

Factors Influencing the Efficacy of Free Primary Education Policy in Relation to the Enrolment of Children with Special Needs Education in West Pokot County, Kenya

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Abstract

The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in 2003 was aimed at enhancing the enrolment of all school going- age children in Kenya indiscriminately. However, significant concerns have been raised by scholars and the public over the low enrolment of children with Special Needs Education (SNE). The main objective of this study was to determine the efficacy of FPE policy on enrolment of special needs children in education in West Pokot County, Kenya. Descriptive survey research design was used. The target population was 696 respondents drawn from the 65 primary schools, SNE teachers of West Pokot County. Purposively sampling was used due to relatively low enrolment of children with special education needs. Simple random sampling was used to obtain the respondents as follows: 362 pupils with SNE and 123 SNE teachers. Each sub-county formed an important cluster from where the respondents were drawn from. The researcher collected data from pupils with special needs education and special education teachers. Focused Group Discussions (FGD), Document Analysis schedule and interview schedules were also used during the study. Content validity was done through the contributions of experts in the Department of Educational Planning and Management of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Pilot study was carried out to establish the reliability of the instruments. Test –retest method was employed to obtain the reliability of the instruments at 0.05 level of confidence. The findings yielded both qualitative and quantitative data and presented in frequency tables and line graphs. The findings revealed that factors affecting the efficacy of free primary education range from; sociocultural, economic, environmental, school based, individual and policy and system factors. The study thus recommends that the government commits more resources to FPE financing policy and employ strategic and individualized mechanisms such as early identification, screening, tracking and monitoring of pupils from homesteads to homestead to ensure enrolment enhanced nationally.

Keywords: Efficacy, Free Primary Education Policy, Enrolment

1.0 Background of the Study

Globally, Universal Primary Education is the second goal of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, more specifically, to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Children with special needs in education are equally regarded in equal or higher measure in as far as provision of basic education is concerned in all these declarations and policy frameworks. However, studies reveal that some practices in the education sector continue violating the right to education for children with Special Needs in Education despite the UN Declaration, World Conference on EFA, Regional Organizations' Policies and local national policies especially in terms of participation and access (UNICEF, 2005). The violation occurs because of "blind policies" that consider non-disabled learners and expects children with special needs education to fit automatically to what has been designed for use in the school set up (KNCHR, 2009).

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien in 1990 observed various forms of discrimination which bedevil children with special needs in education in contemporary society and came up with strategies to address the issues. It was noted that many groups are excluded from the mainstream education and affirmed that every child: disabled or normal has an inherent right to quality and affordable education. Arising from the deliberations was an urgent need to reform the education sector to address issues of enrolment of children especially those living in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs), urban slums, conflict prone areas, disabled, children from ethnic minorities and those children who are discriminated against due to HIV/AIDS. The concern of EFA therefore was how to guarantee every child the right to participate fully in schooling and acquire quality educational opportunities that will make them productive and self-reliant (UNESCO, 2005). To implement the EFA resolutions, the Dakar Framework of Action Conference was held in 2000 to assess progress towards the attainment EFA goals by 2015 as stated in the Jomtien protocol.

However in practice, Millions of children with disabilities throughout the world are still denied their fundamental right to education (Educational International 2009). The situation is worse in Third World Countries and especially in areas with environmentally harsh conditions such as the ASALs, conflict prone areas, refugee camps and urban slums. (UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, 2008). Although the exact figures are difficult to verify, it is estimated by UNESCO that out of the 72 million children of primary school age who are out of school, one third are children with disabilities and more than 90% of children with special needs education in the world's poorest countries do not go to school (UNESCO,2009-2010). Education, being a fundamental human right should by all means be made available to all.

The International political demonstrates by the ratification of the various protocols, proper legislation, implementation of relevant policies and practice to ensure that children with disabilities have an inherent and equal access to a quality and inclusive education.(Singal,2007). If the Millennium Development Goals of achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 (MDG.No 2) is to be met, than an urgent step is required and pressure needs to be put on countries to ensure that the severe implementation gap between policy and practice often experienced is bridged and access to quality education for all is achieved.(DfID,2010). People with disabilities currently make up an estimated 10% of the World's population (DFID, 2010) although estimates are not wholly accurate because of diverging international definitions of disability (Mc Laughlin and Ruedel, 2005). The World Health Organization(WHO) estimates that the number of people with disabilities is increasing globally as a result of medical advances that prolong life and the proliferation of conflict and chronic diseases aggravated particularly in low-resources countries, by poverty (WHO,2006)

