



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Effects of Free Primary Education on Pupils' Participation in Primary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract:

Education is such a very important social service that ought to be freely available to all children and to be supported out of the government's revenue.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of Free Primary Education on pupils' participation in primary schools. Specifically, the study aimed at accomplishing the following objectives: to determine the influence of FPE on school enrolment, repetition and drop-out.

The study used ex post facto research design. Two sets of questionnaires were designed for the head teachers and class teachers and an interview schedule for the AEO. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting the study sample.

The sample consisted of 30 head teachers, 90 class teachers of standard one to three and one Area Education Officer (AEO) of the Bumula Division. The data obtained was analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics of mean, percentage and frequency. Findings show that the abolition of payment of school fees through FPE led to increased enrolments in primary schools. Between 2003, the year of removal of payment, and 2005 enrolments increased by 1351 pupils (96.1%) out of a total of 1406 total A pupil enrolment increment between 2001 to 2005. Although enrolments were highest in Standard One, the number of children enrolled in other grades 2 and 3 also increased, in the period 2003-2005. Standard One enrolment was 6205 pupils, Std Two was 5460 pupils and Std Three was 5383 pupils in Bumula Division, Bungoma District

The study further reveals that pupils still repeat in many primary schools. In lower primary (Std 1 -3) repetition was majorly caused by lack of pupil interest in academic work, health problems and unsuitable studying conditions at home leading to poor performance hence repetition. In upper primary (Std 4 -8) repetition was high in standard seven.

Head teachers admit few pupils in standard eight in an attempt to increase their schools' mean scores in examination.

On withdrawal, the study shows that the rates recorded before 2003 were higher than those recorded after 2003. Between 2001 to 2002, 1059 pupils dropped out of school compared to only 556 pupils who withdrew after 2003. Withdrawal was majorly caused by lack of encouragement by parents and peer influence.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made: -

- *The government should abolish all Levies, subsidiary to school fees and instead step in directly to finance and support all school projects and activities.*
- *The government needs to decentralize disbursement of funds to schools to the district level as it has done with the constituency development fund to enable them get the money promptly.*

1. Introduction

1.1. The History of Free Primary Education

The picture of education development in most developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America looks the same. Blaug (1979) reviewed comparatively and comprehensively this pattern and observation that in Japan and Russia, which have centralized state guided education, the base of universal primary education was achieved in 1912 and 1930 respectively. Blumenthal and Benson (1978) suggest that emphasis on primary education is both an equitable and a rational strategy for future expansion.

The history of attempts to make primary education universal in Africa is not long (Omar, 1983). Serious efforts in many countries began after independence in the early 1960s. Thirty-five ministers for education of the Africa member states of United Nations (UN) met in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in 1961 to review the education in Africa (UNESCO, 1961). This conference resolved to achieve a desirable educational pyramid and have basic personnel to move on to universal education of high quality that is free and compulsory, with a practical bias to reduce urban migration of school learners. Referring to the Report of the conference, Sheffield (1973) wrote: ``primary and adult education was to be developed at the same time with a goal of universal literacy in 1980`` (Sheffield, 1973:69).

The need for a free universal education was also stressed in 1977 during an assembly of the world confederations of organizations of the teaching professions (WCOTP). Focusing on compulsory education the assembly declared that:

The youth of world has an inherent right to participate in a free education system. Universal education should be made available for all children and the wealth of the world be harnessed to enable the nations, provide free compulsory Education (WCOTP's Assemble; 1971: 1).

The attainment of universal primary education in Kenya is a major goal in the government development. Universal primary Education (UPE) was first articulated in Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 in which the government committed itself to eradicating ignorance, poverty and diseases (Ongwaye, 2003).

The right to education originates from the 1948 United nations (UN) General Assembly, which adopted the Universal Declaration of Human rights stipulated in Article 26, that:

- Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (ages 6-12). Elementary education shall be compulsory.
- Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among nations, racial groups and among religious groups and shall further activities of the UN.
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. Illiteracy, according to Gillette (1972) is a flagrant denial of a human right. Just like a right to life, education is part of human life.

Free education was therefore hoped to be going to cater for those who could not finance their education as well as curb absenteeism, improve performance and check repetition and premature withdrawal rates.

