

Factors Contributing to the Current Academic Performance of both Private Primary Schools and Public Primary Schools: A Case of Kitale Municipality, Kenya

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Abstract

There have been current controversial discussions concerning the performance of private primary schools versus public primary schools in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination (K.C.P.E.). Lately, the private primary schools appear to be performing better than public primary schools. For example; in the 2003 K.C.P.E. results more than 31% of the top 100 candidates came from private schools; in the 2004 K.C.P.E. results more than 92% of the top 100 candidates came from private schools. In January 2005, 68% of admissions to national schools came from private schools (MOEST, 2005). In 2006, though more than 60% of the top 100 positions were taken by private schools most of the public primary schools showed improvement. This performance has elicited all kinds of reactions from political leaders and educationists. Among them the question; why are the performances as such? And what factors contribute to the performances? This paper therefore sought to establish the factors that contribute to the current academic performance of these schools. The paper made use of ex post facto research design. Simple random sampling was used to select eight public and eight private primary schools in Kitale Municipality. Through interviews and questionnaires the teachers and the administrators provided information on enrollment, academic performance, teacher-pupil ratio and factors leading to the current performance. The work was based on the systems theory which postulates that a school is like a factory that has inputs and outputs. Inputs have to undergo a process and outputs tested for their quality. It justifies the use of tests as a measure of academic performance. The government needs to step up financial and material support to public schools to cater for high enrolment due to F.P.E. program. It is hoped that educational stakeholders including teachers, parents, policy makers and students will benefit from the study.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Factors, Kitale Municipality, Private Primary Schools, Public Primary Schools

1. Introduction

Private schools are clearly doing better and sending more students to national schools and good provincial schools. There is an argument that students from private primary schools are poorly taught (Saitoti, 2005). They are drilled to pass examinations and nothing more. They are rich, cheat in examinations and poach bright pupils from public schools (Mwiria, 2004).

Normally, both teachers and the public believe that a low pupil-teacher ratio and teacher's high qualifications result in better performance in schools. However, studies from other regions, for example, Wad Haddad (1978) basing on the available data indicated that, no optimum class size could be scientifically established as a function of educational benefits. He concluded that how a teacher organizes and motivates the class was more important than class size. In addition, that savings made from increased class size could be invested in teacher training or educational materials, which had shown to have stronger effects on learners' achievement.

Available studies suggested that high or very low pupil - teacher ratio was one of the main reasons for the poor quality and low efficiency, which characterized primary education in Africa. Many policy-oriented interventions and research studies considered a 40:1 ratio reasonable in developing countries. World Bank-Financed primary education projects were usually designed with an average pupil-teacher ratio of approximately 41:1. The pupil-teacher ratios vary between rural public, urban public and private primary schools. Educators and administrators of private schools believe that a low pupil-teacher ratio, which characterize their schools, boosts pupils' performance (Abagi, 1997c).

A report by Obbo "Has God blessed the rich pupils?" in Uganda, indicates that some private schools were specifically set up to soak up the poor candidates. According to this report universal Free Primary Education programme abolished fees, provide textbooks and exercise books free but it was not compulsory and did not take into account other factors like uniforms and meals. Children thus would still not go to school. This showed clearly that riches and poverty was not really the determinant of high and low academic performance respectively but there were many other factors that contributed to excellent academic performance.

Eshiwani (1986) studied the cause of poor performance in private schools in Kenya. The study concluded that the major cause of poor performance was lack of teacher experience. This stems from the fact that

over 50% of the teachers in private schools had taught less than three years. Opposed to such conclusion, Ongeti (2005) noted that children in private schools were performing much better than their counter parts in public schools. He argued that in private schools teachers were employed on temporary terms and they could hardly stay in a school for more than three years. Despite little salary that was paid irregularly, they produced good results. Studies show that teacher qualification in relation to formal education and training influence good performance. Schiefelbein and Ferrel (1973) revealed that teacher qualifications had a positive effect at primary level. Huron (1977) noted that the length of teacher training and student achievement was significant in Malaysia. However other studies revealed either negative or zero correlation in teacher qualification and pupil performance. In this study it is assumed that teachers' experience and qualification determines the teaching methods which in turn influences performance. The study was to establish if there was a difference in the methods of teaching in public and private primary schools and if they had any effect on academic performance.