People with disabilities are more likely to be poor than their non- disabled peers. It is estimated that people with disabilities represent 20% of the global population living in poverty (Filmer, 2005). The World Bank Report (2004) contends that disabled people are undisputedly amongst the poorest of the poor and hence a significant proportion of them cannot access quality and affordable education especially in Developing countries. The fact that so many people with disabilities live in conditions of chronic poverty is an injustice and abuse of their fundamental human rights (RESULTS, UK 2010). This is closely related to their continued exclusion from education and subsequent marginalization from the labour market. Scholars agree that due to their complete exclusion from education, people with disabilities are more likely to pass their poverty on to their children than other groups and therefore in order to fight intergenerational poverty, it is crucial to break the cycle of exclusion from education for people with disabilities (Filmer, 2005). It is imperative to note that all children are entitled to an education, and children with disabilities are no exception.

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1.2 Statement of the Problem

However in practice, Millions of children with disabilities throughout the world are still denied their fundamental right to education. The situation is worse in Third World Countries and especially in areas with environmentally harsh conditions such as the ASALs, conflict prone areas, refugee camps and urban slums. Although the exact figures are difficult to verify, it is estimated by UNESCO that out of the 72 million children of primary school age who are out of school, one third are children with disabilities and more than 90% of children with special needs education in the world's poorest countries do not go to school (UNESCO,2009-2010). In Kenya, the National Conference on Education for All held in Kisumu in 1992 provided a platform for review and the expansion of the Jomtien vision of basic education and the domestication of the principles of practice into the education system. This resulted to the expansion of Basic Education for All (BEFA) to other levels. While the Free Primary Education Policy in Kenya has had both successes and failures in terms of implementation and achievement of objectives, it has had minimal successes in areas deemed as Arid and Semi Arid areas (ASALs).

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to Factors Influencing the Efficacy of Free Primary Education Policy in Relation to the Enrolment of Children with Special Needs Education

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Kombo and Tromp (2006) observe that descriptive survey research is the most suitable design while collecting data about people's attitude and opinions on education or social issues. This research design is the most appropriate and flexible enough to permit the considerations of many different aspects such as enrolment, dropouts and retention of pupils (Best and Kahn, 2003).

1.4.2 Target Population

There were a total of 65 public primary schools with integrated unit/classes with 189 special needs teachers. There were also 3824 pupils with special needs in education enrolled in the 65 public primary schools in West Pokot County.

1.4.3 Sample Technique and sample size

The respondents were purposively sampled due to the relatively low enrolment of children with special education needs. Simple random sampling was used to obtain the respondents as follows: 362 pupils with SNE sampled through Yamames' (1967) formula and 123 SNE teachers. Each sub-county formed an important cluster from where the respondents were drawn from.

1.4.4 Instruments of Data collection

Focused Group Discussions (FGD) were used on the SNE pupils. Document Analysis schedule and interview schedules were also used during the study.

1.4.5 Validity of the instruments

Validity was assured through the contributions of experts in the Department of Educational Planning and Management of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.

1.4.6 Reliability of the Instruments.

Pilot study was carried out to establish the reliability of the instruments. Test –retest method was employed to obtain the reliability of the instruments at 0.05 level of confidence.

1.4.7 Data analysis and Presentation.

The findings yielded qualitative and quantitative which was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings were presented in frequency tables, pie charts, bar charts, line graphs and figures

1.5 Data Presentation and Discussion.

Regarding the nature of enrolment for special needs education children for the period starting 2001 and ending 2010. It was established that the enrolment of children with SNE increased between 2003-2006 due to the introduction of free primary education policy but reduced between 2007-2010 due to a number of militating factors. This has been supported by studies by Acted (2006), World Vision (2007) which was carried in the neighboring Turkana County and Uganda. West Pokot Sub-County, according to the study was leading in enrolment due to the presence of many schools with integrated units and the high awareness level of residents coupled with the relatively low poverty levels compared to the other sub counties.

The study also established that three in twelve children with special needs education are attending school. On average, the enrolment increased from 6% in 2001 to 27% in 2003 because of the enabling policy that enhanced the enrolment level indiscriminately. However, the net enrolment for children with SNE was still compared to the enrolment of ordinary/ normal children.

Regarding the specific forms of impairments, the study established that only one in six disabled children with physical and visual impairments were attending school while only one in four disabled children with mental and multiple impairments were attending school in the county. However, the enrolment of normal (non-disabled) was very high as compared with their disabled counter parts as shown in Fig 1 in appendix.

