republic is free and obligatory. The education is assigned for 6-11 years age kids and runs for six years. In spite of the secondary level education being free in the Dominican Republic, it is not obligatory (World Bank, 2018). The secondary school level education is divided into two years of lower secondary meant for learners aged 12-13 years and upper secondary assigned for learners aged 14-17 years. The lower secondary level is intended for general education while the upper secondary level is intended for either technical/vocational or arts education.

Enforcement of attendance of school is little despite the mandatory nature of primary education. This leads to low retention and completion rates at the primary level. Resultantly, transition to the secondary schools is of low rate. The non-obligatory nature of secondary education creates a significant impairment to completion of secondary education. The rates of transition to and completion at secondary school were gauged at 93 and 62 percent respectively in 2018. This implies that 100 % primary and secondary schooling are yet to be attained in the Dominican Republic. This then necessitates that Dominican Republic enforces participation at elementary school level and makes secondary level education mandatory and enforceable (World Bank, 2018).

A report by European Commission (2018) on education and culture in Kosovo shows that primary and lower secondary education (grades 1-9) is a requirement, however upper secondary (grades 10-13) is not. This is owed to economic hardship occasioned by persistent fighting with Yugoslavia for a surprisingly long time till 2017 when Kosovo acquired confirmation as a sovereign state. Besides, upper secondary is seen as essential only when a learner is seeking to join an academic university. Additionally, Kosovo has a discriminative culture, for in the event that a family is to make a choice, it inclines in the direction of educating boys and not girls. The non-financing of upper secondary education and the discriminative culture against girls make transition and completion rates in upper secondary remain below 100 percent. Hereafter Kosovo government needs to authorize a course of action on financing upper secondary education and educating the girl child.

The 1986 African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) asserts acknowledgment of African countries to the principle of human and individuals' rights and liberties. The rights and liberties are contained in legal instruments approved by the African Union (AU) and in the global declarations, conventions and treaties approved by AU. Article 17 (1) of the ACHPR determines that; every individual will have the right to education. Article 11 (3) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), expresses essentials on the right to free and obligatory education for the youth (ACRWC, 1990)

Ghana government introduced free schooling in 1995 by focusing on giving Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) by 2005 (Melara, 2014). The Ghana FCUBE covers eleven years; 2 years of nursery education, 6 years of primary tutoring and 3 years of junior secondary school. The goal is to abolish educational expenses hence expand enrolment. Because of unpredictable disbursement of funds by government, parents/guardians pay compulsory additional expenses dubbed Parents Teachers Association (PTA) dues to provide for school repairs, school functions, games and sports. For some families are of low income hence cannot meet the dues, they do not send their children to school. This brought about 40% of children aged 6-11 years pushed out of schools (Melara, 2014).

In accordance with ACRWC requirements, Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) in January 1997. This prompted doubling of enrolment in primary schools in a period of 2 years in Uganda. The call for secondary education by children who were appropriately completing primary schooling under UPE in Uganda initiated introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. Titeca and Lisa (2015), did a study on the effect of USE on enrolment in Uganda. The study found out that USE distinctly positively influenced enrolment. The positive result, had been prompted by the strategy on automatic promotion to the next class regardless of performance in formative tests in previous classes.

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

Education is officially compulsory in the State of Eritrea for children aged 7-16 years. For physical structures and facilities are not adequate, it becomes challenging to require every eligible learner to enroll in school (Mengesha & Tessema, 2019). The schooling is just free at basic level, owing to low financial status. The poor financial status is occasioned by 30 years of battling for freedom, acquired in 1993 from its motherland, Ethiopia. Horrible agro ecological environment and hence food insecurity exacerbates the low economic status. Because of non-financing of the education at secondary level by government and inadequacy of infrastructure, just 57 percent and 21 percent of eligible youth take part in primary and secondary schooling respectively (Mengesha & Tessema, 2019).

The above enrolment percentages are demonstrative of tremendous wastage along educational system from primary to secondary regardless of the fact that the government of Eritrea has persistent effort to establish schools and staff the schools with prepared educators. In view of teacher shortage, student- teacher proportions are high, estimated at 45:1 at the elementary level and 54:1 at secondary level. The elementary level classrooms accommodate 63 learners while secondary level classrooms accommodate 97 learners. The inadequacy of infrastructure, notably classrooms, with available ones being crowded and teachers' shortage lead to high exit rates, hence poor transition to and retention and completion rates at the secondary school level.

