

Full Length Research Paper

Hindrances to pupils' access and participation in primary school education in Kakuma and Lokichoggio divisions, Turkana county

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This study was undertaken to investigate pupils' access and participation challenges in primary school education in Kakuma and Lokichoggio divisions of Turkana County in North Western Kenya. The purpose of the study was to investigate factors that hinder pupils' access and participation in primary school education in Turkana County, using Kakuma and Lokichoggio divisions as case study. The two divisions' nine schools were randomly selected to form the sample population for the study. The research study employed the descriptive survey design. The data collection instruments utilized included questionnaires administered to head teachers and teachers, focus group discussions conducted for pupils and parents and interview guides done for the key informants and head teachers. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study, paradoxically, revealed that financial resources played insignificant role in school access whereas cultural factors, parental negligence and ignorance of their roles in education provision, poverty among the majority of parents and insecurity played a major role in hindering education access and participation in the area. This study recommends that more boarding schools be established in the area of study. The study also recommends that a sensitization programmed be undertaken for education stakeholders in the area to improve understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the provision of education opportunities to learners.

Keywords: Hindrances, pupils' access, pupils' participation, primary school, Kakuma, Lokichoggio, Turkana

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) Bill of Rights guarantees the provision of education to everyone in the world at a very minimal or no cost (Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), based on which the UN has declared education as a basic human right for every person. At the Jomtien world conference on Education for All (EFA), (Unesco, 2000), the governments of the world committed themselves to provide children around the world with access to good quality basic education (Hunt, et al,

2011), following which education has been recognized as an indispensable weapon for human and national development that urged both national and international laws to declare it as a basic human right (World Education Report, 2000) Education to the general public not only improves their general standard of life but also they become capable of understanding and participating in the socio political discourses to makes their voice known in an increasingly congested environment of ideas and competing interests (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985).

Many issues related to education exist ranging from

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access to basic education at micro level to appropriate synthesizing and practicality of the education at the macro level, however, issues related to access and participation have dominated the world forums and conferences (Unesco, 2000) on education due to the fact that education is considered a basic human right and everyone needs to be made available of. Education is considered the most effective way to reduce poverty, give people opportunity to improve their lives and raise their voice, improve their health, productivity and foster participation in civil society (Acemoglu, Daron, and Angrist, 2000; Preece, 2007). Education broadens employment opportunities; increases income levels, improves child and maternal health and helps to slow down the transmission of major preventable diseases in the world including HIV/AIDS. The benefits of education extend beyond the family to the wider community and even the nation (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985). Increasing the number of pupils' who finish school leads to economic growth, social and political stability, decline in the crime rate, improved social services, adoption of new agricultural innovations, improved family health (Foster and Rosenzweig, 1996; Schultz, 2002; Glewwe, 2002). Empirically, there is a strong negative correlation between educational attainment and various measures of crime (Freeman, 1996; Hjalmarsson, 2006).

While the need to provide education to all those eligible remains a fundamental requirement to communities and governments, it is reported as of 2006, more than 125 million children around the world lacked such fundamental human right and did not attend school or any type of educational institutions (UNESCO, 2006, Oxfam, 2005); These figures have continued to decrease over the years especially after the Education for all interventions (Unesco, 2011) majority of such children reside in low- and middle- income countries, especially in the Asian and sub Saharan African nations. These two regions still experience many hurdles in terms of access to education opportunities which is a result of, historical injustices, activities of early missionary activities, increasing urbanization and the existing political environment (Achoka et al, 2007) these conditions have continued to perpetuate inequity to education access at all levels. While these factors are formidable, the international community has the power to fulfill the promise of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and guarantee every child access and participation in education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000, 2003). The joint position paper for Oxfam GB and Action Aid (Education for All: A compact for Africa) declares the problem of primary education access and participation to be acute in sub-Saharan Africa. It states that

Almost half of primary school ages going children in Africa – over 40 million children - are not in school and sixteen countries suffered a decline in enrolment rates in the first half of the 1990s.

Kenya's enrolment rates showed this general declining

trend in the quoted years and recorded a gross enrolment rate of 86.9% in the year 1999 down from an all time high GER of 95% in 1989 (Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2005). The government of Kenya recognized that both regional and gender disparities were evident in this poor enrolment show and this was more pronounced in the ASAL counties and pockets of poverty in the urban slums (MOEST, 2001: 25).