2. Materials and Methods

The study used Ex post facto design through descriptive statistics as was deemed convenient. This study was conducted in eight public and eight private primary schools in Kitale Municipality. The target population was class 4 pupils. This study area was chosen because the district has a high population of primary school age going (6 – 13 years) children.

Probability sampling technique mainly simple random sampling was used. For the study, all the pupils of class 4 from the eight private and eight public primary schools were involved. A list of pupils was compiled in each school separately for both boys and girls and their mean score established. This sample of class 4 pupils was selected as these were the pupils who were admitted in class one the year F.P.E. was introduced in public schools. It was a homogeneous group that used the same curriculum (i.e. private and public).

Questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and observation were the methods used for data collection. The selection of these tools was guided by the nature of data to be collected, the time available as well as the objectives of the study.

The academic performance of both public and private primary schools was computed using t-test case II while gender and type of school interactions were made using ANOVA case II. The t-test is a measure of the difference between the mean scores of two (independent or dependent) groups. Data was analyzed at a level of significance of 95% or 0.05. The degrees of freedom were determined from the two cases. The value ($\alpha = 0.05$) has been chosen because the sample size is adopted from figures calculated on the basis of 0.95 level of confidence. ANOVA case II is a design that has two factors or more (two independent variables). In this study it was used to test variations in gender performance between private and public primary schools. It was also used as an indicator of interaction effects between, gender and type of school.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Factors Contributing to the Current Academic Performance of Both Private and Public Primary Schools

3.1.1 Teacher- Pupil Ratio

Table 1: Private Schools Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Private School	No. of pupils 2006	No. of teachers 2006	Teacher-Pupil ratio
All Saints	1711	48	1:36
Jack & Jill	411	16	1:26
Purpose Driven	268	12	1:22
Green Fields	149	10	1:15
Kitale Family	175	9	1:19
Mt Emoru	151	12	1:13
Aquinoe	149	13	1:12
Fair Way	99	6	1:17

Table 2: Public Schools Teacher- Pupil Ratio

Public Schools	No. of pupils 2006	No. of teachers 2006	Teacher-Pupil ratio
Milimani	649	17	1:38
Kitale Union	694	14	1:61
Township	860	16	1:38
Lessos	714	18	1:40
Chetoto	438	10	1:44
Muliro	694	9	1:39
Showground	279	9	1:31
Section six	347	8	1:43

The highest teacher- pupil ratio in private schools was 1: 36 while that of public schools was 1: 61. The lowest teacher- pupil ratio was 1: 12 in private schools while the lowest pupil-teacher ratio in public schools was 1:31. This observation supports the literature review on high teacher-pupil ratio being higher in public schools than private schools. Such a ratio limited teachers' close supervision of pupils' work affecting performance. The District Statistics Office indicated an average of 1:37 teacher-pupil ratio in public primary schools. The average teacher pupil ratio of class four in private schools was 1:20 while that of public primary schools was 1:42. This was higher than the District Statistics Office average.

3.2 Teaching-Learning Contact Hours

Okwach and Odipo (1997) in their study, private primary schools had the highest total time utilized in student's learning hours compared to public primary schools. In this study it was observed that whereas private school started their lessons between 6.00a.m. and 6.30 a.m. for upper classes and 7.00 a.m. for lower classes, public school generally started lessons at 8.00 a.m. They only started lessons at 7.00 a.m. for classes seven and eight. Lessons ended at 3.10 p.m. but are extended from 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m., and 6.00 p.m. for all classes in private schools, while in public schools extension of lessons was only for classes seven and eight. In private schools teachers had remedial lessons at night from 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. This revealed a higher teaching and learning contact hours in private schools. This advantage over public schools was due to boarding facilities provided in private schools. Teachers of public schools believe they could do better than private schools given boarding facilities. This was argued in relation to boarding public schools like Lugulu, Mukumu and Kaimosi boarding primary schools, which were doing quite well academically in K.C.P.E.

This study however, was based on class four pupils who most of them were not boarders. In private schools where they were boarders only one or two were boarders and the private schools with highest population had only eight class four pupils as boarders.

