

MASS-MARKET EDUCATION IN KENYA: AN EVALUATION OF TEACHER ROLES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Education is not just the key to development but now, sustainable development where emphasis has shifted to. It is also a panacea for many problems afflicting the developing world, such as illiteracy, disease, poverty, environmental degradation, overpopulation, and many more. As a result, most nations spend large sums of money to enable as many as possible of their populace to access it. A notable commitment was that made by 164 Governments (Kenya included), at the Dakar Education Forum of 2000 to achieve six identified Education for All Goals by the year 2015. Today in Kenya, primary and secondary education levels are free in public owned schools. At the university level, the government has made available loan through Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) to those who cannot finance their education. The loan is given based on specific conditions key among them being passing the Kenya Secondary Certificate Examination at the completion of secondary school, with a specified grade and points at the lower limit (often varied through the years). Government loans, initially limited to students joining public universities have now been extended to those joining private ones and middle level colleges too. Further, the introduction of privately sponsored education (module II) has given opportunity to many others, without government sponsorship, to advance their education at a fee. All these account for great growth in the number of students enrolled at various education stages. The question is how well educational institutions are equipped to manage knowledge for competitive advantage. A significant driver in this management is the teacher, whose duty transcends imparting knowledge to include the tacit knowledge. Unfortunately however, premium is put on certification at the expense of any other benefit. Consequently, the teacher is under intense pressure to produce academic scores regardless of the school environment. This study examined the roles of the teacher and the challenges encountered in the effort to cope with the ever increasing demands for education. It proposes to give attention to the institutional environment affecting the teacher for proper functioning in the face of mass-market education.

KEYWORDS: Education, Mass-market, Massification, Teacher preparedness, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is experiencing an accelerating information and knowledge revolution. This is with the understanding that knowledge is crucial for growth and development of economies (du Toit, 2000). The result is new opportunities for learners and demands for educators who play a pivotal role in knowledge transfer. For the purpose of this paper, knowledge is simply referred to as

education, and the educator as the teacher. Focus is on the primary and secondary school levels. The term mass-market is used to mean quantitative representation of those who seek an education. The specific attention of the paper is given to the challenges faced by teachers in discharging their roles in the face of mass-market education, how well the teacher is prepared to manage these challenges, and some mitigating suggestions. However, the growth of education in Kenya and the roles that teachers are expected to play precede the discussion as they enhance contextualization.

GROWTH OF EDUCATION IN KENYA

Education is not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself. Thus, it is both a process and a product (Digolo, 2006). As a process, it denotes continued acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and ideals required to play significant roles in society. As a product, it is the aggregate of what has been learnt and expressed in terms of abilities, attitudes and other socially acceptable behavior. Education as a process and the teacher as the key director, are the concern of this paper.

Kenya, like most developing countries, is experiencing a new wave of demand for education basically at all levels and in all fields. This is due to the realization that education specifically that related to science, technology and innovation, plays a critical role in accelerating economic development in all newly industrializing countries of the world. It helps people to understand and to some extent come to terms with the phenomenon of globalization and social cohesion (Sidhaye and Kamble, 2010). Furthermore, there is increased realization that societies must work towards sustainability which entails meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Hopkins, Rizzi, & Chrystalbridge, 2002), and that education is a key tool. Consequently, the government has come out strongly to underscore the importance of education by making it not just affordable through cost sharing, but also a Human Right enshrined in the Kenya Constitution 2010. Various legislations have therefore been enacted by parliament to provide the necessary legal and regulatory framework for education reform. These include The National Gender Equality Commission of 2011, The Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, The Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015, Education and Training Sector Gender Policy of 2015, and the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (2017). Thus, denying children an education attracts prosecution as it is interpreted as a violation of their rights. In agreement with the Millennium Development Goals, Education for all, and the Kenya Vision 2030 (the current long term development blueprint for the country), the population is encouraged to take advantage of the learning opportunities and attend school.

