

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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

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### Abstract

Kenyan Government, in its efforts to attain gender parity and increased access at primary education level in 2003 implemented the Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy which narrowed gender gap nationally; public primary school Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in 2010 was 119.8% (119.2% girls; 120.4% boys). However, Rongo lagged behind with a GER of 105% (95.4% girls; 114.6%) in the same year suggesting there was a wide gender disparity in the Sub-county. The purpose of the study therefore was to determine the influence of FPE policy on pupil access by gender in Public Primary Schools in Rongo Sub-county. Ex-post-facto and descriptive survey designs were used in the study. The study population comprised of 42 schools, 1 Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (SQASO), 966 and 624 Class 7 and 8 pupils respectively. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussion and document analysis guide. The study revealed FPE policy had a positive influence on access on both gender but girls still lagged behind. The study concluded that though girl's enrolment in public primary schools was lower than expected it was discovered these girls did not remain at home as they constituted a higher proportion than boys in private primary schools hence explaining the huge disparity in public primary schools. Provision of enough teaching and learning resources in public primary schools was found to be crucial to eliminate congestion and overcrowding which led to transfers by many pupils to private primary schools. The findings are significant to, educational planners, donor agencies, parents and community in making decision in improving FPE Policy to enhance gender parity.

**Keywords:** *Access, Free Primary Education, Policy, Gender, Rongo Sub-county.*

### Introduction

The United Nations Declaration on human rights 1948, the 1990 Jomtien Declaration and Kenya children's rights Act 2001, all state that every child is entitled to basic rights including education. In contrast to the universal policies adopted by African governments, some Latin American countries have employed targeted demand side policies aimed at boosting enrolments. Barrera-Osorio [1] found that the targeted fee reductions in Bogotá, Colombia significantly increased primary school enrolment equally for both genders. Schultz [2] estimates that the Progresá program of conditional cash transfers in Mexico led to an increase in the attendance of those who were targeted, with larger increases for girls. From these studies it is clear fee reduction led to increase in enrolment for both gender in Colombia and notably for girls in Mexico. The reasons for access to education differ

from one pupil to another and from one region to another as no single factor can explain the phenomenon [3]. This was the motivation behind this study to establish the influence of free primary education policy on pupil participation by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county, in Kenya. To find why in Rongo even with the introduction of FPE Policy girls enrolment still remains low as compared to boys in public primary schools.

There are several compelling benefits associated with girls' education, which include reduction of child and maternal mortality, improvement of child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, enhancement of women's domestic role and their political participation, improvement of economic productivity and growth and protection of girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse and protection [4]. Girl-

child's education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments yielding both private and social benefits that accrue in individual families and societies [4]. Girls' education and promotion of gender equity in education are vital to development and policies that do not address gender disparities miss content in development opportunities, as education is central in propelling country's economic development. This is the motivation behind this study in analysing the participation by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county after noticing the gender disparity trends in the initial data at the Sub-county. Prior studies have shown that FPE interventions have the potential to boost enrollment, however they generally do not examine primary school completion or achievement. Deininger [5] and Nishimura et al. [6] found that the Ugandan FPE program led to an increase in enrollment with a larger effect for girls, while Grogan [7] found that the Uganda program decreased the probability of delayed school entry, especially for girls. Deininger [5], Nishimura [6] and Grogan [7] studies have shown that FPE program led to increase in enrolment in the primary schools in Uganda, these studies show that girls were favoured and their school entry was increased. This is not, so in the case of Rongo Sub-county. Initial data indicates that after the introduction of FPE policy according to MOE, statistics section, 2000-2010, public primary schools' GER for Rongo Sub County fluctuated between 102.5% in 2003 to 106.0% in 2011, not going beyond 106.1%, against GER of 131.2% in the same period for Nyanza Region (within which Rongo is a constituent Sub-County) while the national GER was 115.0% during the same period; Nyanza's GER for girls which was 120.7% in 2004 is still higher than the girls' national GER of 114.9% (MOE, statistics section, 2005). These figures suggest that even after the introduction of FPE Policy, Rongo Sub County continued to experience low enrolments for the girl-child with levels both below the provincial and the national figures. This as Nyanza Province continued to have high enrolment of girls than the national GER.