3.3 Social Economic Status (S.E.S.)

Table 3: Occupation of parents who take their children to public or private schools

Occupation	Private schools	Percentage	Public schools	Percentage
1.Business (small scale)	12	24	15	30
2. Teachers	10	20	1	2
3.Medical Service	4	8	1	2
4.Civil Servants	7	14	4	8
5.Drivers	0	0	1	2
6.Pastoral	3	6	1	2
7.Counsellor	0	0	0	0
8.Farmers	8	16	6	6
9. Armed Service	3	6	1	2
10.Mechanics	0	0	1	2
11.Masonry	0	0	1	2
12.None of the above	7	14	18	36

Apart from the above occupations few people whose children went to private schools were not in employment while a majority of those who took their children to public schools were also not in employment. Out of the 50 sampled parents' questionnaires 30% of who were in small-scale business took their children to public schools while 24% took their children to private schools. It is also clear that most teachers take their children to private schools revealed by 20% against 2% who took theirs to public schools. From the above results those who took their children to private schools could not be classified as rich. A good number of farmers took their children to private schools as indicated by 16%. It was only in one school that children were acknowledged to belong to the rich, majority of who belonged to mainly the Asian business community and a few large-scale

African businessmen.

However, there were also poor pupils sponsored in all the private schools. In fact one of them collected street children and tried to lure them and accommodate those who accepted schooling and catered for all their basic needs. The street children were taught Christian morals and were attached to willing families who assisted in catering for their basic needs where possible.

In both private and public schools it was acknowledged that the use of uniform made it not possible for one to notice those from the able families and those ones from extremely poor families. However, the main indicators of pupils from able families were; constant neatness, healthiness, constantly present in school, the type of food carried to school and parents close check on children activities in school. Those from extremely poor family lacked basic needs, lacked concentration in class, were timid, lacked self-esteem and uniform was not well kept. In public school despite free education some parents could not afford meals for their children, uniform and medication. This led to school drop-out especially children from slum areas. Welfare and Monitoring Survey Report (1997) categorized the district population as poor, majority being food-poor. The results of this study contradicted the idea that "the rich" took their children to private schools and that education was for the "rich".

3.4 Teaching/Learning Resources

Table 4: Public/Private Schools Teaching- Learning Resources

Public Schools	Private schools
Text Books	Charts
Wall Maps	Real objects
Charts	Wall maps
Real Objects	Pictures e.g. from magazines & newspapers
	Diagrams
	Chalkboard
	Textbooks
	Environment

From the charts and observation checklist, private schools make more use of teaching-learning resources compared to public primary schools. Private schools attributed their performance to a lot of exposure of their pupils to a variety of teaching-learning materials. Some of these materials were provided by parents on request by schools as donation or lent for a given period when it was required. Public school teachers and administration observed a marked improvement in academic performance after the provision of textbooks and writing materials to schools by the government. However, these provisions were still inadequate, as pupil-textbook ratio on average was 1:3. In private schools parents met all the costs of their children's requirements e.g. pupil-textbook to a ratio of 1:1. This enabled the children to carry home assignments and do them in time. It made teaching easy since the teachers were able to identify areas that needed clarification and pupils who were weak. The weak pupils are given extra remedial time to enable them catch-up. Private schools also engaged in field excursions, which exposed the pupils to real life situation, real objects and environmental variation enhancing their learning.

3.5 Family and Personal Factors

Oral interview with class teachers and heads of primary schools both in private and public schools, family and personal factors were determinants of school performance among other factors although it was agreed that self-esteem overrides all other factors. Family factors like parent education was seen to give added value because educated parents tended to follow up their children academic activities. This was because they understood the value of educating their children. Social Economic Status (S.E.S.) though not statistically assessed seemed to play a role in the child's academic performance both negatively and positively. Negatively in that, children from poor families tended to be withdrawn, lacked self-esteem and had poor health. Constant absenteeism and child school dropout was observed more with low-income earners who at times used their children as income earners for their families especially during their maize weeding and harvesting season. They were employed to earn some wages to supplement family income. In addition, those constant in school lacked concentration in class probably having gone without supper or breakfast. These poor families could not afford uniform despite free education - neither could they afford medication. However, some pupils from the same S.E.S did better academically than that from a higher level of S.E.S.