The concept of free education at the primary school level had been initiated in the early 1970s but fizzled out a decade later. The crisis was heavier in urban schools serving poor neighborhoods and those that had performed well in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) the previous year. In Nairobi, a survey indicated that a staggering 3000 new pupils had turned up for enrolment in one school, while in Mombasa more than 300 pupils turned up for admission in a single class (Okwach, 2003). Quite a number of these pupils were aged above 10 years. The gross enrolment increased from 7,159,523 in 2003 to 8,330,148 in 2007 (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Pupil-Teacher Rate grew considerably. What ensued could candidly be described as chaos and confusion, especially in the early months of the year when schools opened. This was the situation the teacher had to find ways to contend with.

Apart from the corresponding increase in enrolment in secondary schools from 881,328 in 2003 to 1,180,267 in 2007, the government went ahead to implement the free tuition program for secondary schools in 2008 with the aim of raising the transition rates from primary to secondary level. This saw the student numbers grow exponentially from 1,334,566 in 2008 to 1,772,482 by 2015 (Ministry of Education). Then came free secondary education at the beginning of this year 2018 in fulfillment of the 2017 presidential campaign promises allowing those students who had dropped out of school for lack of funds to resume. The aim is to achieve 100% attainment of basic education in the country. The result has been an appreciable burden on the teachers. In essence, the teacher is trained to handle classes of 40-50 learners at a go in an ideal situation. The upsurge both in primary and secondary schools drove the author to desire an understanding of the happenings on the ground. Just managing the numbers, even before undertaking actual instruction appeared a tall order. The question was, how were the teachers doing it given their multiple roles? The study was therefore based on three specific objectives; to examine the learning environment of schools following the implementation of free tuition by the government, assess the preparedness of teachers to handle the students, and identify the challenges that teachers faced in the course of discharging their duties in the schools.

METHOD

Participants

Data was obtained from observation of forty-minute lessons in 12 (6 primary and 6 secondary) randomly selected public schools across three Counties in Western Kenya. From each County were 2 primary and 2 secondary schools. In each of the selected schools, two classes from lower primary and two from junior high (Forms One and Two) were chosen based on their assignment to the teacher trainee, to participate in the study. Also, subject teachers (trainees) of the participating classes were interviewed to give their perception on implementation of the curriculum under the working circumstances.

Procedure

The study was undertaken during the yearly observation of teacher trainees when on practice. This meant that the data was collected alongside the normal evaluation of the practicing teacher when instructing their specific classes in their subject areas. As I assessed their effectiveness in pedagogy, I took note of the class establishment, the adequacy of infrastructure in the room, teacher's class management and challenges in content delivery. Data collection was by simple check-off on the schedule and brief notes. Informal post lesson conference with the assessed teachers helped to obtain information on their opinions and perceived challenges of handling their classes. It was presumed that their views represented those of the rest of the teachers in their schools. This was because the trainees had been in the specific schools for 2½ months prior to assessment, long enough to feel and behave like qualified teachers. The data which was basically qualitative was compiled to give an evaluation on implications of 'massification' of the education system following introduction of free education.

RESULTS

Specifically, the learning environments in the classrooms reflected an overstretch. In most of the high school classes that I visited, there was hardly sitting space for me. My seat was put on the passage between the columns at the end of the class. This made the learners on either side of my row

fidgety, and may have affected their learning. On the whole, in both the secondary and primary schools, there were more learners in a room (60 on average) than the acceptable number of 40-50.

Teachers on their part appeared unprepared to handle the upsurge in the student numbers. They continued to use the traditional teaching methods that sufficed for fewer learners. In high schools especially, they often gave written exercises and marked but a few books during the lesson directing that the rest of the books be sent to the staffroom for marking later on. This being a kind of formative evaluation of learners, did not serve the intended purpose. Also it was doubtful, given the need to prepare for the next lessons that the marking was done at all. On one occasion a teacher asked learners to exchange their books so that they would mark as directed by him. My worry as the researcher was the inability of the teacher to identify the specific areas of difficulty for class attention. Thus, the role of the teacher as subject guide was entirely lacking. Since training is on the premise of an ideal class size of 50 on the upper limit, what the teachers found in the field was beyond their capability. The quality of learning was therefore in question.