### Statement of the Problem

Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy narrowed gender gap nationally; public primary school Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) in 2010 was 119.8% (119.2% girls; 120.4% boys), while Nyanza Province in 2010 had a GER of 128.3% (126.5 girls; 130.1% boys). However, Rongo lagged behind with a GER of 105% (95.4% girls; 114.6%). This raises the study's concern on why this big disparity exists, when the population census of

2009 showed there were 39,121 (56.7%) girls of primary school age compared to 30,366 (43.7%) boys in Rongo Sub-county. Given the importance of education to the country and commitment of funds to FPE programme, children not enrolled in school are a drawback to the country move towards achieving Education For All (EFA) by 2015. Therefore, this motivated a need to conduct a study on influence of FPE Policy on pupil access by gender in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county, Kenya.

### Limitation of the Study

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

### Methodology

This research was conducted through a combination of an Ex-post facto and descriptive survey research designs. A simple random sampling was used to select 20 schools from the 42 public primary schools that were established by the year 1995 (to enable cohort analysis). All the 20 head teachers and 40 class teachers of the selected schools were purposively sampled. The Glen Israel formula was used to select 320 pupils from a total of 1,590 pupils of class seven and eight of the sampled schools. The Glen Israel formula 1992 used was applied as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \times (e)^2} \quad n = \frac{1590}{1 + 1590(0.05)^2} = 319.598 \approx 320 \text{ pupils}$$

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

Then proportionate random sampling was used to select 195 and 125 pupils from the pupils total sample size of 320 Class Seven and Class Eight respectively [8] which represented at least 20.2% of the population. Gay [9] asserted that at least 20% is a good representation when dealing with a large population. Data was collected using questionnaires, document analysis guide, interview schedule and focus group discussion. Face and content validity of the instruments was determined by experts in the Planning and Economics of education, whose input were incorporated in the final drafts. Reliability of the instruments was determined through a pilot in 4 public primary schools. The instruments were administered through test-retest method. Data obtained was correlated using Pearson r at an

alpha level of 0.05. The Pearson r coefficient of head teachers' and class teachers' questionnaires obtained after calculation was 0.82 and 0.79 respectively. Since the coefficients were higher than 0.70 which is conventionally acceptable reliability, the instruments were considered reliable. Quantitative data was analyzed using combination of descriptive statistics in the form of percentages, frequency counts and means; Cohort analysis of the male and female pupils based on grade and cohort. Qualitative data from

interviews, open-ended items of the questionnaires and focus group discussions were organized into themes and sub-theme as they emerged from the content analysis.

## Results

**Research Question 1: The** research question responded to was: What is the influence of FPE policy on access of public primary schools by gender in Rongo Sub-county, based on school enrolment data?

**Table 1: Influence of FPE policy on access of public primary schools by gender in Rongo Sub-county from schools data, Enrolment of pupils by gender of the 1995 and 2003 cohorts**

1995 Cohort				2003 Cohort			% increase by gender
Year	Class	Gender	Population	Year	Class	Population	
1995	One	F	1320	2003	One	2115	60.2
		M	2170			3715	71.0
1996	Two	F	1290	2004	Two	1900	47.3
		M	2080			3567	71.0
1997	Three	F	1121	2005	Three	1849	64.9
		M	1989			3510	76.0
1998	Four	F	1094	2006	Four	1641	50.0
		M	1947			3469	78.0
1999	Five	F	1040	2007	Five	1583	52.0
		M	1872			3313	77.0
2000	Six	F	978	2008	Six	1339	37.0
		M	1818			3268	80.0
2001	Seven	F	940	2009	Seven	1226	30.4
		M	1762			3095	76.0
2002	Eight	F	813	2010	Eight	1186	45.9
		M	1640			3000	83.0