1.2. Enrolment Fluctuations

In most third world countries, the greatest expansion in enrolment h occurred at the primary level since it is both the base of the educational pyramid and the level of schooling most accessible to members of the society (Carnoy, 1971). Okwachi (2003) says the large turn outs of children when schools re-opened in first term 2003 was an individual that the majority of the school age children were denied education due to unnecessary levies. Okwachi says, by declaring free primary education, the government has shown that it is ready to increase education opportunities to all and systematically revitalize this important sector. The aim of FPE is to increase enrolment in schools and curb drop outs (Mugo & Njeri, 2003). Nyagah (2003) says millions of children who had dropped out of school because of lack of fees are expected to go back to education. He says an estimated 3.3 million children between the ages of three and six had dropped out but many will be going back to class.

1.3. Repetition and Premature Withdrawal

A number of studies have shown the regional auspices of a school – whether rural or urban location, and level of regional development – to be important in determining repetition and/or dropout. This status is often combined with the effects of pupil's socio-economic background.

Early studies in the rural United States provide valuable insights into what appears to be one of the most important factors governing school attendance – the opportunity costs of pupils' time. Mcntire (1918) and Folks (1920) reported a strong influence of seasonal farm demands on pupils attendance. Mcntire (1918) noted that farm and housework were responsible for nearly half the absences.

Retardation in school work was found coincident with non-attendance. This was found to lead to drop outs. Reavis (1928) who also examined a number of important factors in rural United States, found distance from school to be important determining variable, and to a lesser extent, the salary, educational level, and experience of the teacher. In many developing countries distance from school and the opportunity cost of student's time are acknowledged as some of the important factors influencing attendance, and therefore repetition and dropping.

In their Indian study of elementary and middle level schools Sharma and Sapra (1971) found dropouts and non-dropouts to differ in their attendance rates. Pupils with less than a 60 percent attendance rate were seen to be potential dropouts. In their Nicaraguan study, Jamison and McNlly (1975) found attendance to fluctuate with the farming calendar in rural areas. Agricultural family status was found to be significantly related to non-attendance. This finding is further corroborated by some evidence from East Africa. Mbilinyi (1969, 1974) found regional and locational effects in Tanzania to be less important than the sex of the child, family background and the traditional social structure and stratification among peasants, and traders in the rural areas. His findings indicated that the primary school intake in Tanzania is drawn from the rich and to a certain extent middle level peasants.

From the findings of the above cited studies, we may anticipate to find that in Kenya, repeaters and dropouts are more likely to be from rural than urban schools. We would also expect more female than males to be repeaters or dropouts and more repeaters and dropouts to come from agricultural and pastoralist's families than from non-agricultural and non-pastoralists families. In Kenya, the great majority of the population, work on the land and derive most of their income from farming. It has therefore been observed that poor families who cannot afford to hire extra help find it necessary to draw children from school to work in the family farm or look after cattle (Raju, 1973).

The magnitude of repetition and withdrawal is much higher than it is often thought and despite promotion of enrolments by free education. There is evidence to show that during the 1970s, government policies acted as cause and result of much repetition and withdrawal (Nkinyangi, 1980). The Briggs group (1973) in 1952 made enquiries into the causes of withdrawal based on the opinions of hundreds of people. They agreed that the main causes of withdrawal were: -

- The distance from home to school.
- Poor school buildings.
- Dull and boring lessons.
- Overcrowded classrooms.
- Lack of school furniture.
- The need to work at home on the land or with cattle.
- School fees.
- Repetition of standards.

In 1970, a survey was carried by the education department of the University of Nairobi on the causes of withdrawal, which came up with the same findings as the Briggs group (Raju, 1972). In their Nicaraguan study, Jamison and McNally (1975) found teacher experience to have a positive, significant effect on school attendance. Larger classes (typical of some poor schools and a spreading thin of scarce educational resources) were found to have a significant effect on attendance. This finding implies that attendance figures reflect demand for high quality classroom interaction of experienced teacher and small pupil-teacher ratios.