Free primary public education was declared in Somaliland in 2011, but the government of Somaliland does not fund the schools effectively. This is owed to low economic status, as indicated by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (UNICEF, 2017). The poor funding of schools leads to lack of essential infrastructure, guidance and learning materials and shoddy management and administration of schools. Students are likewise forced to incur additional expenses in obtaining writing materials. This prompts high dropout rates, causing Somaliland to have one of the most minimal worldwide primary school gross enrolment rates (GER) presently assessed at 44.3%.

Secondary education in Somaliland, which spans 4 years, is neither free nor mandatory, owing to low monetary standing. Therefore, the transition, retention and completion rates are exceptionally low in secondary schools in Somaliland. This again causes Somaliland to have one of the most unfortunate secondary school GER universally and which remained at 21.3 percent in 2015. To help raise enrolment, retention and completion rates, it is vital that Somaliland orders an approach on free and mandatory schooling execution in both primary and secondary levels of education.

Kenya is not just a signatory to the aforesaid worldwide and regional declarations and charters, but besides, party to EFA (1990), MDGs (2000), Universal Primary Education (UPE) 2000 and SDGs (2015) commitments. This committed Kenya to once again, introduce Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 after failure of earlier attempts to offer free education in primary school level (Republic of Kenya, 2003). Five years down the line and because of fruitful execution of the FPE, Kenya presented Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008 (Republic of Kenya, 2008). To guarantee equal opportunities for all students leaving primary schools, the Government of Kenya (GoK) enacted the part of compulsion in 2010 and consequently free and obligatory fundamental education in Kenya (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Part 4-the bill of rights, article 53 (b) of the constitution necessitates that each Kenyan child be offered opportunity to obtain free and mandatory basic education.

In 2017, government of Kenya dedicated to pay Ksh 22,244 per year per each public day secondary school learner, with parents left only with duty of meeting cost for lunch meals and uniform. This made the day public secondary education totally free and compulsory. This effort is geared toward accomplishing SDG 4 part of making secondary education universal. School partners comprising of head teachers, parents, leaders, local and county administrators are obliged to uphold school participation with the end goal of boosting execution of the free and compulsory secondary education policy (Basic Education Act, 2013). Section 28 (1) of part IV of the Act has arrangement for carrying out the right of each child to free and compulsory basic education. Segments 30 and 40 of part IV of the Act make parents and head teachers accountable for guaranteeing kids go to school.

The independent variable identified with execution of free and mandatory education policy (the dependent variable) and associated with this study is learners' entry behavior. Entry behavior, which is prior performance in academics, is a key determinant in entry to and performance in academics in higher institutions of learning (Amasuomo, 2014). A UNESCO report found out that most students repeated form one and others dropped out of school due to shoddy performance in formative examinations occasioned by low entry behavior of the learners (Paul, 1997). The dropping out of school reduced retention and completion rates. A study on academic performance of students with different entry behavior in Nigeria by Ogbonnaya, Okpuruka, Iheanacho and Ndu (2014) found out that there existed a significant relationship between entry qualifications and students' performance in basic schools of nursing. Shavisa, Ndiku and Musasia (2016) did a study on role of students' characteristics in dropout cases among secondary school students in Vihiga County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and a sample of 200 respondents identified by use of snowball method. The study found out that students with poor entry behavior persistently performed poorly in formative examinations and eventually dropped out of school, leading to reduction in retention and completion rates.

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

Kenyan Government established the free and obligatory education strategy with a view to achieving 100 percent transition and completion rates in secondary schools (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Nonetheless, the 100 percent transition and completion rates in public day secondary schools in Kenya may not be accomplished. This is on account that, some schools have continued to peg form 1 admission on Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) performance of learners. Nationally, 942021 learners sat KCPE in 2016 and out of which 748021 transited to form one in 2017. This represented a transition rate of 79.4 percent (MOE, 2021).