The findings in Table 1 shows increase in enrolment of the 2003 female pupils cohort after the introduction of FPE policy as compared to the female pupils of the 1995 cohort before its introduction; the percentages were arrived at by calculating the percentage increase between the two cohorts class by class between genders. There was an increase in enrolment by 60.2% (795) in class one, 47.3%(610) in class two, 64.9%(728) class three, 50% (547) class four, 52%(543) class five, 37%(361) class six, 30.4%(286) class seven, and 45.9%(373) class eight as compared to the female pupils of the 1995 cohort. This implies that with the introduction of FPE policy parents were relieved of paying fees and therefore an increase in the number of female pupils who were able to access primary education in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county was noted. However, the gender gap still remained wide as shown in Table 1 even with increase in enrolment for the girls in Rongo Sub-county. The Economic Survey Report revealed that the national enrolment in

public primary schools rose to 1.33 million in 2003 from the previous 1.18 million in the previous year recording a positive deviation of 12.7%.

Okongo [10], studied Socio-economic factors affecting Promotion of Primary education in Rongo Sub-county and revealed that parents find it difficult to educate a girl-child in public primary school due to overcrowding and poor performance thus many prefer private schools for their children and this may contribute to low enrolment in public primary schools. For low income families school levies such as school uniform, examination fees, may also result in drop outs thereby leading to low survival and eventually low enrolments in public primary schools. Mukudi [11] on the other hand asserts that there are other factors which influence enrolment of girls in schools such as presence of female teachers, availability of proper features such as latrines, daycare facilities for younger siblings and water sources and flexibility of school calendar.

**Research Question 2:** To further establish the influence of FPE Policy on access of by gender to education in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-

county, based on the views of the head teachers and class teachers (Table 2)

**Table 2: Influence of FPE Policy on Access by gender to Education as rated by the Head teacher (n=20) and the Class teacher (n=40)**

Influence of FPE Policy on Access	Mean Rating (MR)	
	Head teachers	Class teachers
a) FPE Policy has enabled many girls and boys to enroll in public primary schools.	4.11	2.32
b) FPE Policy has attracted many girls and boys who had dropped out of school to join public primary schools.	4.22	2.16
c) FPE Policy has strengthened re-entry policy of adolescent mothers back to public primary schools.	3.96	2.66
d) FPE Policy has attracted many parents to take their children to public primary schools.	3.96	2.11
e) FPE Policy has enabled many girls and boys affected by HIV/AIDS to enroll in public primary schools.	3.75	2.33
f) FPE Policy has made primary schools accessible to most parents which enabled them to enroll their sons and daughters to public primary schools.	3.44	2.67
g) FPE Policy has reduced gender disparity as enrolment of girls and boys in public primary schools is almost 1:1	3.22	2.86
h) FPE Policy has reduced socio-cultural factors hindering gender access to education in public primary schools.	3.54	2.98
<b>Overall mean rating</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>2.51</b>

**Key: Classification mean rating:**

1.0-1.9 Very Low, 2.0-2.9 Low, 3.0-3.9 Moderate, 4.0-4.9 High, and 5.0 Very High

Table 2 gives the ratings of both the head teachers and the class teachers on the influence of FPE Policy had on access by gender to education in Public Primary Schools in Rongo Sub-county. The view that FPE has enabled many girls and boys to enroll in Public primary schools rated highly at 4.11 by head teachers unlike the class teachers who rated it lowly at 2.32. Disparity in ratings of statement a-h may be based on the fact that head teachers' responses were factual emanating from their experiences as policy implementers at institutional level while the class teachers' rating which could have been influenced by their relating to pupils at class level. The head teachers deal with new admissions, so they are in a better position to know the enrolment trend before and after the introduction of FPE Policy. Another reason on the disparity in the ratings of the head teachers and the class teachers may be attributed to the fact that head teachers look at the whole picture in the school while for the class teachers some of them may not have seen much differences in enrolment as the number of the new enrollees differ from class to class. The head teachers, rating can be justified in table 1 showing enrolment of the female and male pupils respectively of the 1995 and 2003 cohorts in different classes in the Sub-county which indicates increase in enrolment after the

introduction of FPE Policy.