Children from able families and rich families were generally neat and were well taken care off in terms of basic requirements for their education. They look healthy and were actively involved in the lesson. However, those from rich families were seen to be extravagant while some did not take much interest in education, since they lacked nothing. In this Municipality single parenthood was said to have destabilized academic performance and general education of these children belonging to single parents. Personal factors are those that influence growth and development such as heredity (height, sex etc.), nutrition (poor feeding leads to lack of

concentration), illness (e.g. sickle-cell, malaria bouts lead to constant absenteeism which affect performance), and psychological instability lead to low self-esteem and withdrawal affecting concentration.

3.6 The Impact of Free Primary Education (F.P.E.)

The introduction of free primary education in the year 2003 was a challenge to most private primary schools as they lost some of their pupils to public schools. This made them work even harder to produce good K.C.P.E. results as an attractive factor. From the charts on enrolment however, the private schools in Kitale Municipality did not experience much loss since after one term parents realized there was congestion in public schools and a drop in their children performance took their children back to the private schools. Private schools in Kitale Municipality have registered a constant increase in pupil enrolment over the years even after F.P.E. provision in public schools in 2003.

F.P.E. encouraged high enrolment leading to overstretched facilities in public schools. Performance went low due to understaffing, over-enrolment, lack of self-esteem for the low S.E.S. pupils and inadequate learning resources. In this study area there had been a drop in the rate of enrolment due to insecurity, lack of boarding facilities and HIV effects. In addition children from low income earning families lacked basic education requirements like uniform, desks, food and medication. Insecurity in the periphery of the municipality also led to immigration increasing the no. of admissions randomly.

3.7 School Enrolment

Table 5: Boys & Girls Enrolment in Private Schools

School		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Jack & Jill	Boys	203	162	126	145	174	212
	Girls	192	163	142	147	180	199
Purpose Driven	Boys				87	139	126
	Girls				96	148	142
All Saints	Boys	548	584	685	714	834	846
	Girls	552	625	735	787	824	865
Green Fields	Boys	43	58	66	75	85	73
	Girls	44	52	64	79	86	76
Mount Emoru	Boys	54	50	36	44	66	75
	Girls	73	64	64	55	94	66
Kitale Family	Boys			35	44	60	82
	Girls			41	46	63	93
Aquinoe	Boys		53	60	85	56	63
	Girls		51	71	104	81	86
Fairway	Boys			21	29	30	47
	Girls			10	30	40	52

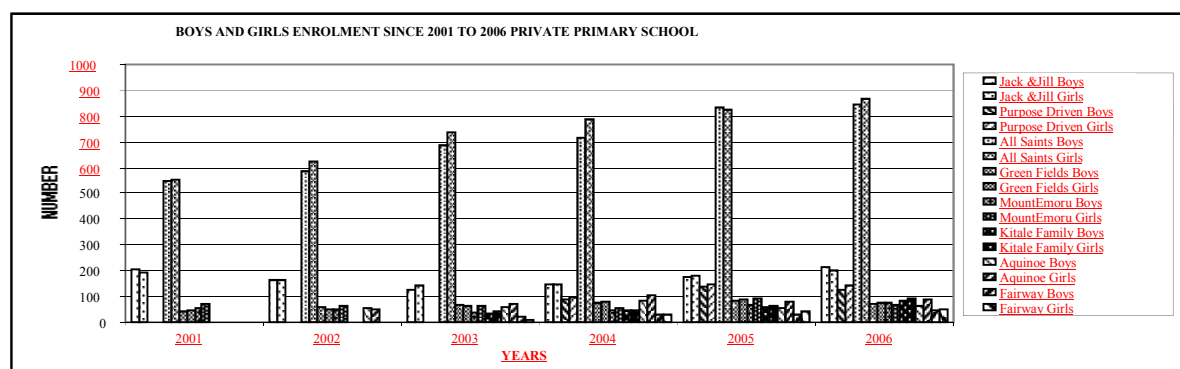


Figure 1: Observation: -Admission increasing steadily since 2001.

Enrolment varies from one school to another, one sex to another.