In 2017, KCPE candidates were 993718 nationally, but 124818 of them did not transit to form one in 2018, indicating a transition rate of 87.4 percent (MOE, 2021). A cohort of 1,060,710 KCPE candidates sat their examinations in 2018, but only 861400 of the candidates transited to form one in 2019 translating to a transition rate of 81.2 percent (MOE, 2021). The class that completed primary schooling in 2019 had 1,088,989 candidates, but 107,489 of them did not join form one in the year 2020. This indicated a transition rate of 90.1 percent. By 12th September 2021 and which was the deadline for form one admission, 26564 of the 2020 KCPE candidates had not enrolled in form one out of the 1171265 learners invited to enroll in form one by MOE. This indicated a 97.7 percent transition rate.

In 2020/2021 out of the 748021 learners who enrolled in form one in 2017 nationally, 5441 did not sit KCSE. This led to a completion rate of 99 percent in the whole country. The above data shows that the objective of 100 percent transition from primary schools and completion in form four is yet to be realized. However, there has been appreciable steady improvement in transition and completion rates since 2017 when secondary school education was made totally free and compulsory in public day secondary schools in Kenya and transition policy announced. The below 100 percent transition and completion rates has been attributed to lack of school fees, teenage pregnancies, early marriages and shortage of requisite school infrastructure (MOE, 2021). Dropping out of school, hence failing to complete is tantamount to wastage of opportunities and both family and government resources.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to determine the relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Legislation of the free and compulsory basic education policy in Kenya was done to ensure rise of access to both primary and secondary education. Kitui County transition and completion rates have been below 100 percent for the last five years (2016-2020) (Kitui County education office, 2020). This is presented in Tables 1 and 2 below. Kitui County was not among 17 counties that had attained 100 percent transition rate by the 12th September 2021 date of conclusion of the mop up exercise meant to have all primary school graduates join form one. Other counties that have had challenges in transition, retention and completion rates since 2015 include Baringo, Garissa, Isiolo, Kilifi, Kwale, Mandera, Marsabit, Narok, Samburu, Tana River, Turkana, Wajir, West Pokot, Bungoma and informal settlements of Nairobi (Nyamai, 2021).

County government of Kitui runs a pro poor program which awards bursaries to students from economically challenged families, while the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF) gives water tanks to schools and sanitary towels to female learners. Moreover, the Kitui County National Government – Constituency Development Funds (NG-CDFs) finance construction of classrooms and installation of other infrastructure in schools and award bursaries to students from financially deprived families (Kitui County Government, 2013). This determination is geared towards ensuring steady participation of students and further foster transition, retention and completion rates. Despite the concerted effort by both the national and Kitui County governments, retention and completion rates in public day secondary schools in Kitui County remain below 100 percent as indicated in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table: 1: Transition rates from primary to secondary schools (2016-2020)

KCPE Year	KCPE Candidature	Form 1 Year	Form 1 Enrolment	Transition Rate	Marginal rate
2015	34848	2016	23066	66.2	-
2016	35215	2017	24132	68.5	2.3
2017	36940	2018	29572	80	11.5
2018	37087	2019	31499	85	5
2019	38081	2020	34212	89.9	4.9
Average				77.92	

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

Table 2: Completion rates at KCSE (2016-2020)

Form 1 year	Form Enrolment	1 KCSE Year	KCSE Candidature	Completion Rate	Marginal rate
2013	21909	2016	16678	76.1	-
2014	22607	2017	18071	79.9	3.8
2015	22949	2018	16707	72.8	-7.1
2016	23066	2019	19716	85.5	12.7
2017	24132	2020	21496	89.1	3.6
			Average	80.68	

The persistent below 100 percent transition and completion rates necessitated the current study: determining the relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya.

Study null hypothesis

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education.

Amasuomo (2014) argues that entry behavior, is prior performance in academics before joining a new level of education and is a key determinant in entry to and performance in higher education. Caliskan (2014) defines students' entry behavior as a form of pre-learning required to study a specific unit or course. A study by Caliskan (2014) investigated the effects of entry behavior on learning at higher level in Meram, Turkey. The study found out that pre-learning is a key variable regarding level of learning at higher level and that good entry behavior raised the learning level at primary and secondary education, while poor entry behavior lowered it. This means that poor performance at a given level occasioned by low entry behavior may make a learner get demotivated and dropout, regardless of the free and compulsory education.