## Discussion

The SQASO on his part on the influence of FPE Policy on access of the girl-child to Education in Public primary schools; "FPE Policy has enhanced enrolment of in Public Primary Schools and expansion of schools leading to slight increase in enrolment of the girl-child in the Public Primary Schools in the Sub-county." He further added that in spite of the increase in enrolment, the Sub-county faced a number of challenges in its implementation which were enormous, and he stated: "The FPE policy enhanced access leading to overcrowding of pupils in classes and shortage of teachers and hence drop-out in public primary schools which lacked adequate staffing. This negatively compromised the quality of education and curriculum delivery. In addition the delay in remittance of fund, inflation, lack of vehicles in the Sub-county to visit schools regularly as stipulated and inadequate school infrastructure exacerbated poor quality in public primary schools. These reasons have encouraged parents to enrol their children in private schools with more girls enrolled in the 43 Private Primary Schools than boys (as per our Sub-county data). Girls enrolled in private schools are 54.3%(12,923)and boys 45.7% (10,892)".

Kipkoech and Kyalo [12] study titled "Management Challenges facing implementation of Free Primary Education in Kenya" where the challenges cited by the head teachers and the educational officers were upsurge in enrolment which stressed the availability of resources in schools such as teachers and teaching materials, delay in disbursement of funds to schools by government and lack of transport for educational officers to frequently visit the schools in the Sub-county among others. These challenges faced are likely to lead to poor quality in knowledge delivery, lack of motivation of staff and pupils hence transfers to private schools.

The view that FPE Policy has made public primary school affordable to most parents enabling them to enroll their daughters and sons in public primary schools was highly rated at 3.44 by the head teachers but lowly rated by the class teachers at 2.67. The head teachers' findings suggest that more parents take their daughters to public primary schools as compared to the period before the introduction of FPE Policy. During the Pupil Focus Group Discussion, one pupil had this to say: "Free Primary Education has helped my parents to pay examination fees and buy us school uniform with ease. My father told me that he could not have enrolled me in class one in 2003 if there was no Free Primary Education because of the burden of paying tuition fees for my brothers and sister who at that time were in class eight and both needed school levies and school uniform"

While the head teachers were of the view that FPE Policy has attracted many girls who had dropped out of school to enroll back in public primary schools giving it a rating of 4.22, the class teachers disagreed with this as their rating was low at 2.16. The high rating of the head teachers may be based on the argument that they have records of the female pupils they admit in the schools and their background unlike class teachers who deals with individual classes and therefore have facts on the actual number of girls in their classes. This high rating of the head teachers is consistent with the findings of Mwansa [13] study which revealed that a significant amount of new enrollees in Zambia were actually pupils who had previously left school due to inability to pay school fees, especially in rural areas. Another study in Kenya found out that 7.5% of new enrollees in primary schools were children who had dropped out of school due to fees [14].

Another factor of FPE policy as having greatly influenced access of the girl-child to education was that FPE Policy has attracted many parents

to take their children to public primary schools which was rated 3.96 by head teachers but lowly rated by the class teachers at 2.11. The high rating for the head teachers may be attributed to the fact that the head teachers as the main policy implementer may be more positive to FPE Policy than the class teachers who are usually demotivated by poor learning environment. The head teachers are therefore in a better position to know the trends that have taken place during the years of study. This may imply that FPE Policy has increased access of the girl-child to primary education in public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county since a number of parents are able to afford the fees which have been subsidized. The findings are in line with the findings of Lewis and Lockheed [15] who found out that school scholarship programmes offer girls financing and encouragement to stay in school. They compensate families for the direct and indirect costs of education. Scholarships have been highly effective in countries, notably Bangladesh, where scholarships increased girls' enrolment to twice that of the national average [15].