Table 6: Boys & Girls Enrolment in Public Schools

Milimani	Boys	234	226	301	291	328	331
	Girls	234	232	307	312	332	318
Chetoto	Boys	165	149	269	253	225	228
	Girls	155	144	259	248	207	210
Show Ground	Boys	77	110	143	147	144	151
	Girls	79	120	130	144	141	128
Lessos	Boys	283	297	340	371	350	364
	Girls	293	325	350	387	346	350
Township	Boys	295	293	310	332	282	273
	Girls	325	327	366	342	338	335
Kitale Union	Boys	333	299	341	336	387	419
	Girls	340	297	355	373	391	441
Muliro	Boys	111	125	204	228	288	309
	Girls	97	98	182	195	258	285
Section Six	Boys	155	154	187	177	178	150
	Girls	116	121	149	192	174	197

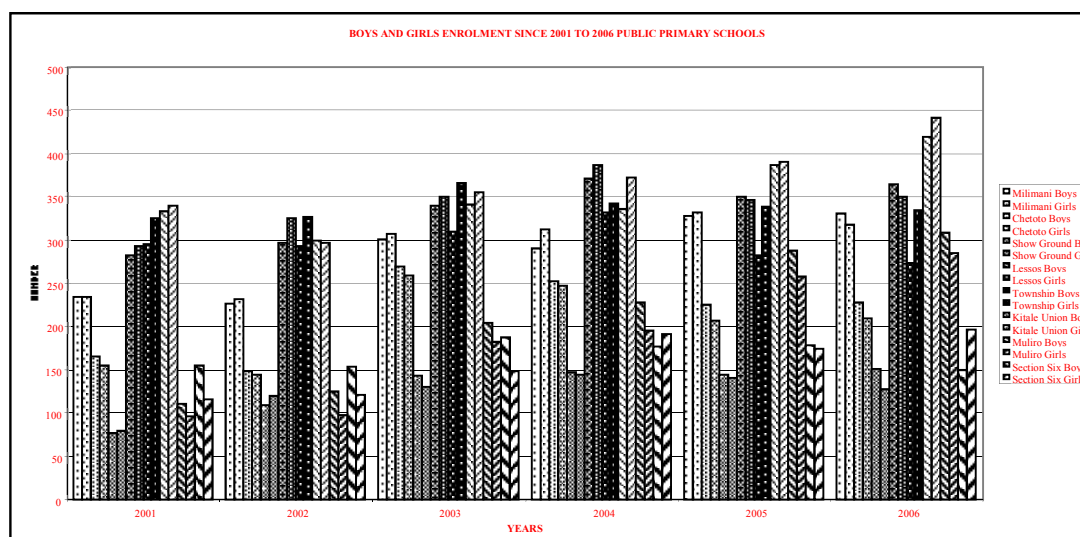


Figure 2: Observation: - Admission rate dropped slightly towards 2006.

Figure 2: Private-Public School Enrollment Comparisons

In most public schools enrolment for girls was higher than that of boys, true to the argument in the literature review that girls benefited most from F.P.E. programme and that they had been kept out of school due to school fees problems.

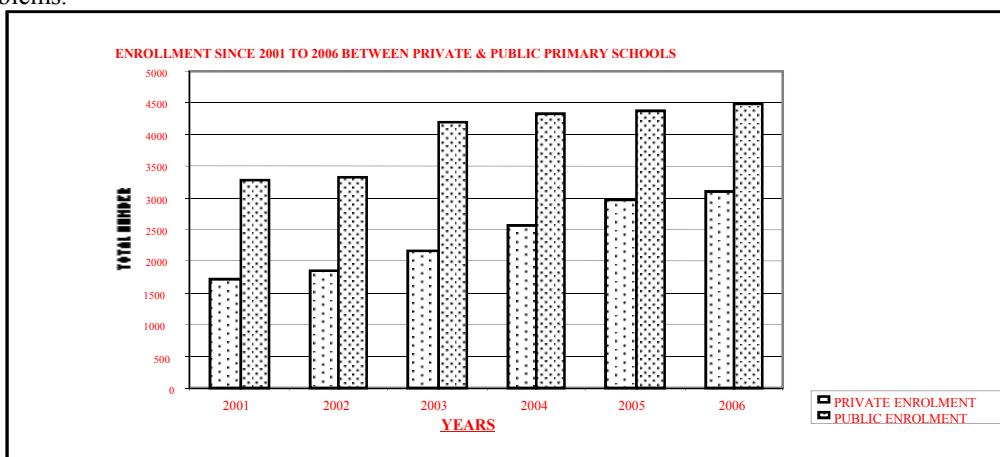


Figure 3: Enrolment for year 2001-2006 between Private and Public primary schools

