

Primary Education in Kenya: Access and Policy Implications, 1989-2002

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Abstract

The study provides a critical analysis of primary education in Kenya using time series data for the period between 1989 and 2002. The main issues of concern include access and participation, internal efficiency and equity. The research basically adopted a desk-study orientation with secondary data providing the bulk of the information. This was obtained from existing literature, including policy documents, Government publications, MoEST Statistics and local and international professional reports. Primary data was obtained by conducting key informant interviews using guided interview, observation and discussion schedules and a questionnaire. The major respondents included key education stakeholders, parents and teachers from a sample of schools drawn from Nairobi province and Kajiado district.

The major challenges facing primary school education in Kenya include unsatisfactory levels of access and participation, regional disparities, declining quality and relevance, rising educational costs, poverty incidence, and declining government financing (prior to FPE), internal inefficiencies and school wastage.

Over-age enrollments, increasing dropout rates, high repetition rates, low completion rates, declining transition rates from primary education level to higher education levels, and declining survival rates denote internal inefficiencies and primary school wastage that characterized trends in access to primary education between 1989 and 2002. Rising educational costs, poverty incidence and declining government financing are to a large extent, associated with the cost sharing policy introduced in 1988 that has had negative effects on primary education in terms of enrolments, quality and financing. Most of the resources are spent on recurrent expenditure items dominated by teachers' remunerations, while development allocation constitutes less 5 per cent (in 2001 the proportion was 2 per cent).

Other challenges evident during the review period include lack of clear policy guidelines on cost sharing, inadequate mechanisms in the identification of needy students within the school system, inefficiencies in resource mobilization, utilization and accountability, poor management of some learning institutions, over reliance of donor funding in development projects/programmes, unsustainability of programmes/projects, child labour, and increasing numbers of destitute/street children. FPE initiative aims at addressing the challenges relating to access. However, close monitoring and evaluation are important in ensuring programme sustainability.

