



**AUTOMATIC GRADE PROMOTION POLICY
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PUPILS' ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT AMONG PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS
IN KIRINYAGA CENTRAL SUB-COUNTY, KENYA**

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Abstract:

There has been a declining trend in performance among pupils in public primary schools at Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCSE) examinations since the introduction of automatic grade policy. The cause of this worrying trend is blamed on, among other factors, the implementation of the policy. The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of automatic grade promotion policy on pupils' academic performance in Kirinyaga Central Sub-County. Specifically this study sought to establish; the status of adequacy of physical facilities in primary schools arising from the implementation of automatic grade promotion Policy in Kirinyaga Central Sub County, and the impact of physical facilities on performance of Pupils' academic performance at KCSE among primary schools in Kirinyaga Central Sub-County. This study used descriptive survey research design and adopted a mixed method approach. The population of the study was 32 head teachers, 181 teachers and 2170 pupils; and a sample of 30 head teachers, 118 teachers and 325 pupils. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample head teachers while simple random sampling was used on the teachers and pupils. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers and pupils, while sampled head teachers were interviewed. Questionnaires were piloted in a neighboring Sub County using test retest method and reliable reliability index of 0.702 and 0.756 obtained for teachers' and pupils' questionnaires respectively. The questionnaires and interview guide were adequately validated and administered. Quantitative data is tabulated while qualitative data was

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analyzed thematically in line with the research purpose and to answer the research questions. The study established that there are inadequate physical facilities in primary schools in the study area arising from the implementation of the automatic grade promotion. It further found out that the facilities were not adequately maintained and therefore compromised learners' health and safety, and hampered instruction. The study concludes that school physical facilities influence pupils' academic achievement. The study recommends that; government and other stakeholders should provide adequate physical facilities in schools alongside complementary resources for effective implementation of automatic grade promotion policy, schools should institute routine schedule of maintaining the available physical facilities. It further recommends a similar study be carried out in other Counties and to engage a larger population and more variables.

Keywords: automatic promotion, grade promotion, academic achievement, primary schools

1. Introduction

Automatic promotion is a widespread and controversial educational practice within developing and developed countries; which refers to the practice in primary or secondary schooling where pupils advance from one grade to the next higher grade at the end of the school year regardless of their educational attainment (Bushra & Samina, 2011). Automatic promotion policy is dated back to 1930 (Steiner, 1986), where the policy was chosen and carried out for the social and psychological wellbeing of the pupils. Automatic grade promotion which enhances retention, conforms to the concept of Universal Primary Education, and is believed to be more effective and results in positive learning outcomes. Studies carried out in advanced and third world countries appraising the effect of social promotion and repetition shows promotion is advantageous to repetition in that Social promotion promotes equality in learning results specifically among boys and girls (Ndarhutse, 2008) and also between pupils in rural-urban environments (Chen, Liu, Zhang, Shi & Rozelle, 2010). It is also believed that it reduces expenses incurred by the government and families in education because children will go through school without repeating or dropping out of school and thus completing school cycle within the prescribed period of time (Verspoor, 2006 & Ndarhutse, 2008).

The high repeater rates in Kenya seem to have resulted from the perception of efficiency in and standards of education through examination index (Okwach & Odipo, 1997). In their education paper "*efficiency of primary education in Kenya*" they noted that in Kenya the understanding of effectiveness is measured by means of formal tests which have had negative impact on organization and financing in schools, teachers, pupils and parents. As a result of this they added that school management committee had to device ways of making sure that the right candidates were registered for KCPE which led to forced grade repetition. However, to address the shortcomings of regulated transition of

learners from one grade to another, Kenya government adopted automatic grade promotion in 2006 to help reduce wastage which was believed to be an obstacle to the achievement of the EFA goals (Adongo, 2017). To implement the grand program alongside the Free Primary Education, enormous resources that include physical facilities were required to accommodate large number of pupils moving to all classes in every primary school. Physical facilities encompass structures such as classrooms, desks, chairs, tables, washrooms and playgrounds. These facilities should be sufficient and well positioned free of any menace of users and to those around them to boost effective school learning atmosphere which uphold educational performance (MOEST, 2005). School physical facilities provide a conducive learning environment which ensures effective instruction and influence learning outcomes. According to Motanya (2011), poor learning environment in Third World Countries has been singled out as one of the main issues that lead to low achievements. This is due to enlarged enrolment without further extension of the facilities. This leads to over straining of resources leading to ineffectiveness of instructional and learning procedure occasioning in poor pupils' academic achievements.