From observation and informal discussion with the teachers, challenges were several. Outstanding ones included issues with class control, fewer resource books making it difficult to use the books as many learners crowded around few available ones with some students getting no appropriate access, inability to give individualized attention to learners, and focus on curriculum coverage at the expense of learning. Most of the challenges were contextual in nature hence would have been easily handled with greater financial investment which was slow coming. This therefore meant that the teaching profession for the Kenyan teacher in the public school was not positively motivating.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to evaluate the roles and challenges that the classroom teacher faced in public schools in Kenya in the wake of free primary and secondary education with concomitant high enrolment rates. While the national benchmark for the average number of learners per class was 45 (MoEST, 2005) the average for the schools observed in this study was 60. This increase may have negatively affected the quality of education (UNESCO, 2005) and also jeopardized effectiveness in teaching (Wamukuru et al., 2006). Majanga et al.,(2011) in agreement with this contend that the free education policy in Kenya created high enrolments in schools resulting in large class sizes, high teacher-pupil ratio, congested classrooms, teacher shortage, and high teacher work load. There was therefore no full exploitation of teacher-pupil classroom interaction activities. This class size allowed by the Ministry of Education was way beyond the US class policies (Zinth, 2009) where the highest was Utah (24) but aimed at reduction to below 20 students in all the States. Content area instruction was however just one of the many roles of the teacher.

According to Sidhaye and Kamble (2010), teachers are not only instrumental in development of attitudes to learning in their pupils, but also play a crucial role in preparing young people to face the future with confidence as well as to build it with purpose and responsibility. It has been established that good teachers who employ effective teaching methods enhance learner acquisition of foundational skills (UNESCO, 2015). Given the fluidity of separation between classroom and outside world, the role of the teacher is rather complex. The teacher has to balance ideas and attitudes a child brings to school and the content of the curriculum. He or she relays important aspects of tradition while at the same time being an agent of change thus maintains balance between

tradition and modernity. He/she helps learners to develop and understanding of a whole range of social topics including poverty, hunger, violence, drugs, and sexual abuse, which learners bring into the classroom.

The teacher therefore needs to demonstrate competence, professionalism and dedication in the task of making school appealing to children. Reform initiatives in the Kenyan education system, such as integration of educational technology into the subject taught, the use of counseling instead of the cane to instill and maintain discipline among learners, and inclusive education where learners with disabilities are taught together with normal children, put new demands on the teacher. Yet, according to UNESCO (2015), teachers who have adequate subject knowledge and pedagogic content and are sensitive to the diverse individualized needs of learners can make a huge difference in the education of students, especially in the early school years.

Thus, among other roles, the teacher is expected to maintain order and discipline in the classroom, implement the curriculum infusing new methods of teaching, and assess the students appropriately all the while taking into account the needs of students with disabilities. All the roles are herein categorized as meeting explicit knowledge needs. But that is not all for the teacher. He/she also transmits tacit knowledge that shapes the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the learners. Although this is not articulated, it completes the education process. This is the knowledge that determines the decisions and patterns of behavior of individuals. All these require an enabling environment in which to operate, which has not always been the case in the majority of Kenyan schools. With so many students to give attention to, the roles of the teacher can be described as a miscarriage.

Challenges that the teacher faces are regarded as risk factors to teacher resilience (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Rinke, 2008). These challenges may be individual or contextual. Some teachers choose to persist in the face of challenges mainly due to individual protective factors such as personal attributes, self-efficacy, coping skills, teaching skills and professional reflection and growth (Beltman et al., 2011). Others quit the profession altogether. Leaving does not only bring significant financial cost (Ingersoll, 2003), but also reduces the educational quality for the students (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000). Difficulty asking for help (Flores, 2006; Jenkin's, Smith & Maxwell, 2009), and perceived conflict between personal need individual teacher's effort to find solutions, contextual factors often need external intervention. Apart from existence of individual nature of challenges which we all acknowledge, this study focused on the contextual category of challenges which impact on teacher preparedness and functioning.