This implies that there had been a steady improvement on the enrolment of normal children within the period 2001 and 2010, though with significant margins. This is attributed this to the FPE policy which they were mandated to safeguard and ensure its implementation. Consequently, head teachers were required to admit any school- going age children irrespective of their ability. This gave an opportunity to the poor families to educate their children hence the increase in enrolment. However, the same officers noted that the increase was not significant as was the case in other counties since there were other inhibiting factors that affected both the pupil and parents. All the same, they noted that some of these factors over time were being resolved by the government and other stakeholders hence the slight improvement.

A similar scale of measurement was applied on the enrolment of children with special needs in education and it was established that during the initial years of the implementation of the free primary education policy, the numbers for the disabled learners was dismally low. As the FPE program took roots, enrolment rates for the children with special needs in education increased. However, the number started decreasing after the year 2005 due to the erratic disbursement of funds that forced the school management to surcharge parents extra levies to meet the needs of the pupils. The biting drought and hunger that ravaged the county caused a significant drop out of children due to the movement of parents to Uganda with their livestock in search of

pasture and water. Figure 2 illustrates this finding in appendix.

Despite the fact that FPE Policy had increased the enrolment of ordinary children (normal), the same, according to the study cannot therefore be said authoritatively on the enrolment of children with special needs education in West Pokot County because of the relatively low enrolment recorded in special schools/special classes/integrated units in the County as shown in table 1 in appendix.

From the table, it can be concluded that there was a drastic increase in enrolment immediately after the introduction of FPE in 2003. However, the enrolment declined in the subsequent years especially in Pokot North, Pokot Central and South sub-counties compared to West Pokot sub – county. This, according to the study, was partly due to the varying livelihood ecological zones in the county coupled with other militating factors. This has adversely affected the enrolment trends on the county as shown in figure 2 in appendix..

The above statistics implied that indeed the enrolment of children with special needs into special schools indeed increased at the time of the introduction of the FPE program and sometime in 2005. However, the enrolment started declining as from the year 2005 till the year 2010. According to Kandji (2006), the famine that affected the northern parts of Kenya as from the year 2004 till 2006 and declared a national disaster by the government then had a significant impact on the lifestyle of the people living in the affected regions in that most had to relocate to other places in search of food and water. Similarly, Roba (2012) argues that the economic activities that the people affected by the drought engaged in on a regular basis were halted and school attendance by their children was interfered with. Consequently, enrolment of children into learning institutions declined with those in semi-urban centre's managing to attend schools that had government feeding program operational. As such, the study can conclusively relate the decline in enrolment of pupils with special needs into schools to the drought and the sprawling insecurity that is common when there is acute drought facing the nomads.

The above enrolment trends are further supported by the head teachers in the interviews where they agreed that indeed the enrolment trends for the disabled learners had initially increased only for them to start declining over time. Overall, they agreed that the enrolment had declined as 11 (16.9%) respondents from Pokot Central agreed that the enrolment had decreased while 15 (23%) from Pokot North stated that it had decreased. Similarly, 8 (12.3%) and 12 (18.4) respondents from Pokot South and Pokot West respectively also agreed that the enrolment for children with special needs in education.

1.6 Summary of the Findings.

The study established that children with special needs in education were indeed recipients of the FPE fund, which was allocated to schools based on a 'fixed grant per school' mode. These amount received per pupil with special needs was slightly higher compared to the other normal pupils. However, the study established that the amount received was not enough to purchase the required facilities, equipment and other learning materials for the children with special needs. A higher need for a better or higher pass mark by the SNE teachers also contributed greatly to the dropout rates of the children with special needs in education as most were forced to repeat classes due to their below par performance. This resulted in frustration, coupled with the '*special*' tag that stigmatized the pupils hence the dropout. On the other hand, the sub standard follow up mechanisms for the children with special needs who had dropped out of school also proved to be exercises in futility since they did not yield the expected results. Lack of facilities by the EARC officials greatly contributed to poor enrolment and re-enrolment of disabled pupil's since they were unable to properly screen the pupils' disabilities for proper placement into relevant special schools.

The increased enrolment at the initial phases of the FPE policy implementation resulted in a low teacher to pupil ratio. This was established to be a factor contributing to the failure of FPE policy as most pupils with special needs in education lacked the required extra attention due to the pressing need for a better pass mark. Given the implementation of the FPE policy, overcrowded classrooms sprang up, resulting in lack of attention for the learner with special needs hence a feeling of isolation and eventually drop out. This, similarly, frustrates the efforts of the FPE policy implementers. Given the numerous factors that the study found to be impacting the efficacy of the FPE program, the researcher categorized and summarized them as presented in below.