In Kenya, large numbers of pupils were seen to drop out in standard 1 after the government `abolished` school fees at the beginning of 1974. This may be seen as the effect of swollen numbers and the need for school committees to charge `building fees` to put up new facilities and provide other amenities necessary to meet the enrolments explosion (Ministry of Education, Annual Report, 1974). While the popular demand for schooling has risen, there is mounting evidence that rapid expansion has created a new set of formidable problems: - rising unit costs (Coombs, 1968), and educated unemployment (Shiffield, 1967; Kinyanjui, 1972; and Stewart, 1976).

The 1971 and 1974 World Bank education sector working papers (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) (IBRD) 1971, 1974) also lamented that as enrolments expanded it became difficult, often impossible for educational systems to maintain quality and efficiency. Facilities like classrooms, equipment and teaching materials did not keep pace with the expanding number of pupils. Teacher training lagged behind and the qualification and experience of the teaching force declined. This created serious problems in organization, planning, evaluation and supervision needed to meet the challenge of expansion. The cumulative effect of all these factors was reflected in higher dropout and repeater rates.

There is also increasing polarization in access and promotion based on social class. This is seen in social – economic profiles of drop outs, repeaters and successful pupils, and in the fact that middle and upper class are over represented in their education. These inequalities are further aggregated by differences in the quality of teachers` education, facilities and other inputs between schools serving different geographical areas and income groups (IBRD, 1974). Shiffield (1971) observes that primary school pupils who either dropout before the end of the cycle or fail to go secondary schools are rising in number in Africa. The problem with them is that they are unable either to find a job or places to be admitted in secondary schools. In Kenya, it is estimated that half of those who enter primary school complete the cycle and those reaching standard eight, approximately a quarter go to secondary (court and Ghai, 1974, Radio, 1974, Raju, 1973) There are also high repetition rates at virtually all grades in the primary schools (King; 1974)

To support these early scholars, Otieno, Oduor and Yusuf (2005) said that the Kenya National Association of parents was outraged that more than 340,000 pupils who sat last years, KCPE would miss form one places. The association said:

It is wrong for the Ministry for Education, prof. George Saitoti to talk about more than 300,000 pupils missing form one places without offering alternatives. We would hate to see a lot of standard eight drop outs who have nothing to do. It is shame that our government does not have a concrete plan for the large number of children graduating from primary schools (Otieno, et al. 2005:4).

There is good evidence and sound arguments in regard to premature withdrawal from schools as a serious waste from the point of view of both child and parents and government. Withdrawal is a total loss of effort and resource. A child who withdraws may have deprived a child who would have persevered of a place (Gadgil, 1955). It becomes necessary therefore to establish the level of repetition and withdrawal in Bumula division since FPE was introduced in 2003 with an aim of finding a solution to the problem.

2. Research Design and Methodology

Borg & Gall (1989) define research design as procedures used by the researcher to explain relationships between variables to form subjects into groups administer and analyze data. This study was conducted as an ex – post facto study. An ex post facto research deals with research variables that have already occurred and thus they cannot be manipulated or be deliberately arranged through the intervention of the researcher (best and Kahn, 1989). The study involved the variables of enrolment, repetition, drop out, education funding and hidden cost of schooling. These variables are independent and manipulatable. These effects of FPE have already occurred and therefore cannot be changed, altered or prevented from occurring. One can only achieve evaluation not by manipulation of the variables but selecting of individuals in whom the variable is present, absent and or weak or strong.

Mulusa (1988) defines target population as a group or category which has one or more characteristics common and has been selected as a focus of study. It is also known as the ``universe`` and it is this group that a researcher wishes to generalize the results of the research.

The target population for this study consisted of 84 head teachers (all heads of the 84 primary schools), 252 class teachers of Std. one to three (each school has at least a class for each class) and the AEO.

A total of 30 primary schools were randomly selected for the study. To select the 30-sample schools from the population, simple random sampling method was used because the target population is homogeneous (only day mixed public schools). The head teacher and only one class teacher in each class was selected purposively because they have interacted with pupils closely. In total 30 head teachers and 90 class teachers were used in the study.