Given the finding that teacher challenges included class discipline and control, lack of teaching/learning resources, and emphasis on curriculum coverage, make intervention a possibility. Nonetheless, it is agreeable that teaching can be stressful especially for new teachers. In the US, research shows that almost 40% of new teachers leave the field within their first 5 years in the classroom (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Such turnovers, as earlier mentioned, obviously reduce the educational quality for students (Grissmer, et al., 2000). Mainly, it is the inability to be resilient to the contextual challenges that results in the high teacher turnover situation. Like in other developing countries, issues faced by Kenyan teachers include poor working conditions, lack of access to education, high demographic growth, and HIV/AIDS (Halperin & Ratteree, 2003). Such conditions can be quite stifling especially in the face of high student enrolment rates. Proper preparation of the

teacher in alignment with the prevailing environmental situation is required. This is underscored by the paper for the Education Oslo Summit that the quality of an education system cannot exceed that of the quality of its teachers or the quality of its teaching (UNESCO, 2015).

As a result, the players particularly the teachers do not know their specific roles and the standard upon which they should be evaluated. The major problem facing the Kenyan education system is its overemphasis on formal education measured by examination and certificates, which the new Competency-Based curriculum has been developed to address. While the teacher might strive to produce a fully integrated, respectful and adaptable individual the numbers regardless, the system shouts otherwise. For a long time, government policy guidelines lacked significant clarity on what relevant education really means. Even now, the developed framework is only at the pilot stage. Glorification of certificates puts teachers at the mercy of the community when academic standards are perceived as low. Cases abound where teachers have been forced out of their work stations on account of learners' poor performance in National examinations. It is a situation that breeds pressure, uncertainty and insecurity, and consequently a bad working environment for the teachers. And the 'massfication' of education has not made matters any better.

The fact that education is dynamic, determined by market or social forces can be frustrating to the teacher who must work extra hard to remain in control. In such a situation, continued training becomes necessary to keep abreast. This is only possible with funding. The government of Kenya is shy at doing this because of the already high budgetary spending on education. Statistics indicate a steady increase in expenditure on education and training from 72,292.00 billion in 2003/04 to 104,686.39 in 2007/08. This is about 30% of the total National budget. Of this, over 90% goes to recurrent expenditure, especially teachers' salaries (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Limited funding means that the teacher lacks the necessary sufficient knowledge and skills to train the students for environmental and global adaptation. It also means that the government may not be in a position to employ more teachers to effectively manage the increased student numbers. Whether the 'literate' society then will meet the envisioned goal of education is for all to guess.

Teachers also contend with inadequate resources for use in the face of technological advancements. There is negligible investment in development of modern media programs for use in teaching and training school teachers (Kafu, 2006). Most County schools are poorly equipped. Furthermore, the available resources are either dilapidated or inappropriate for use in the technological age. Kafu (2006) argues that the materials were designed and developed for the traditional mode of teaching much of which is outlived. It should be emphasized here that availability of and interaction with materials relevant for the prevailing situation enhances preparedness of the teacher to face the tasks. Unfortunately, inability of the government to improve the learning resources such as laboratories, libraries, and other necessary teaching materials de-motivates the teacher who at the same time is expected to produce good results. In such situations the teacher cannot put in much at planning of the lessons since there is nothing new to factor in. Although the teacher is encouraged to improvise, there is certainly a limit to this. The issue of resources clearly classifies schools into 'good' and 'bad'. Working in a bad school deters job satisfaction leading to apathy, a situation observed in most primary and secondary schools at the County level. It is important to appreciate that preparedness is also a factor of enthusiasm.

In Kenya, like most sub-Saharan African nations, teachers are among the lowest paid government workers. In fact, they are paid less than their peers in other professions requiring similar qualifications (UNESCO, 2015). Coupled with heavy workload thanks to the increased enrolment rates, and the general view that teaching is not prestigious, teachers feel unappreciated and therefore demoralized. Those happy to stay on have strong protective factors such as altruistic motives and high self-efficacy. Others do so for lack of better options.