- i. Community Based Factors (socio-cultural). Gender stereotype roles within the community, Retrogressive cultural practices such as FGM and early marriage, Negative attitude/parental attitude (Regard of children with SNE as Liabilities), Nomadism, Social stigma, Cattle rustling and Home based factors e.g. chores. The study recommends that the government, both the county and national, should put awareness and educational mechanisms in place to make the local communities aware of the rights for the child with special needs and educate them on the importance of educating their disabled children.
- ii. Economic factors included High poverty levels, Low parental income and Lack of employment. As such, the study recommends that the local communities should be encouraged and empowered to start off viable economic activities in form of businesses to help them cater for their financial needs better. This will enable them educate their children easily and be able go through situations, such as droughts and famines, that are natural easily without the need of relocating.

- iii. Environmental factors include Location of ASAL, Long distance to school, Rugged, hilly and bushy terrain/environment, unfavorable wealth conditions (high temperature rainfall section) and Insecurity in form of Rape cases, Banditry, Bee stinging during dry season near boreholes, Small flies (especially on visually impaired) and Snake bites. The relevant government organs should work towards ensuring a safe environment not only for the disabled but also the normal children by tasking the relevant authorities to screen and rid the areas where people live off any wild animals. Likewise, proper transport mechanisms should be provided by either the schools or the county government to ensure that disabled learners do not walk long and unbearable distances.
- iv. Pedagogical factors (school based factors).The pedagogical factors where emphasis on mean score, inadequate resources, Stigmatization, Non-adapted environmental (highly restrictive environment) and Low teacher pupil ratio. The study recommends that relevant authorities should move in to put checks that ensure that children with special needs receive treatment that befits them, not similar to that of normal children. Likewise, head teachers and other SNE teachers should work towards removing the 'special' tag that amounts to stigmatization of the disabled children.
- v. Individual based factors like ill health, over age, Severity of impairment, Intellectual inability and Low levels of resilience / passion for education. To mitigate the effects of these factors, stakeholders should work into ensuring that disabled children receive adequate medical attention immediately after birth and their records should properly kept to assist during the screening process. As such, the issue of disabled children enrolling into schools late while over age will be tackled hence proper placement immediately after enrolment.
- vi. Policy and system factors. Inappropriate policy based on medical model as opposed to social model, Non-inductive policy that is segregate, Non-implementation of SNE policy, Inadequate funding, Limited training for SNE teachers, Poorly resourced EARC, Poorly staffed EARC and DQASO, Inadequate identification and screening services, Poor school support services and erratic financing policy.

1.7 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the factors influencing the efficacy of the Free Primary Education Policy in relation to the enrolment of children with special needs in education in West Pokot County are inadequate resource provision, poverty, unfriendly learning environment for the child with special needs, unskilled or inadequately trained teachers in special needs education, hunger, harsh environment, individual diseases and infestation of flies among others. Factors Influencing the Efficacy of Free Primary Education Policy in relation to the Enrolment of Children with Special Needs Education in West Pokot County.

1.8 Suggestions for Further Studies

The study suggests the following for further studies.

- i. What are the factors that determine the enrolment trends for children with special needs education after the introduction of the subsidized secondary Education Program in ASALs of Kenya?

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Appendix

Table 1: SNE enrolment trends in West Pokot County between 2001 and 2010

| Sub-County/Year | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Pokot Central | 102 | 128 | 165 | 170 | 183 | 199 | 155 | 133 | 120 | 115 |
| Pokot North | 87 | 91 | 122 | 132 | 149 | 169 | 111 | 93 | 84 | 76 |
| Pokot South | 77 | 89 | 101 | 108 | 178 | 188 | 112 | 96 | 85 | 79 |
| West Pokot | 138 | 160 | 170 | 185 | 191 | 215 | 134 | 113 | 98 | 97 |
| Total | 404 | 468 | 558 | 595 | 701 | 771 | 512 | 435 | 387 | 367 |