Paul (1997) notes that a large portion of issues undergone through by students who repeat form one is attributed to the learners' low entry points, teachers' lack of ability in conveyance of value education and learners' challenges in switching from primary to secondary schools. Larger part of students who repeat form one feel embarrassed, unwise, humiliated, and miserable. This feeling aggravates when a few teachers label the learners as such. Their being identified and compelled to repeat classes elicits their frustration, with some selecting to dropout (Paul, 1997). Their dropping out of school lowers retention and completion rates.

Transition from primary to secondary school is a critical changeover to young learners as they move from small self-contained classrooms to large and more cosmopolitan schools. Large cosmopolitan schools have reduced teacher support and heightened expectations of independent academic performance (Hanewald, 2013). The transition poses changes that can have positive or negative effects on students, socio-emotionally and behaviorally. This then requires support from peers, teachers and parents so as to shape the teenagers' experiences and outcomes for them to stay in school until completion point. Lack of support to new students may result in disengagement, with potentiality of dropping out of school altogether (Hanewald, 2013).

A study on students' joining eligibility and scholarly execution in fundamental schools of nursing in Nigeria was carried out by Ogbonnaya, Okpuru, Iheanacho & Ndu (2014). The study utilized correlational study design and a population sample of 390 nursing students. The study discovered that there existed huge connection between joining behavior and students' ability in academics. The study also found out that students who persistently performed poorly in formative examinations eventually got expelled. This resulted in reduction in enrolment and completion rates.

Limbe (2017) studied factors influencing students' performance in Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) in Newala District, Mtwara region, Tanzania. The study used qualitative approach research design and a sample of 100 respondents; 2 educational officers, 5 heads of schools, 10 secondary school teachers, 8 parents and 75 learners. The study discovered that performance was low in CSEE due to a number of factors, key being poor entry marks in forms one and three (Limbe, 2017). The study recommended that only students with high scores in primary school leaving examination should join form one. This implied that transition rate to secondary school would get diminished.

Shavisa, Ndiku and Musasia (2016) did a research on the role of students' characteristics in dropout cases among secondary school students in Vihiga County, Kenya. The research adopted a descriptive survey research design and a sample of 200 drop outs identified by use of snowball sampling method. The study found out that students' entry behavior had a significant relationship with

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

students' dropout rate and that students who joined secondary school with low marks had more probability of dropping out of school and which would reduce completion rates. The research recommended that learners be enrolled in form one regardless of entry behavior and performance in formative examinations not to be used as yardstick in promotion to next class, for this would boost transition, retention and completion rates.

Kenya secondary schools are officially categorised into a four rungs rank based on their catchment areas for form one admission (Kirera, 2013). KCPE results determine which level an applicant is qualified for entry. The levels are national, extra-county, county, and sub county schools. The sub county level comprises of public day secondary schools and which solely absorb day learners, greater part of whom are local area inhabitants. Kirera (2013) executed a study on factors impacting on transition of learners from primary to secondary schools in Meru Central District, Kenya. The study utilized descriptive survey research design and a sample of 50 respondents; 25 head teachers and 25 chairpersons of school boards of managers (BOMs).

The study by Kirera (2013) established that some sub county schools set a minimum KCPE score for entry to form one while others were non-selective. It was the selectivity of some of the sub county schools that led to some KCPE candidates not to get chance in form one, even when some sub county schools had chances to accommodate more form ones. This greatly reduced transition rate to secondary schools in Meru central District. Stakeholders pressure principals to produce good results for entry to higher education institutions. This makes the secondary school principals to resort to admitting students whose prospects of doing well at KCSE are quite high. Ultimately, this lowers transition rate to secondary schools.

Simiyu (2015) researched on impact of institutional and learners' characteristics on scholastic achievement and completion rates in day secondary schools in Trans Nzoia and Pokot counties. The research used ex-post facto and correlational designs and a sample of 493 respondents; 384 learners, 79 teachers and 30 head teachers. The research found out that learners with good entry behavior had evidently better academic performance and which motivated them to stay in school until completion time. The research also found out that learners with low entry ability had poor performance in academics, a situation that would discourage them, eventually leading to their dropping out of school.

The findings of Simiyu (2015), concur with those of a study done by Wekesa and Simatwa (2016) on student factors impacting scholastic performance of students in secondary education in Kakamega County. The study by Wekesa and Simatwa (2016), employed descriptive survey research design and a sample of 1,225 respondents, inclusive of 162 secondary school principals, 162 secondary school deputy principals, 900 form 4 students and 1 County Education Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (CEQASO). The study found out that good performance in KCPE improved performance in KCSE and students were encouraged to stay in school until completion time, while poor performance in KCPE generally led to shoddy performance in KCSE. The study further found out that some students with poor entry behavior performed poorly in formative examinations hence left school midstream, a situation which retarded retention and completion rates.