The Republic of Kenya report (1999), popularly known as Koech report observed the same about the ASAL areas. These regions of Kenya would require affirmative action in order to address the inequalities that had caused them to lag behind in accessing and participating in education. These report stated as follows concerning education access in ASAL areas:

ASAL counties have specific problems which affect access seriously than those experienced by more economically productive counties. Such factors include a poor economic base, poor communication and infrastructure, lack of water, the nomadic way of life, insecurity and socio-cultural practices (Republic of Kenya 1999: 80).

This discouraging scenario can be addressed with the support of governments, development partners and communities with proper commitment. The declaration of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in January 2003 by Kenya government (Republic of Kenya, 2005) was a move in the right direction to try and address some of the concerns raised in the Koech report. However, this policy lacks the affirmative action component to make it more relevant to areas that have been underdeveloped over long periods of time (Crosby, 2003). Despite the introduction of the FPE policy, Turkana county just like other ASAL counties in Kenya, has continued to lag behind in education access with little care from the stakeholders to address them (Achoka, 2007). It is in the interest of Kenya as a country that education access for the pastoralist children be given a fresh look and those factors that hinder pupils' access and participation in primary school education in Kenya be identified and tackled with haste so as to enhance the achievement of the EFA goal.

One of the main factors that can explain low levels of participation in primary education in the county is the harsh climatic conditions and environment and the nomadic life style of the people. Another factor is the high poverty level index that is noted in the urban as well as rural areas of the county (Republic of Kenya TDDP, 2002-2008). Due to inadequate resources, there arise frequent conflicts between the Turkana pastoralists and their neighbours both in and outside Kenya which causes insecurity and lose of lives (Republic of Kenya TDDP, 2002-2008). It is against this background that this study was undertaken to have a closer look at the factors hindering education access in Turkana County.

Although there are factors enhancing access and participation of pupils' in primary education such as the

introduction of FPE policy in 2003, the hindering factors are also overwhelming, requiring concerted efforts by education providers to address effectively (Deininger, 2003).

Literature review of Turkana County reveals existence of disparities even within the different geographical areas of the county thereby creating inequity within an already marginalized and unequal region of Kenya (Republic of Kenya TDDP, 2002-2008).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study required a broad spectrum of respondents who would give relevant data on factors hindering pupils' access and participation in primary education in Kakuma and Lokichoggio divisions. The area of study is inhabited mainly by the Turkana nomadic pastoralists with a high livestock density. The area is prone to constant cattle rustling between the Turkana and their neighbours in Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

The County suffers due to cattle rustling in terms of loss of life, loss of property, displacement of families, destruction of infrastructure e.g. schools, health and water facilities and disruption of education and farming (Republic of Kenya TDDP, 2002- 2008: 22).

Overall, the study employed the multi stage random design. This was necessary because there are a number of ASAL counties in Kenya and then in those counties there are various divisions and schools. This design helped the study to identify Turkana County from the several counties that fall within the ASAL region, then the two divisions selected from this county, the schools and individual teachers and pupils. The Ministry of Education (MOE) staff and head teachers of selected schools also formed sample of the study through multi stage random sampling. Simple random sampling was used to identify teachers and pupils in the study. In particular, the County education officer, the education officers in charge of primary education in the headquarters and the Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) of the two divisions targeted for the study were considered as the expert informants for the study.

Simple random sampling was useful in identifying a total of nine schools (39% of the target population) from among the twenty three public primary schools in the area of study. Five schools (38%) were selected in Kakuma division and four (40%) in Lokichoggio division for the study. Some of the schools were located in insecurity prone areas of the two divisions. This was based on the school categories. The schools then so chosen were used as the sampling frame of the sample respondents. The non probability sampling was adopted for the study because the respondents were the only officers serving in the region in their respective category.

RESULTS

The tables below present the responses that were received from the 9 head teachers, 5 from Kakuma division and 4 from Lokichoggio division concerning factors that hinder primary school education access and participation. The scores show the strength of influence of the factors based on the Likert scale provided below

- 1 – Strongly influences
- 2 – Influences
- 3 – Has influence
- 4 – No influence

It can be noted (Table1) that the scores from the 5 head teachers in Kakuma division tended to be at the end of the scale thus giving many factors a rating towards lesser influence. This could be attributed to the schools involved in the sample since most of them were around settled areas of the division.