Source: Field Data, 2013

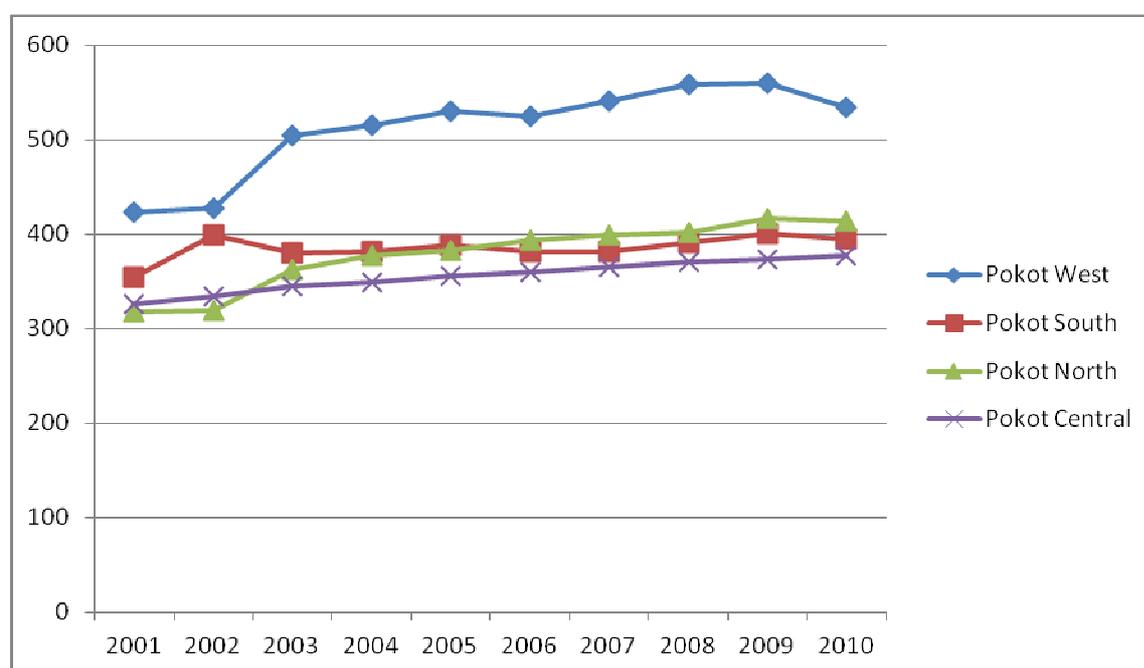


Figure 1: Enrolment Trends for Normal Children between 2001 and 2010

Source: Field Data, 2013

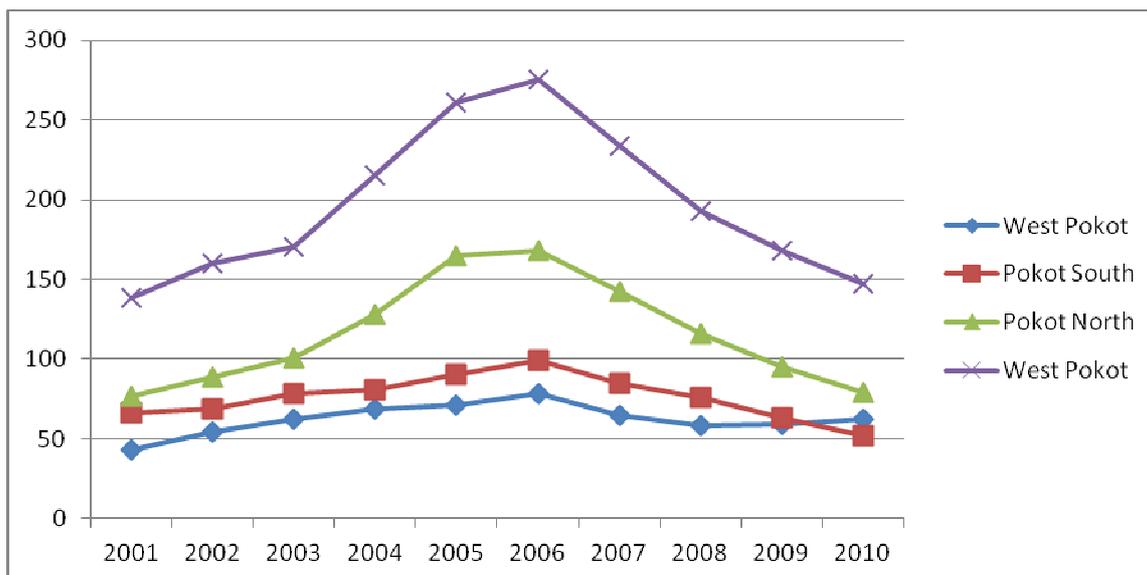


Figure 2: Enrolment Trends for Children with Special Needs in Education
Source: Field Data, 2013

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