This study therefore determined the relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and mandatory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County.

Study theory

The study was grounded on Liberal Educational Theory (LET) as proposed by Howe (1992). The theory recommends that every country's citizen needs to be accorded opportunity to obtain education without any form of discrimination. School learners have duty of using the chances by joining and completing schooling. Parents have obligation of making available school prerequisites and imposing attendance and participation in school programs by the students. Learners' entry behavior if low (not fit) according to a certain school would make a learner not be admitted by the school against the wish of that learner. Hence LET suitably explains how low learners' entry behavior can deny some learners chance to participate in education acquisition if LET principle of non discrimination is not applied.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive survey research design, adopting a mixed methods approach for both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The target population was 655 comprising of all principals in 327 public day secondary schools in Kitui County, all Parents' Association (PA) chairpersons of those schools and Kitui County Director of Education (CDE). Kitui County has 327 public day secondary schools distributed in 17 sub counties. The schools were stratified according to the sub counties and proportionate stratified sampling technique employed to obtain an equal representation of schools from each sub county. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) assert that a 20-50 percent sample size for a descriptive survey study design is appropriate.

The researchers used simple random sampling technique to obtain half of the schools from each sub county and hence half the number of principals. A record of public day secondary schools from Kitui County Education office was used in sampling the schools. The procedure involved writing down all schools in a sub county on individual pieces of paper. The papers were then rolled

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

and put in a tumbler and the tumbler shaken. The researchers then picked half the papers and which then indicated sub sample size from that particular sub county. The procedure was repeated for all the sub counties and eventually added all the sub samples to get the County composite sample and which totalled to 164 schools. All principals of the identified schools were purposively selected to participate in the survey. This is because principals regulate execution of the free and mandatory education at school level. Kothari (2004) explains that purposive sampling is selection of respondents that fulfill specific conditions.

Similarly, the researchers carried out simple random technique to get the 17 PA chairpersons, each from each sub county. The technique was executed by noting down name of each school on a piece of paper. The papers were then rolled, put in a tumbler and the tumbler shaken. A single paper picked from the tumbler would identify school from which to interview a PA chairperson in a particular sub county. Interviewing 17 PA chairpersons enabled reaching data saturation and representativeness of each sub county (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Six to twelve interviews enable reaching data saturation in both health and social sciences.

The Kitui CDE was purposively selected as a respondent for he/she oversees execution of free and mandatory education policy in the County. The aggregate sample was subsequently 182; 164 principals, 17 PA chairpersons and 1 CDE. The study used interview schedules, document review analysis and questionnaire for data collection. The researchers established content validity of the research instruments through expert judgement. Test re-test technique was carried out to determine reliability of the research instruments. This was done by administering the questionnaire to 16 principals and the interview schedule to 2 PA chairpersons and who were not involved during the actual data collection. Qualitative data in the research instruments were transcribed and reported in narratives according to themes in the study objectives while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In this study, the researchers targeted to administer 164 questionnaires to principals, 17 interview schedules to PA chairpersons and 1 interview schedule to 1 CDE. Out of the distributed instruments, 145 questionnaires were returned, 14 PA interview schedules were administered and 1 CDE interview schedule was administered. Hence the instruments return/ response rate was 88.4 percent for principals' questionnaire, 82.4 percent response rate for parents' association chairpersons interview schedule and 100 percent response rate for Kitui CDE interview schedule.

Treatment of Likert Type Data in the principals' questionnaire

The clarification of research outcomes by utilization of Likert Scale governs the accuracy of results. For purposes of measuring the variables as used in this research, a Likert type of scale was devised using a range of 1-5, where by a numerical worth of 1=SD – Strongly Disagree; 2=D – Disagree; 3=N – Neutral; 4=A – Agree; and 5= SA – Strongly Agree was used as endorsed by Bishop & Herron (2015). Likert sort of scales are satisfactory to measure a desired component ideal where mathematical modelling is involved in data analysis, thus requiring merging indicators of various variables. Carifio and Rocco (2007) assert that during analysis of Likert scale data, one ought to embrace a plan where; Strongly Disagree (SD) = $1 < SD < 1.8$; Disagree (D) = $1.8 < D < 2.6$; Neutral (N) = $2.6 < N < 3.4$; Agree (A) = $3.4 < A < 4.2$; and Strongly Agree (SA) = $4.2 < SA < 5.0$ as such keeping an equidistance of 0.8 unit in the scale. This weighting criteria of responses of Likert-type data advocated by Carifio and Rocco (2007) was used as an interpretation plan during data analysis in this research.

Relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education

Entry behavior of learner can affect the implementation of free and compulsory secondary education positively or negatively. This study was to find out the principals' views regarding how entry behavior of learners affected the transition and completion rates in secondary schools in Kitui County. Data regarding aspects measuring the entry behavior were collected using a five-point Likert scale. The response categories and values for the various aspects were given as 5= Strongly Agree (SA), 4= Agree (A), 3= Undecided (U), 2= Disagree (D) and 1= Strongly Disagree (SD). Analysis of this variable's aspects is as shown in Tables 3 and 4 and narrated hereunder.

Analysis of responses from principals pertaining learners' entry behavior

Questionnaire for principals (QP) was used to collect data. The QP was planned to gather views regarding to diverse aspects of learner entry behavior and its relationship with transition and completion of learners. Outcomes are displayed in Table 3.

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

Table 3: Responses from principals on learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education

	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
Some schools do not admit KCPE graduates with low marks in fear that this may lower their KCSE Mean score and which leads to below 100% transition rate	61.4	29.7	-	2.1	6.2	4.67	1.53
Continuous poor performance in formative examinations by some learners due to low entry behavior leads to some eventually dropping out, due to frustration hence lowered retention and completion rates	48.3	42.8	3.4	3.4	2.1	4.32	.86
Some teachers label learners with low entry behavior as poor learners. This discourages them hence dropout lowering retention and completion rate	22.8	55.1	2.1	12.4	6.9	3.75	1.15
Some teachers advise learners with low entry behavior to transfer to artisan courses for they are not good at academics. Their transferring lowers retention and completion rates	15.9	53.8	2.8	20.0	7.6	3.50	1.20
Valid N (list wise)	145						

In Table 3, it is observable that majority (91.1 percent) of the principals approved while 8.3 percent of them disapproved that some schools do not admit KCPE graduates with low marks in fear that this may lower their KCSE mean score and which leads to below 100 percent transition rate. Overall, the level of agreement among principals was very high with regard to the statement considering the Mean rating of 4.67 and standard deviation of 1.53. It is also important to observe that greater number (91.1 percent) of the principals consented that continuous poor performance in formative examinations by some learners, due to low entry behavior leads to some eventually dropping out due to frustration, hence lowered completion rate. Only 5.5 percent of the principals were opposed to the statement while 3.4 percent of them were undecided. In general, majority of the principals were of the view that poor performance in formative examinations occasioned by learners' low entry behavior could result in them dropping out, thus lowering completion rates (Mean = 4.32, s d = .86).

In regard to labeling of learners, majority (77.9 percent) of the principals concurred while 19.3 percent of them were nonconcurrent that labelling of learners with low entry behavior as poor learners discouraged them, hence leading them to drop out of school, thus lowering completion rate. This view was expressed by most principals as can be seen from the average index rates (Mean = 3.75; s d =1.15). Lastly, it is observable from the Table that mainstream (69.7 percent) of the principals concurred while 26.7 percent of them differed that some teachers advise learners with low entry behavior to transfer to artisan courses, for they are not good at academics. Overall, most principals agreed that teachers' advice to learners with low entry behavior to transfer to artisan courses lowers completion rates (Mean = 3.5, s d = 1.2).