Factors which were rated to have the highest level of hindrance to education access and participation in primary school education in Kakuma division included the following: Cultural related factors such as early marriages, gender discrimination by parents who deliberately do not want to send girls to school. These girls are considered important family asset and investment thus not to be sent to school. High incidence of poverty in families which thereby causes many would be school age going children being utilized by the family as bread earners to provide the family with basic need items like food, clothing through child labour. Inadequate number of teachers in the schools was also rated highly in Kakuma division.

The following factors were rated to have a strong influence in hindering education access and participation in primary school education in Kakuma division. Lack of food in schools, Poor school infrastructural development, the nomadic pastoralist lifestyle, the negative attitude towards education by the community, those factors that were rated to have the least level of influence included the following, insecurity in areas around the school, inadequate FPE grants, improper school location.

Responses from the head teachers and teachers from Lokichoggio division

The table below shows the responses from the head teachers from Lokichoggio division. On those factors that are hindering education access and participation in primary School Education.

It can be noted (Table 2) that the scores from the 4 head teachers in Lokichoggio division tended to be at the beginning of the scale thus giving many factors a rating towards a higher level of influence. This could be attributed to the fact that this division is still very far behind in terms of overall pupils' enrolments and therefore feel the negative impact of poor education

Table 1. Kakuma division head teachers' responses on factors hindering education Access and participation

	Arid zone	Kakuma girls	Kakuma mixed	Pokotom prim	Kalobeyei	Total score
Insecurity in areas around the school	2	3	3	2	4	14
Improper school location	3	3	4	3	4	17
Inadequate no. of teachers in schools	2	3	2	3	1	11
Ineffective implementation of GOK education policy	3	3	4	1	3	14
Lack of food in schools	2	4	4	1	1	12
Poor school infrastructural development	4	3	1	1	3	12
Inadequate FPE grant	3	3	3	3	4	16
Cultural barriers	3	2	2	1	1	9
Nomadic pastoralist lifestyle	4	2	4	1	1	12
Negative attitude towards education by the community	4	2	2	2	2	12
Gender discrimination by parents	3	1	2	2	1	9
High incidence of poverty in families	3	2	2	1	2	10

Table 2. Factors hindering education access and participation in Lokichoggio division

	Loki girls	AIC Loki mixed	Lopiding	St. Johns	Total Score
Insecurity in areas around the school	1	3	1	1	6
Improper school location	1	3	2	1	7
Inadequate no. Of teachers in schools	1	1	1	1	4
Ineffective implementation of GOK education policy	2	1	2	1	6
Lack of food in schools	1	3	1	1	6
Poor school infrastructural development	1	2	1	1	5
Inadequate FPE grant	2	4	3	1	10
Cultural barriers	1	2	3	2	8
Nomadic pastoralist lifestyle	1	4	2	1	8
Negative attitude towards education by the community	1	2	3	1	7
Gender discrimination by parents	1	3	3	1	8
High incidence of poverty in families	2	2	1	1	6

Source: Field survey data May 2008-09-08

access and participation than in the other sampled division. Again the fact that this division is at the farthest end of the marginalized area may have contributed to such responses.

Factors which were rated to have the highest level of hindrance to education access and participation in primary school education in Lokichoggio division included the Inadequate number of teachers in the schools. This was very apparent in that most schools had fewer teachers compared to the number of classes in schools.

The staffing situation is quite acute in the schools of this division, poor school infrastructural development, lack of food in schools, insecurity in areas around the school. This also seemed to stem from the fact that many raids by bandits do occur in the areas around schools of this division as was adduced by the stakeholders in the division. High incidence of poverty in families causes many would-be school age children to be used in child labour. Ineffective implementation of government policy on education is also a challenge, particularly the

ineffectiveness of the government to ensure all children go to school. The head teachers pointed out the lack of support from the law enforcement agencies in addressing the problem of out of school children and the school drop outs due to early marriages, unwanted teenage pregnancies and such like vices.

Education access and participation in primary school education in Kakuma division were hindered by factors such as; school location, cultural related factors such as early marriages, gender discrimination by parents who deliberately do not want to send their girls to school, (These girls are considered important family asset and investment thus not to be sent to school for child labour purposes), the nomadic pastoralist lifestyle and the negative attitude towards education by the community.