With the introduction of FPE Policy, the adolescent mothers still have a chance of re-joining public primary schools as rated by the head teachers at 3.96, unlike the class teachers who rated it at only 2.66. This discrepancy in the mean rating may be due to the fact that matter is sensitive and majority of class teachers may not have such details with them unlike the head teachers who interact with parents during admissions. The head teachers also interact with other colleagues in leadership positions and are aware of the existence of such cases. FPE Policy having influence on socio-cultural factors hindering girl-child access to education in Public Primary Schools was rated at 3.54 by head teachers and 2.98 by class teachers. These average ratings by both the head teachers and the class teachers may be attributed to the fact that, other than tuition fees which the FPE policy caters for there are other factors that affect access of the girl-child to education in public primary schools. On hindrances faced by the girl-child to access primary education, the head teachers said that a number of parents do not value education of the girl-child and would be better placed to carry out the house chores as one of them gave this sentiments: "The community around this area has not valued education of the girl-child for a long time as most of the new enrollees in class one are mostly boys. The number of the girls just started going up with this free primary education policy". This finding is consistent with World Bank [16] who says that, on average, girls in Africa score low marks in examination which

limits their enrolment at primary schools. UNESCO [17] also observed that many factors which inhibits access to education are gender-based characterized by wealth, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, rural habitation and child labour, health barriers are important factors regarding attendance and access to primary education.

When asked what could be done to enhance girl-child access to primary education, they gave various reasons. 45% of the head teachers suggested that girls public primary schools should be introduced to allow girls to learn independently as this would curb some of the challenges they meet at school such as intimidation from boys, boy/girl relationship among others that discourage them from coming to school. They were also of the view that role models should be called upon to talk to the girls regularly; teachers to take responsibility of encouraging the girls; sensitization to be done to the community on the importance of girl-child education and above all, guidance and counselling to be enforced in all schools by qualified Guidance and Counselling teachers posted to schools by the Teachers Service Commission. 55% of the head teachers felt that government should provide school uniforms and increase number of teachers and streams in public primary schools to eliminate overcrowding in classes for quality learning.

On the other hand the findings in Table 1 shows increase in enrolment of male and female pupils after the introduction of FPE in 2003 compared to 1995 cohorts. However, there is decrease in enrolment for both the boy and girl child as they move to upper classes even with free primary education. Worldwide, UNESCO [18] estimates that nearly one in four children at lower primary level do not go to school, and one in two children do not attend upper primary school level. On regional level, enrolment ratios for lower primary school versus upper school reveal similar trends. For instance in West Asia, the ratio goes from 69% to 40%, while in East Asia, it drops from 90% to 48% as children move from lower to upper primary school levels. In Africa, lower primary school enrolment is 85%, while upper primary enrolment drops to 70%. While the decline in enrolment as both boys and girls progressed to higher level of education before the introduction of FPE policy can be attributed to inability of parents to pay school fees, the decline in enrolment after the introduction of FPE policy means that there are other factors other than

school fees that inhibit access. This could confirm what the SQASO said that FPE policy led to increase in enrolment in public primary schools causing overcrowding of pupils and shortage of teachers and continued drop out especially in public primary schools which lack adequate staffing. It is notable from the research that FPE policy had positive influence on access and thus led to class congestion, shortage of staff leading to transfer of girls to private primary schools. And that the number of girls enrolled in private schools was higher than boys in Rongo Sub-county. This showed that more girls than boys transferred to private schools after the introduction of FPE policy in the sub-county. The study revealed that though girl's enrolment in public primary was low compared to boys it was discovered these girls did not drop out as they constituted a higher proportion than boys in private schools hence explaining the huge disparity in enrolment in the sub-county.

### Conclusion

The study concluded that though girl's enrolment in public primary was low compared to boys it was discovered these girls did not drop out of primary schools as they constituted a higher proportion than boys in private schools hence explaining the huge disparity witnessed in public primary schools. The main reasons for low access of girls to public primary school in Rongo Sub-county was as a result of overcrowding in classes, inadequate learning teaching materials and lack of female teachers in leadership who acted as role models. The strategies on FPE policy need to be reviewed in connection with this study's recommendations given to increase access of girls in public primary schools and counter cases of transfers to private primary schools.

### Recommendations

The government should come up with affirmative action to promote more female teachers to head public primary schools who will be role models to female pupils to enhance enrolment as only 5% of public primary schools in Rongo Sub-county were found to be headed by female head teachers; some girls are still locked out or drop out due to lack of role models to enhance access. The government should also consider provision of enough teaching and learning resources in public primary schools to eliminate congestion and overcrowding in classes which has led to drop out and transfers to private primary schools.

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