Analysis of responses by chairpersons of Parents Associations pertaining learners' entry behavior

Interview schedule was used to collect data from chairpersons of Parents Associations (PAs). The interview schedule was formulated to gather views in regard to various parameters that were being considered in this study. Moreover, the study tried to determine from the PA chairpersons the situation of various factors pertaining to retention and completion rates in schools. A portion of the reactions yielded quantitative and qualitative information and are reflected herein. Breakdown of the descriptive feedbacks from the interview plan is as portrayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive analysis of the nominal items in PA interview schedule on learners' entry behavior and performance in formative examinations

Variable	Values	Frequency	Percent
Does your school have a policy on: i) admission based on learner entry behavior?	Yes	5	35.7
	No	9	64.3
	Total	14	100
Does your school have a policy on: ii) promotion to next class based on learner performance in formative examinations?	Yes	9	64.3
	No	5	35.7
	Total	14	100

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

The study pursued to find out from the parents' association chairpersons whether their respective schools have policies on admission based on entry behavior of the learners and upgrading to the next class based on performance in formative examinations. It is observable from Table 4 that 35.7 percent of the chairpersons of the parents' associations confirmed that they had a policy on admission while majority (64.3 percent) responded in the negative. This therefore means that majority of the schools did not have an admission policy based on the entry behavior of the learners. However, for the schools with admission policy in place, it was established that, should one request for form one admission and the KCPE marks turns to be below the set entry mark, different schools employed different mechanisms of which among them was denying admission to such students.

In cases where the students were admitted, the emphasis was on character formation and hard work as opposed to academic performance, while other schools could want such a student to make a commitment to work hard and improve on their grades. In instances where such pupils continued to perform poorly in academics, schools had different measures to deal with such cases. These measures included: inviting parents/guardians to school to discuss the performance of their children; warning the students against continued poor performance; continuously encouraging the students to improve and advising the students to repeat or transfer to other schools.

Analysis of responses from the Kitui CDE pertaining learners' entry behavior

The CDE asserted that, low learners' entry behavior (low KCPE marks) affected transition and completion rates negatively. The low entry behavior resulted in most learners persistently performing poorly in formative examinations, a situation that demotivated them. This contributed to some of the students dropping out of school, consequently lowering transition and completion rates.

Testing of the study null hypothesis (H0):

The null hypothesis (H0) for the study stated thus: There is no statistically significant relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Test results are shown in Table 5 and narrated hereunder.

Table 5: Correlation coefficient between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education

		Levies	Infrastructure	Teachers	Entry behavior	Implementation
Entry behavior	Pearson Correlation	.249**	.297**	.331**	1	-.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000		.000
	N	145	145	145	145	145

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 demonstrates an inverse and significant coefficient of correlation ($r = -.678$; $p \leq .01$) between low entry behavior of students and execution of free and mandatory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .460$) infers that low learners' entry behavior can account for 46 percent of the disparity in the execution of free and mandatory secondary education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County.

Subsequently, the low the entry behavior of learners, the low is the pace of execution of free and mandatory schooling. This prompted rejection of the null hypothesis statement that there is no statistically significant correlation between learners' entry behavior and execution of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

Relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education

The findings of this study show that low entry behavior of learners had a negative effect on transition and completion rates among learners in secondary schools in Kitui County. The low entry behavior was construed based on the marks scored in KCPE. In this respect principals were of the view that some schools do not admit KCPE graduates with low marks (marks below their set cut off marks for form one admission). The schools fear that this may lower their KCSE mean score and which leads to below 100 percent transition rate. Secondly it was found that continuous poor performance in formative examinations by some learners due to low entry behavior leads to some eventually dropping out due to frustration, hence lowered completion rate. Similarly, labeling of learners with low entry behavior as poor learners by some teachers discouraged them, thus leading to their dropout hence lowering completion rate. Finally, it was established that some teachers advise learners with low entry behavior to transfer to artisan courses, for they are not good at academics. Their transferring lowers completion rate. These findings are shown in Table 3.

The chairpersons of parents' associations also corroborated these findings in which case they confirmed that schools' admissions depend heavily on the marks scored at KCPE level. Upon admission, it was established that some schools have a policy on repetition

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

or asking students to transfer to other schools on the basis of poor performance. This, in effect has a potential to affect retention, transition and completion rates thus affecting free and mandatory instruction implementation as indicated in Table 4. This finding is further confirmed by the Kitui CDE who affirmed that low entry behavior negatively impacted on transition and completion rates. The finding further concurs with Liberal Educational Theory (LET) by Howe (1992) that explains that low learner entry behavior can discriminate against learners by not giving learners chance to join form one or progressing to next class. The null hypothesis four (H₀): there is no statistically significant relationship between learners' entry behavior and implementation of free and mandatory education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County test result ($r = -.678$; $p \leq .01$) further confirms that low learner entry behavior reduces retention, transition and completion rates. This is shown in Table 5.