The main research instrument in this study was the questionnaire. It was chosen because it helped the respondents to give answers even to sensitive questions especially as they were not required to indicate their names. Three sets of questionnaires were designed by the researcher: an interview schedule for the Area Education Officer (A.E.O), a questionnaire for the head teachers and the class teachers of Standard 1-3.

The study applied content validity. This validity shows whether the test items represent the content that the test intended to measure (Borg and Gall, 1989). Content validity ensured that the instruments had covered all the areas to be examined. A supervisor in the Department of Educational Administration and Planning reviewed the questionnaires and made adjustments. They were further ascertained through the results of the pilot study

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage mean and frequency using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS). In analyzing enrolment and dropout, percentage was used to establish comparisons between years. For enrolment, the year of take-off of the study (2001) was the year from which the first percentage increases for the 2002 (over 2001 figures) was calculated. Percentage increases for the rest of the preceding year. This way, the year to year percentage increase was compared on pre-2003, 2003 and post 2003 to test for fluctuations in enrolment trends.

On drop out, the number of withdrawals with regard to gender was expressed as a percentage of the whole class for the particular year. This was done for the grades 1-3 in all the selected years. A pre-2003 and post 2003 comparison was done to test for any impact of FPE on this variable.

Frequencies were recorded in certain cases, for example, in the area of classrooms, laboratory and library facilities, and teaching staff. Percentages were used to analyze data on repetition, causes of withdrawal and hidden costs of schooling.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Fluctuation in Enrolment

The study looked at three levels; standard 1 – 3 in trying to arrive at yearly total enrolments. Standard 1 – 3 were chosen because they are mainly affected by newly registered beginners who join school at the start of the year. This way the total enrolments for pre-2003, (year of introduction of FPE) and post 2003 years were extracted. The study covered 2001 – 2005.

In the presentation of the findings, three periods, that is pre-2003, 2003 and post 2003 are compared. Pre-2003 period include 2001 – 2003, and post 2003 include 2004 – 2005. Table 1 given below shows total class enrolment between 2001 – 2005.

Total Standard	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	831	756	805	814	1044	991	1044	1014	1072	1040	9411
2	802	725	784	782	849	850	919	912	992	938	8553
2	758	656	706	692	883	856	859	893	956	936	8195
Total	2391	2137	2295	2288	2776	2697	2822	2819	3020	2914	26159

Table 1: Total class enrolment between 2001 – 2005 in the sampled schools
N=22

- Pre-2003 Enrolment
 - 2002/2003 period

Enrolment increment was experienced in different schools before 2003. The total enrolment for 2001 was 4528 pupils and the enrolment for 2002 was 4583 pupils in the sampled schools in Bumula Division.

Therefore, the increment in total enrolment of 2002 over 2001 was 55 pupils (1.2%). For the males, enrolment decreased by 4.0%. For the females, enrolment increased by 7.1% as shown in Table 2 below.

Gender	Enrolment increment	Percent
Male	0	0
Female	151	7.1
Total	151	7.1

Table 2: Enrolment increment by gender and total in the period 2002 over 2001
N=22

The findings show that more girls enrolled than boys in the period 2001 to 2002 as shown in the Table 2 above. Female enrolment increased by 151 pupils between 2001 to 2002.

As regards class enrolment, the findings are shown in Table 6.

Class	Enrolment increment	Percent
1	32	45.0
2	39	55.0
3	0	0
Total	71	100.0

Table 3: Class enrolment increment 2002 over 2001
N=22

From the table Std 2 had the highest enrolment increment of 39 pupils (45%). Std 3 enrolment dropped by 22.5%.

- 2003 over 2002 period

The period witnessed greatest enrolments in nearly all schools (see Table 4)

Gender	Enrolment increment	Percent
Male	481	10.5
Female	409	9.0
Total	890	19.4

Table 4: Enrolment increment by gender and total, 2003/2002
N=22

The total enrolment for 2002 was 4583 pupils and enrolment for 2003 was 5473 pupils. Therefore, total increment in enrolment was 890 pupils (19.4%). Males increased by 10.5% while females by 9.0%. More boys enrolled than girls. As regards class enrolment many pupils enrolled particularly in Std 1 as education had been declared free in 2003. Other grades also experienced high rates of enrolment. (See Table 5).