Observation from the figures show that there was a higher increase in admission in public primary schools since 2003 to 2004 then gradually started dropping. And for private schools there had been a steady increase in enrolment since 2001 to 2006. The steady increase in enrolment supports the information given by the District Statistics Office, Kitale, 2001. This statistics showed that the primary school going age population (6-13years) kept increasing every year, which called for expansion of facilities especially classes.

3.8 Teaching Methods

Table 7: Frequency and Percentage of Teaching Methods Used

Public Schools	Private Schools	Percentage	Public schools	percentage
1. known to unknown	2	25	0	0
2. Child - Centered	4	50	4	50
3. Practical Teaching	3	38	1	13
4. Remedial Teaching	2	25	2	25
5. Group Teaching	1	13	0	0
6. Group Discussion	3	38	3	38
7. Clinics	0	0	1	13
8. Lecture	0	0	1	13
9. Field Excursions/Fieldtrips	2	25	0	0
10. Demonstration	1	13	0	0
11. Question-Answer	1	13	0	0
12. Assignments	1	13	0	0

The most effective method of teaching used by both public and private primary schools was child-centered indicated by 50% in both types of schools. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) advocated for this method in which, education was planned around the child i.e. needs, interests, ability and stages of development. The content selected for each class considers stages of the child's mental development. The ability of targeted children was considered, while the class teacher planned and catered for each individual.

Question- answer method advocated by Socrates (469-399 BC) was mainly a discovery approach of teaching. This was not preferred in public schools but a good number of private schools seemed to prefer it as represented by 13%. Practical teaching involving the use of variety of equipment had been advocated for by Maria Montessori (1870-1952). It was mostly used in private schools (38%) than in public schools (13%). This method valued teaching-learning resources and real things making learning reality. Demonstration, mostly used in private schools involved presentation of evidence to enhance memory, arouse curiosity and provide concrete experience to the child for example, use of drama and experiments. Group teachings involved a number of teachers of the same subject who shared various topics going in class together teach and give small exercises. They mark and did correction within a given period. This method was more preferred in private (13%) than in public primary schools (0%). Group discussion involved giving a group of pupils' work to do together through discussion or sharing of ideas. This method was used both in public and private primary schools, indicated by 38% respectively. From the results above, private schools used variety of teaching methods unlike public schools.

4. Conclusion

During the study it was acknowledged that a variety of factors lead to either high or low academic performance but no single factor could be identified on its own. For example low social economic status family, may not provide nutritional food for the child, may not see the value for education, may not provide the basic needs for the child, no proper medication and may involve their children in search for mean of survival for the family, etc. it would be vice versa for high income earners. Most of the factors tied around SES.

However, it came out clearly that most of the parents who took their children to private primary schools were average income earners or the middle class group like; nurses, teachers, farmers, business men, pastors mechanics drivers carpenters masonry, civil servants etc. It was only one private school that acknowledged their pupils as belonging to the high-income earners like the Asian community. Most parents who took their children to public primary schools were also from the middle income earners. Few poor ones had benefited from the FPE project. In addition private schools could be encouraged since they also sponsored good performing pupils from poor family and one private school was mainly rehabilitating street children by education and provision of other basic needs.

5. Recommendation

This paper recommends the following actions: The government should construct and equip a public library in the municipality and encourage pupils to visit and read. This would assist pupils from poor families that cannot afford to buy books. Here they can borrow and use the books for their own study and assignments. Private schools should be encouraged as education providers for those who can afford but the government should reduce

exploitation by controlling high fee charges by the proprietors. Guiding and counseling programme should be established in all primary schools. The counselors should be trained in order to equip them with skills and knowledge to deal with both social and psychological issues among administrators, teachers and pupils for academic improvement

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