According to Ayoo (2002) and Eshiwani (1993) school facilities like chairs, desks, enough text books and classrooms have greater influence on pupils' achievements in advanced countries. A school requires adequate physical facilities which according to Baker & Bernstein (2012) are functional, 'normal' and well maintained, in order to operate well and achieve desired academic goals. Physical facilities in primary schools include; classrooms, pit latrines, desks, chalkboard, tables, chairs and land on which other facilities create conducive learning environment within which the school community can work comfortably and effectively achieve institutional goals and objectives. Furnishing classrooms with appropriate furniture ensures learners are seated comfortable and are able to learn well. Pupils seated on comfortable benches, chairs, or desks will be able to have direct eye contact with the teacher and the chalkboard thus boost their level of concentration and also obtain good writing skills (MOE, 2004). A number of studies have indicated that many school systems especially those in urban and high-poverty areas are affected by unplanned infrastructures and old buildings that threaten the health, safety and learning opportunities of the pupils. Good learning environment support strong academic programs (Mononen-Aaltonen, 2008). The availability and safety of the buildings contribute towards the creation of a conducive learning environment. Physical facilities therefore contribute to effective learning since their adequacy will lead to improved teaching and learning, increased retention of learners, improved development of a sense of belonging among learners, and development of ownership in the parents and the school community in general (MOEST, 2005).

learners' academic performance, the introduction of automatic grade promotion in Kenya has strained available physical facilities in primary schools. This has compounded the challenges brought about by the Free Primary Education that Kenya government introduced in 2003 in that classrooms are forced to accommodate large number of learners. According to Bushra & Samina (2011), a number of studies have

revealed that automatic promotion policy alone cannot provide desired results unless it is accompanied by other reform measures. They further observed that if automatic promotion is implemented with no attempt to eliminate the factors associated with school failure, problems of learning in the early grades may be passed on. This may therefore impede meaningful academic performance by pupils at Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Examination. And as such Endeley (2016) observed that though automatic promotion is aimed at minimizing wastage, if not properly handled it can lead to further wastage.

In his study in Matungulu Sub-County Kieti (2017) observed that unavailability of learning resources affect performance negatively while their adequacy affects students' academic performance to a great extent. This situation is consistent to the findings by Endeley (2016) who reported that inadequate resources are contributing to poor academic performance. In their study in Pakistan on 'Automatic promotion policy at primary level and MDG-2', Bushra & Samina (2011) complained that public primary schools are not well equipped with educational facilities which are the main reason for declining standards of education. There are a few studies that have been conducted in Kenya to investigate the role of automatic grade promotion in the status of performance in Kenya's primary school and in Kirinyaga central Sub County.

This situation could be the reason for poor academic performance among learners at end of primary school education examinations. This study therefore sought to establish the influence of automatic grade promotion policy on pupils' academic performance in Kirinyaga Central Sub-County. It specifically sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the status of adequacy of physical facilities in primary schools amid the automatic grade promotion Policy in Kirinyaga Central Sub-County?
- 2) What is the impact of physical facilities on performance of Pupils' academic performance at KCSE among primary schools in Kirinyaga Central Sub County?