	Class enrolment	Percent
1	416	46.7
2	133	15.0
3	341	38.3
Total	890	100.0

Table 5: Class enrolment increment, 2003/2002
N=22

- Post 2003 enrolments

The high increments of 2003 over 2002 were repeated. Std 1 had the highest enrolment although the enrolment of other grades was also high (See table 6).

Gender	Enrolment increment	Percent
Male	46	0.8
Female	122	2.4
Total	168	3.2

Table 6: Enrolment increment by gender and total, 2004/2003
N=22

The total enrolment for 2003 was 5473 pupils and enrolment for 2004 was 5641 pupils.

During this period enrolment increased by 168 pupils (3.2%). Male increment was 0.8% while for the female it was 2.4%. As regards class enrolment the findings are shown in Table 7.

Class	Enrolment increment	Percent
1	23	13.6
2	132	78.6
3	13	7.7
Total	168	100.0

Table 7: Class enrolment increment in the period 2004 over 2003
N=22

From the table Std one had the highest enrolment increment of 46.7% Std 2 had an increment of 38.3% while Std 3 had an increment of 14.9%.

- 2005/2004 period

As shown in Table 8 the 2005/2004 period enrolment were also high like those of 2003 – 2004. Increments were witnessed in virtually all the grades.

Gender	Enrolment increment	Percent
Male	198	3.5
Female	95	1.7
Total	293	5.2

Table 8: Enrolment by gender and total in 2005/2004
N=22

The total enrolment for 2004 was 5641 pupils and enrolment for 2005 was 5934 pupils. Hence overall change in enrolment between 2004 – 2005 was 293 pupils (5.2%). Male enrolment was 3.5% while female increment was 1.7%. As regards class enrolment increment the findings are shown in table 9

Class	Enrolment	Percent
1	54	18.4
2	99	33.8
3	140	47.8
Total	293	100.0

Table 9: Class enrolment in the period 2005/2004
N=22

From the table Std 3 had the highest enrolment increment of 47.8%, std 2 had 33.8% while Std 1 had 18.4%

From the findings, enrolment fluctuated between increases and decreases. However, a pronounced increase in enrolment was witnessed during and after 2003, the year FPE was introduced. Male was slightly more than females` enrolment. This was particularly evident in the post 2003 period. Nkinyangi (1980) argued that parents were biased in providing education to their children and favoured males to females.

In summary, it is evident that free primary education has resulted in increased enrolments.

3.2. Repetition

Although free primary education promoted enrolments, the findings of the study show that some pupils still repeat in various classes. Asked to state classes in which pupils mostly repeat, the head teachers gave the following responses as shown in table 10.

Class	Frequency	Percent
1	2	9.1
2	0	0
3	1	4.5
4	3	13.6
5	2	9.1
6	2	9.1
7	19	86.4
8	14	18.2

Table 10: Class pupils mostly repeat
N=22

From the table, pupils repeat virtually in all the grades except in Std 2. However, they mostly repeat in Std 7 given by 86.4% respondents. Asked to give the reason why pupils mostly repeat in Std 7 the head teachers gave the following responses to account for this scenario (see Table 11). From the table, it is evident the need for high mean scores in national examinations and better positions in the division made head teachers to deny some pupils places or chances in std eight. This reason was given by 68.2% of the head teachers. The findings indicate many schools still screen pupils in an attempt to do better in examinations.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Need for high mean score	15	68.2
Adolescent influence	1	4.5
Child labour	2	9.1
Cultural influence	1	4.5
Poor teaching	4	18.2
Aged pupils	1	4.5
Peer group influence	1	4.5

Table 11: Head teachers' responses on pupils' repetition

As regards the major cause of repetition in lower primary the class teachers gave the following responses as shown in table 12.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Lack of pupil's interests in academic work and therefore poor performance in exams.	61	92.2
Health problems	60	90.9
Unsuitable studying conditions at home leading to poor performance in exams.	60	90.9
Lack of encouragement by parents to study hard.	58	87.9
Poor facility in schools.	41	62.1
Constant absence due to financial problems leading to poor performance.	26	39.4
Poor teaching in schools.	21	31.8

Table 12: Major causes of repetition in lower primary in Bumula Division, Bungoma District
N=66

Ranking first in important as a major cause of repetition was lacked of pupil interest in academic work and therefore poor performance in examination given by 92.4% respondents. A pupil who has no interest in learning will not take his/her school work seriously. This will lead to poor performance in class and the child may be forced by the school administration to repeat in order to improve before can be promoted to the next class.