Challenges associated with behavior management also affect the teacher. Some schools, two among the study sample used, have been known to be difficult due to frequent displays of indiscipline and violence. In Kenya, such acts range from boycott of classes, destruction of school property, to loss of life. The periods between 2001 and 2002 experienced high unrest in schools totaling to 3234 cases (Digolo, 2003). When this happens sometimes the community blames it on teachers' highhandedness or laxity. Besides, when learners are sent home, often the whole school, the teacher has to contend with backlog when the students are recalled. He/she must find time to recover the lost time in a bid to complete the syllabus. This is besides the other none teaching duties such as disciplinary meetings as well as offering counseling to the students to help modify behavior. Simply, the role of the teacher becomes overwhelming and complex. The increased student numbers only makes the bad situation worse. If not adequately supported, the teacher is at the risk of losing commitment to and motivation for teaching. This is especially true for new teachers. A survey of new Canadian teachers showed that almost half reported having thought of leaving teaching as a result of challenges they faced (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). The case is not different in Kenya, especially as those suspected to have a hand in students' violence are often moved to difficult geographical areas as a form of discipline, or interdicted altogether.

Last is the problem of security. In one school assessed, practicing teachers residing on some market center close to their station had been robbed of their personal effects when they were away in school. This made them fearful and unable to settle and may have affected their teaching too. Other schools in the counter have experienced worse incidences. While education is a fundamental right of each Kenyan child, some of the areas are prone to rustling and other forms of insecurity. Lately, the attacks on the Northern frontier of the country, blamed on the Al shabaab, are real threats to all civil servants in these areas. In this year, teachers declined to report to their teaching stations following the killing of their colleagues who were travelling to their homes for holiday after schools closed. Additionally, an attack on a university college resulting in the death of over 100 students further heightened security fears. These points to the possibility of overstaffing in areas presumed to be secure but understaffing in problem regions. Those teachers who persist in insecure areas may be natives, but still cannot offer their best in such uncertain circumstances. It is no wonder that schools in such areas are among the worst performing in the country in National Examinations.

The challenges discussed are both direct as obtained from the research, and indirect. These make the point that, more often than not, the teacher operates in a not so friendly environment yet society's expectations are high. However, all is not cast in stone. Suggestions are therefore made in this paper to address the contextual challenges discussed.

Suggested Interventions

Every country needs a comprehensive and coherent policy on education, clearly stating the role of

the teacher in formal, non-formal and informal dimensions. This will help focus not only on those who excel and proceed through, but also on how those who fall off at various levels can be productive in society. Teachers and educationists should be involved in the formulation of such policies to ensure issues pertaining to reality on the ground are taken into account. It is hoped that the new curriculum (2017) when fully implemented will achieve this for Kenya.

The government has a duty to source for funding for all levels of education to ensure proper remuneration of teachers as well as education support resource development. It is suggested that investing in teachers can transform education and spur effective delivery of post-2015 education agenda that focuses on equity and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2015). This must be pegged on the provision of relevant education of national development. Partnership with the private sector has been proposed (Kenya Vision 2030), and should be effected.

Teacher support in discipline management is paramount. As a matter of fact, all stakeholders including parents, administration, and the teacher must work in harmony to ensure production of a disciplined and dependable citizenry. It is common knowledge that discipline underlies good performance, not just in schools and colleges, but also the market place. A lot of social evils experienced in society have their bases in formative years of individuals concerned. Thus, if behavior is well managed in school, society can be a much happier place.

The issue of teachers' workload must be given attention. With the improvement of enrolment both in primary and secondary schools, the amount of work the teacher puts in has more than doubled. Classes are larger yet the teacher strives to offer individualized attention to learners. Where classes have been split, no additional teacher is recruited so that means double work. The worst hit are those who have specialized in guidance and counseling, and a number of the teachers used in the study were. No specific time is allocated for the sessions except evenings when others go home. The government should therefore consider recruiting more teachers to ease the work for those in the field. Meanwhile, those who undertake counseling should have lesser class loads so as to effectively help students who have emotional and related problems.

The role of any government in providing security for her citizens cannot be overstated. No growth of whatever kind can be realized in an insecure environment, and certainly not education. Thus, for Kenya to realize her dreams to be a knowledge-led economy wherein the creation, adaption, and use of knowledge will be among the most critical factors of rapid economic growth (Kenya Vision 2030), security must be ensured in all areas of the country. Hindsight all the discussed suggestions must be the factor of mass market education.

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