Altogether, it was established that the relationship between learner entry behavior and implementation of free and compulsory education was inverse. This means there was a negative relationship between low learner entry behavior and execution of free and mandatory education. Subsequently, it was deduced that the lower the learners' entry behavior, the lower the retention and completion rates in schools, hence influencing execution of free and compulsory secondary education in public day secondary schools in Kitui County.

These findings are in conformity with a study by Caliskan (2014) which investigated the effects of entry behavior on learning at higher level in Meram, Turkey. The study found out that good entry behavior raises the learning level at primary and secondary education, while poor entry behavior lowers it. This means that poor performance at a given level occasioned by low entry behavior may make a learner get demotivated and dropout, thus lowering completion rate. The findings herein are further confirmed by Paul (1997) who asserts that when learners are forced to repeat class, they are also likely to drop out of school due to the stigma associated with them being labeled as poor learners. Hanewald, (2013) also avers that lack of clear structures of transition from primary to secondary school can lead to learner disengagement, with potentiality of dropping out of school.

A study done by Ogonnaya, Okpuruka, Iheanacho and Ndu (2014) on students' entry qualifications and academic performance in basic schools of nursing in Nigeria additionally confirm the aforementioned findings. The study found out that there existed significant relationship between entry qualifications and students' performance in academics and that students who persistently performed poorly in formative examinations eventually got expelled. This resulted in reduction in enrolment and completion rates. This finding is affirmed by results of a study by Limbe (2017) in Tanzania on factors influencing students' performance in Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE). The study established that performance was low in CSEE due to a number of factors, key being poor entry marks in forms one and three. The study recommended that only students with high scores in primary school leaving examination should join form one. This implied that transition rate to secondary school would get diminished.

Shavisa, Ndiku and Musasia (2016) on a study of the influence of students' characteristics in dropping out of school among secondary school students in Vihiga County, Kenya found out that students' entry behavior has a significant relationship with students' dropout rate. The study further found out that students who joined secondary school with low marks had more probability of dropping out of the schools which reduced completion rates. Kirera (2013) on the other hand executed a study on factors influencing transition of pupils from primary to secondary schools in Meru central District, Kenya. The study found out that selectivity of students in joining form one as a result of setting entry marks of joining form one led to decreased transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Kenya. The findings also agree with those of Simiyu (2015) research findings on the influence of institutional and learners' characteristics on academic achievement and completion rates in day secondary schools in Trans Nzoia and Pokot counties, Kenya. The research established that learners with good entry behavior had evidently better academic performance in formative examinations which motivated them to stay in school till completion time.

In summary therefore, the study findings herein show that low learners' entry behavior lowers transition, retention and completion rates hence negatively affecting the execution of free and compulsory education in Kenya and in particular Kitui County public day secondary schools

CONCLUSION

Extant literature reviewed herein indicates that learners' entry behavior is a significant factor for effective transition and completion of education at KCSE. This study found out that there is a negative and significant relationship between low learners' entry behavior and execution of free and obligatory education. Consequently, this led to rejection of the null hypothesis that indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between learners' entry behavior and execution of free and compulsory education in public day secondary schools. Conclusion was hence reached that implementation of free and compulsory education significantly relied on the entry behavior of learners. This therefore means that continuous admission of learners with low KCPE marks to secondary schools will ultimately affect their transition and completion rates in secondary schools in Kenya and Kitui County in particular due to midstream dropping out of school by some learners occasioned by their poor performance in formative examinations.

Free and Compulsory Education Policy Implementation; Determining its Relationship with Learners' Entry Behavior in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations on the basis of the findings;

- i. Ministry of Education to formulate a policy on even and random admission of students to secondary schools regardless of marks scored in KCPE examination.
- ii. Ministry of Education to enforce the policy on promotion to next class, regardless of performance in previous formative examinations.
- iii. Government to enforce the policy of abolishment of ranking of schools and learners upon undertaking examinations. This would encourage learners to join any secondary school invited to, hence boost transition rate.
- iv. Principals to have policy on timely coverage of syllabuses and remedial teaching of weak learners, for it would motivate such learners to stay at school until completion.
- v. Government to diversify the destination of transition to include artisan and craft village polytechnics to admit primary graduates not fit for academic tutelage.

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