The second in position as a major cause for repetition were health problems and unsuitable studying conditions at home given by 90.9%. Some pupils repeat because they could have been sick. A child may also repeat due to health problems of his/her parents or guardians. Such problems make a pupil to be absent from school and in turn cause poor performance.

Poor studying conditions at home come mainly as a result of poverty. Many parents, particularly who are not employed or do not have a reliable source of income cannot give their children materials and facilities required for reading such as study rooms, light and textbooks (Mbilinyi, 1969, 1974). The respondents said that lack of adequate facilities lead to poor examination results. Lack of encouragement by parents was ranked 3rd with a percentage of 87.4 while the fourth in importance was poor facilities in school with a percentage of 62.15%.

In the 5th position was constant absence due to financial problems leading to poor performance with a percentage of 39.4. This means schools still charge certain levies which parents pay. These have been termed as "Hidden costs of schooling," and pupils who do not pay them are sent home forcing them to be absent from school for a certain duration leading to poor performance and hence repetition. However, out of 66 teachers, 83.3% said pupils are not sent home if they fail to pay the dues in time. It is only 11.7% who said pupils are sent home if they fail to pay. From this finding, majority of the schools do not send pupils home over payments. They have heeded the government's directive that no child should be denied access to education or sent home over any pay payments. According to the information obtained from the A.E.O, the government and donors are the financiers of FPE. Each pupil gets Kshs. 406 annually to cater for activity, maintenance, tuition support staff wages, electricity, water, telephone, postage and other expenses.

3.3. Premature Withdrawal Rates

The findings are presented in the order of pre-2003, 2003 and post 2003. Withdrawal rates is calculated for three periods: pre-2003, 2003 and post 2003 as a percentage out of the total withdrawal within the five years. Total class withdrawal is shown in Table 13 below.

Standard	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	96	103	73	70	39	56	33	41	33	38	582
2	98	99	60	64	46	85	99	71	47	61	731
3	97	97	107	95	45	65	34	32	24	42	638
Total	291	299	240	229	130	206	166	145	104	141	195

Table 13: Total class withdrawal between 2001 to 2005

N=22

- 2001 – 2002 period withdrawal rates

The findings of period 2001 – 2002 are presented in table 14 as shown below. From the table, total withdrawal was 1059 pupils (54.3%). For males, it was 531 (27.2%) while for the females it was 528 pupils (27.1%)

Gender	Withdrawal rate	Percent
Male	531	27.2
Female	528	27.1
Total	1059	54.3

Table 14: Withdrawal Rate by Gender and Total in 2001 – 2002

N=22

- 2003 period withdrawal rates

Gender	Withdrawal rate	Percent
Male	130	6.7
Female	206	10.5
Total	336	17.2

Table 15: Withdrawal rate by gender and total in 2003

N=22

As shown in the table above total withdrawal in 2003, the year of free primary education was 336 (17.2%). Male withdrawal was 130 (6.7%) while female drop out was 206 (10.5%).

- Post 2003 withdrawal rates

- 2004 – 2005 period withdrawal rates

During this period, total withdrawal was 556 pupils (28.5%). Male withdrawal was 270 pupils (13.8%) while female withdrawal was 286 (14.7%) (See table 16 below)

Gender	Withdrawal rate	Percent
Male	270	13.8
Female	286	14.7
Total	556	28.5

Table 16: Withdrawal rate by gender and total in 2004 – 2005

N=22

From the above tables withdrawal rate was high during the 2001 – 2002 period in which 1059 pupils (54.3%) pupils dropped out of school. This rate greatly decreased in 2003 to 17.2% meaning FPE retained many pupils in schools. Withdrawal rate even after 2003 was low (28.5%) compared 54.3% of 2001 – 2002