The factor that seemed to have the least measure of hindrance to education access and participation in primary school education in this division was inadequate FPE grants. This is indeed paradoxical given that most regions of Kenya point to lack of funds as main reasons for lagging behind academically. This is a strong pointer to the fact that money does not count for everything.

Responses from pupils

Six schools out of the targeted nine did carry out the focus group discussions. The average age of the pupils' respondents was about sixteen years. The repetition menace that was apparent in the schools of both divisions has a bearing in the age of pupils in class 7 and 8 in the two divisions. The pupils felt that the following factors were most responsible for the poor access and participation rates in the primary school education in the two divisions:

Parental negligence and undervaluing of education

Many of the pupils in the focus group discussions in the two divisions cited the above factor as the most hindering for them in accessing education. They said that their parents were not interested in knowing how they were fairing on with their education. They never asked them about school, did not bother to find out whether they really attended school or not leave alone assisting them with their homework. Generally they felt that their parents were disinterested in their education. Parents viewed their school going children as too knowledgeable for them and therefore could fend for themselves.

Cultural considerations

The pupils stated that it was more difficult for the girl child to access education than their male counterparts mainly due to cultural considerations. The girls were not the determinants of their education pursuit but rather their parents dictated what was good for them. The girls were seen in terms of bride prize and family wealth. Thus it

was noted that girls were more affected when it comes to access and participation in education. They dropped out of school through early marriages, unwanted pregnancies and child labour. One parent who discontinued their class three girl and took her back home to grow up and be married off had this to say in defense of his action.

Mr. chief, I have taken away my child from school. Ask this head teacher whether the child I took back belongs to him or the school. (As narrated by the head teacher Nanam primary school in Lokichoggio division, May 2008).

In a discussion group for the chief elders in Lokichoggio location one parent by the name Egialan, had this to say concerning her girl children at home "Girls are our shamba here in Turkana". This parent had three girls who were of school going age but whom she had decided to keep at home due to the school girls' pregnancy menace. She felt that she was not prepaid to deal with another unwanted pregnancy which she could even know the identity of the one responsible and yet the dowry paid for their girls who get married was their main source of wealth in the Turkana culture

Orphaned children

The pupils in the discussion groups stated that the orphaned children faced most difficulties in access and participation to education. These children lack support from family to attend school. Instead of being encouraged to attend school, their relatives and guardians would ask them to take care of their siblings or even be used by the family as child labourers to supplement family earnings. The adult responsibilities thrust at them early on in life makes it difficult to have time for education even if they were interested to pursue it.

Responses from key informants and community leaders

Among the experts interviewed for this research were the District Education Officer (DEO) Turkana and the two area education officers in the two divisions. The education secretary – Diocese of Lodwar (DoL), besides being a sponsor representative, he was also considered as an expert in this research since he is running a department equal to what the DEO is in charge of. Of the 173 primary schools in the county the DoL sponsors over 65% of those schools. According to these sample population the following were the factors that mostly hinder education access and participation in the area of study.

- Education is still considered by the majority of the nomadic Turkana pastoralists as "strange ideology" that antagonises their culture and way of life. One respondent put it in this manner the educated Turkana are useless

people who have lost their manners and do not value their families. They do not invest in increasing the family animal herds. They have no livestock and are poor. The educated Turkana women are worse because they lack decorum and good manners.

This attitude was seen to account for the under enrolment in schools and the high drop out rates in all the education sectors in the county. The nomadic pastoralists consider education as an activity engaged in by the poor people who have nothing else to depend upon for their lives. The idea of “getting to school to survive” is very prevalent in the Turkana whose livelihoods are cleared off by the frequent calamities that befall them such as raids, severe droughts that decimate their livestock and diseases.

Cultural factors play a big role in hindering access and participation in primary school education as well as in other education initiatives. Such factors as the nomadic pastoralist lifestyle practiced by the inhabitants of the area, early and forced marriages similar to arranged marriages, and the moranism of the Turkana males are factors that deny many would be pupils from school attendance. There is a prevalent perception in the nomadic pastoralists that education “contaminates” their culture and thus not desirable.