2. Methodology

This study employed mixed methods approach which Razaee, Adidin, Abdallah & Singh (2011) advocates a survey that is mainly identified with quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry and involved the collection of information at one or several points in time for scientifically designed probability samples of teachers or schools. By using mixed methods approach, varied categories of data are gathered using different techniques and procedures in paths that show strengths and minimal vulnerability enabling this method to give an insight impossible with neither quantitative nor qualitative gathered data. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. According to Rezaee, Abidin, Abdullah, & Singh in Tomno (2014) it is used to investigate, assess opinions and preferences in educational issues and problems. It targeted 2170 pupils from class VI, VII and VIII, 181 teachers and 32 head teachers in 32 public primary schools. To draw the required sample from the respective population based on precision rate and a 95% confidence level (Kothari, 2004), the sample size calculator (www.surveysystem.com/index.htm) was

used. Purposive sampling technique was used on the sampled 30 head teachers, while 118 teachers and 325 pupils were drawn using simple random sampling for the study. The data collection instruments were questionnaires for pupils and teachers, and unstructured interview guide for the head teachers to elicit in-depth information on promotion policy. They were piloted using test-retest method and after computing, a reliable index of 0.702 and 0.756 for teachers' and pupils' questionnaires were obtained respectively. According to Ebel & Freisbie (1991) a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above is reliable. Kombo and Tromp (2006) observe that with this, the research process attempts to reduce errors and improve compatibility of information gathered. The interview guide was also pre - tested on the head teachers and both instruments were appropriately validated and revised accordingly before being used to collect data. Data collected using the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively while qualitative data was analyzed thematically as guided by the research questions.

3. Results and Discussions

In answering the question on the adequacy of physical facilities in primary schools in the study area, the research findings from the questionnaires revealed that there were inadequate classrooms (59%), desks (54%), chairs (78%) and washrooms (61%). The inadequacy of physical facilities made pupils to perform generally poor. This agrees with findings of the study carried out by Motanya (2011) who noted that learning environment in third World countries has been singled out as one of the major factors that lead to poor performance. This is due to increased enrolment without further expansion of facilities thereby overstressing resources, and in turn affects the effectiveness of teaching and learning leading to pupils' poor academic achievement. This corroborated head teachers' responses to interviews that apart from facilities being inadequate, they were in poor conditions where in many schools' windows did not have window panes, some desks and chairs were broken and washrooms required repairs.

Cynthia and Megan in Endeley (2016) confirmed a strong and positive relationship between the quality of school facilities and student achievement. On being probed further, head teachers reported that following the implementation of the automatic grade promotion policy, there has been an increase in pupil population in every school. They added that this situation strained the available physical facilities and continuously posed a risk to the pupils' safety and health. They reported that the open windows exposed the learners to cold condition during rainy seasons and at times some students developed health complications that related to pneumonia. They added that this resulted in absenteeism as parents took these pupils for medical treatment. These situations make pupils miss classes and when they come back, they lag behind in content coverage thus leading to poor academic achievement. They further noted that the overcrowded classrooms hampered teachers' movement while attending to individual learners' needs. In addition, several pupils sit on one desk making them uncomfortable and unable to concentrate and to effectively learn.

The researcher also sought to find out the impact of physical facilities on pupils' academic achievement. The findings obtained from the questionnaires indicate that a majority (71%) of the respondents acknowledged that physical facilities have a positive impact on pupils' academic achievements. These findings are in agreement with the study carried out in India by Fabunmi & Okore (2000) and which showed that schools with sufficient physical facilities performed better than those which did not have enough facilities. Kieti (2017) affirmed that availability of physical and teaching facilities has a positive influence on students' academic performance. Adequate and well-organized school physical facilities encourage the school community to support the school and therefore make the school conducive for instruction.

4. Conclusions

The study concluded that arising from the implementation of the automatic grade promotion, majority of the schools had inadequate classrooms, chairs, desks and washrooms. The classrooms were overcrowded, and some had broken windows which exposed learners to cold condition during season thereby compromising their health and safety. The overcrowded classrooms hampered free movement by teachers while teaching. This study further concludes that school physical facilities influence pupils' academic achievement in such a way that when pupils are congested in a classroom, they do not pay attention during lessons. This study further concludes that school physical facilities influence pupils' academic achievement.

5. Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

This study recommends that;

- 1) Government and other stakeholders should provide adequate physical facilities in schools alongside complementary resources such as enough teachers for effective implementation of automatic grade promotion policy.
- 2) Schools should institute routine schedule of maintaining the available physical facilities so as to keep them in a condition that provide a conducive learning environment and facilitate effective instruction.
- 3) A similar study is carried out in other areas and to engage a larger population and more variables.

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