As regards sex withdrawal, more girls dropped out of school at an average percentage of 17.4%, compared to the percentage of boys of 15.5%. Therefore, free primary education has not completely stopped premature withdrawal in primary schools. Class withdrawal rates are shown in table 17

Class	Total withdrawal	%
1	582	29.8
2	731	37.5
3	638	32.7
Total	1951	100.0

Table 17: Class withdrawal rates, 2001 – 2005

N=22

The findings show Standard two had the highest withdrawal rate of 37.5%. It was followed by Standard three with 32.7% and Standard one with 29.8%

- Causes of withdrawal

Asked to choose possible causes of withdrawal from a given list the respondents gave the following responses as shown in table 18

Causes for withdrawal	Frequency	Percent
Lack of encouragement by parents	57	86.4
Peer influence	54	81.8
Need for domestic labour	52	78.5
Health problems	50	75.8
Unsuitable condition for studying at home	49	74.2
Decision that school work not be beneficial	45	68.3
Fear of failing examination	28	41.5
Fear of punishment by cruel teachers	14	20.6
Pregnancy among girls	9	12.3
Financial problems	6	7.9

Tables 18: Causes of withdrawal in lower primary in Bumula Division Bungoma District
N=66

From the ranking of the responses, lack of encouragement by parents was a major cause of withdrawal given by 86.4%. Children may not know the value of education unless encouraged by parents and friends. Lack of parental support may cause withdrawal. In the 2nd and 3rd positions were peer influence and need for domestic and family labour given by 81.8% and 78.5% respectively. Families which cannot hire labour may occasionally withdraw pupils from school to work on the farms. McIntire (1918) and Folks (1920) observed a strong influence of seasonal farm demands on pupils' attendance in the rural United States, saying it is responsible for nearly half the absences. Other causes given by respondents were: bad company, natural calamities, gender imbalance, poverty, lack of role models, rebel conflicts, lack of teaching facilities and child labour. Asked on the gender that drops mostly out of school, 9.2% respondents said males while 90.8% chose females. The reasons for choosing females were: - pregnancy, fast maturity, early marriage, fear exams, health problems and peer influence.

4. Summary and Conclusions

Findings show that the abolition of payment led to increase enrolments in primary schools. Between 2003 – year of removal of payment, enrolments went up by 1351 pupils. Although enrolments were highest in standard one, the number of children enrolled in other grades; 2-3 also increased in the period 2003-2005. Standard One enrolment was 6205 pupils, Standard Two enrolment was 5460 pupils and Standard Three enrolment was 5385 pupils. Free primary education therefore greatly improved enrolment in Bumula division, Bungoma District. Pupils still repeat in primary schools. In lower primary (Std 1-3) repetition was majorly caused by lack of pupil interest in academic work and therefore poor performance in exams, health problems and unsuitable studying conditions at home leading to poor performance, hence repetition. In upper primary (Std. 4-8) repetition was high in standard seven. Head teachers admitted few pupils in standard eight in an attempt to increase on their scores in examination.

Withdrawal rates recorded before 2003 were higher (1059 pupils) than those recorded after 2003 (556 pupils). In 2003 withdrawal was 236 pupils. Therefore, the research reveals that free primary education significantly reduced withdrawal. Withdrawal was majorly caused by lack of encouragement by parents and peer influence. Females were seen to be most dropping out of school at an average of 17.4%.

Although FPE increased enrolment in the schools, some of the problems it intended to solve still remain. The major problems are repetition and drop out. Not all pupils enrolled are retained until they complete the primary cycle in Bumula Division.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made in an attempt to make free education achieve all its objectives: -

1. The government should abolish all levies charged in schools and directly finance and support all school projects and activities. This will ensure all school age children go and remain in school to create universal education. The government should assist in the construction and maintaining classrooms, libraries, laboratories and provide desks.
2. Parents be educated on the importance of education for their children, so that all parents can send their children to school and encourage them to remain there until they complete the primary cycle.
3. Primary education is made free and compulsory and parents failing to take their children to school should be a court of law.
4. The government should decentralize to the district level the disbursement of funds to schools, to avoid delaying or even missing to send money to some schools.
5. Staffing should be improved to reduce the high shortfall of 490 teachers in the division and work load to the teachers.

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