Many parents are discouraged from taking their girls to school due to the high rates of girls getting pregnant in school. The opinion leaders who contributed to this discussion were very passionate that the girl child was losing out on education because parents considered the girl child as a shamba (land asset) to be invested and then reap bountifully later. They felt that they would rather keep their girls at home and watch over them there waiting for their husbands to come for them and pay dowry to have them.

The groups and experts noted that there was rampant child labour menace in the area. Many school going age children were being used for home chores, in business ventures and to help their families to provide for daily needs.

Laxity on the part of the provincial administration in implementation and coordination of government policy in the area was cited as a factor that hinders education access and participation. The case of enforcing school attendance is a legal requirement but the officers have no interest in following this up. In instances where those responsible for girls pregnancies the law enforcement agencies frustrate the efforts of parents to take action on the culprits. Sometimes they collaborate with the wrong doers. This becomes an excuse for the reluctant parents to educate their girls.

DISCUSSION

This study has endeavored to explore the hindrances to pupils' access and participation in primary school education in Kakuma and Lokichoggio divisions, Turkana

County. It is evident that cultural factors, parental negligence and ignorance of their roles in education provision, poverty among the majority of parents and insecurity in Turkana County play a major role of hindering education access and participation in the area. Literature consistently shows that high financial costs of schooling make education less affordable to the poor, who are cost sensitive (demand is price elastic) (Berg, 2008). Opportunity costs of education are often also high (for example, children may work in agriculture or do domestic chores such as fetching water). Poverty in itself can have disastrous effects on the academic achievement of the learners particularly at the lower levels (Morrison, 2010). A study by Sum and Fogg (1991) found that poor students are ranked in the 19th percentile on assessments while students from a mid-upper income family are ranked in the 66th percentile on assessments. In many societies, the benefits of education may be low or not well understood, particularly for girls. Lack of educational resources in poor schools sometimes hampers learning. Despite financial incentives, good teachers usually prefer to teach in richer schools (Berg, 2008; Boyd, Lankford, and Wyckoff, 2002) or schools that are easily accessible as is the case with schools in Turkana county where teachers prefer schools within Kakuma and not in Lokichoggio division. Teacher quality is the school factor which makes the greatest impact on student achievement (Hanushek et al. 2005; Ferguson and Ladd 1996) therefore efforts should be made, including incentives to have teachers in the most remote areas of Turkana county. The correct resource combination may also be important. Without good textbooks or classroom resources, more teachers cannot necessarily improve the quality of learning. Education is critical in attacking poverty through increased earnings through incomes or productive engagements (Orazem, Glewwe and Patrinos, 2007). Without proper provision of education, economies can stagnate for a long period of time (Londoño, 1996). Gemmelt (1996) found that primary education is most important for economic growth in low income developing countries. Education also provides quality of the required manpower in the economy (Hanushek, and Kimko, 2000). Studies consistently show that lack of education continues to yield cyclic illiteracy, underdevelopment and underachievement (Halpern-Felscher et al., 1997; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985; Peters and Mullis, 1997). Cultural factors also play a role in hindering education access. This is informed by various reasons, for example the costs of schooling girls is greater but the private returns (to the household) are often perceived to be less, daughters are expected to leave the household upon marriage (Oxaal, 1997). Other constraints to girls' schooling include concerns about girls' safety both in school and journeying between home and school, especially at puberty, and worries about girls becoming sexually active outside of social sanction (Oxaal, 1997).

For poorer households, these safety concerns may be increased because children from the poorest households are often furthest from schools, particularly at secondary level (Oxaal, 1997). Deliberate efforts therefore need to be put in place to check gender imbalance in education access, some countries have succeeded in embedding girl child education in their economic blueprints. A good example is Rwanda; Vision 2020 aims to correct the historic marginalization of girls from the educational system and from the political and economic spheres more generally (MINECOFIN, 2003).

CONCLUSION

The government of Kenya through consultation and participation of key education stakeholders must put in place deliberate efforts to address the key issues raised in this paper. It is evident that cultural factors, parental negligence and ignorance of their roles in education provision, poverty among the majority of parents and insecurity in Turkana County play a major role of hindering education access and participation in education. In particular, encouragement of boarding schools in this region will do more justice to the pastoralist girl child in an effort to overcome the insurmountable hurdles she faces in her quest for basic education. Clearly evidence from literature confirms that no meaningful development will be achieved in this county without first and foremost addressing the issues of poverty, cultural chauvinism, and others.

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