

The Influence of School-Community Linkages on Child-Friendly Schools Implementation Process in Primary Schools in Kenya

Limo Alice
Department of Education
Management and Policy Studies
Moi University, Eldoret Kenya.
limoalice@gmail.com

Barasa, Peter L.
Department of Curriculum
Instruction and Educational
Media
Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
barasap@yahoo.co.uk

Kindiki, Jonah N.
Department of Education
Management and Policy Studies,
Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
nyagajonah@yahoo.com

Abstract

The concept of child friendly schools (CFS) was developed by the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) in partnership with the Ministry of Education to improve the education of Kenyan children. The study was an analysis of the socio-administrative influence on child friendly schools implementation process in Uasin Gishu County. This paper examines the role of head teachers in promotion of community linkages to enhance CFS implementation process. The study was anchored on Krovets Resiliency Theory of 1998. The study adopted the pragmatic research paradigm and the survey design. From 338 public primary schools, proportionate sampling was used to select 103 schools. This constitutes 30% of the total number of public primary schools in the area of study. The respondents were head teachers, class seven class teachers and 10% of class seven pupils in selected schools. Quantitative data was analysed by use of descriptive statistics that included frequencies and percentages. The hypotheses were tested by use of Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Qualitative data was organized into themes and described by use of narratives and reports. The study established a relationship between the head teachers' promotion of community linkages and enhancement of CFS implementation process. The findings of the study will be useful to the head teachers of primary schools, the MOE, MOH, UNICEF and other education support institutions.

Keywords: *Child Friendly Schools, School-Community Linkages, Community Participation, School Management Committee*

Introduction

The quest to protect the interests of children is an issue that has attracted local and international attention. Several national and international instruments have been developed to provide for the rights of the children. A number of instruments provide for the rights of children. These include Declaration on the Rights of the Child (Declaration of Geneva) in 1924, the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1959, the political covenant of 1966 also known as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (NACECE, 2002).

School-community Linkages and Child Friendly Schools Process

Kenya's education policies, since independence, have demonstrated a resolution to provide among others, Free Universal and Compulsory Primary School Education. This goodwill for education was further strengthened during the world education conference in Jomtien, Thailand and the Dakar, Senegal 2000 which signalled the emergence of a new international consensus, founded on the need for a quality basic Education For All [EFA]. Kenya being a signatory of the United Nations (UN) has shown its commitment to provide basic education for its citizens (World Education Forum, 1990). It is in these conventions that the Kenya Government affirmed its commitment to realizing Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2005 and Education For All (EFA) by 2015. However, this goodwill and concerted efforts may be lost due to a number of challenges that face educational institutions on the ground.

According to UNICEF (2004), a child's access to basic education is curtailed by a number of challenges. These include access issues that relate to long distances or no school at all in some regions; discrimination issues that are linked to cultural practices, discrimination against the education of the girl child and the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC). Other challenges as pointed out by UNICEF include poverty issues that render parents unable to pay school fees for their children, and the demands of child labour.

Schooling in Kenya is not fully inclusive of all categories of children. The Sessional Paper No 1 of 2005 (GoK, 2005) emphasizes the need to develop strategies to enhance participation of the marginalized children, e.g. orphans, those with special needs, those from slums and ASAL areas; expand the school feeding programme to cover children in all needy areas and to integrate children with special needs in the ordinary schools. A rights-in-education-based approach to education results in a child friendly school in terms of curriculum and school organization. Specifically, this calls for curriculum and schools or organizations with an educational agenda that supports the UN conventions on the rights of the

child. This means that deprived children and their families should be active participants in the process that involves them and not passive and dependent objects of social policy. Participation rights or rather a rights based education includes the freedom to express opinions, protection and having a say in matters that concern the child's life (Ingubu & Kindiki, 2012). This would prepare the child for maturity, having increased the opportunity to participate in the activities of the wider society and to take part in decision making in the family, in the school and in the wider social cycle.

School-community relations focus on how school learners and staff are viewed and treated by members of communities within which schools are located and vice versa. Members of the communities include parents/guardians with children enrolled in the schools and other community members who may not have children enrolled in the catchment schools. UNICEF (2006) posits that linking child-friendly schools to the communities is critical. Schools are communities in themselves and child-friendly schools in particular promote a strong sense of community. But schools do not exist in isolation. They reside within the communities they serve and so they must cultivate relationships with them. Parents avoid participation in schools in issues such as supervision of pupils' homework, use of local resources in supporting teaching and learning and support of lessons by allowing visits to local homes.

This paper takes stock of foregoing commitments and challenges and uses them as a base for strategizing for the provision of quality basic education as a basic need and right to all children in the country in a friendly school environment. The challenges facing education in Kenya are very clear, because of two major events in the last ten years: the increased public demand for quality education and the poor economic growth-rate which have negatively affected investment in education. Investment for education especially in marginalized areas has already targeted alternative flexible and community based learning approaches that suit the predominantly nomadic structures of communities. The marginalized child should be targeted wherever he/she is so as to improve the enrolment rates in all regions to the 104% rate at national level. There is, therefore, a need to improve the enrolment rate of these learners through establishment and strengthening community support in the management of education in Kenya. It is thus very clear that other localized interventions ought to be put in place to reach, the hard to reach children and retain them in the school system.

Adequate nutrition is necessary for children to become fit and productive adults (UN, 1996), capable of fulfilling their responsibilities in life. People who are well-nourished and educated are clearly more productive and consequently improve their own income as well as their contribution to the national economy (UN, 1996). For instance, improvements in health and well-being of women and their families through better nutrition contribute to reduced financial burdens and time constraints. Gained time and resources can be used for income-generating and productive activities or for participating in educational, health or social engagements from which women and their families can benefit (UN, 1996). Furthermore, implementing essential public health programmes, including nutrition and health education, and micronutrient supplementation, have been estimated to reduce a considerable amount of the disease burden in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 1996). For example, using conservative assumptions, the benefits of investing in school feeding will far exceed the costs even though this is one of the most expensive possible nutrition interventions (UNICEF, 2004). In addition, nutrition interventions can contribute to reducing the substantial health care costs for nutrition-related chronic diseases and for productivity losses due to nutrition-related health problems.

Child Friendly Schools Implementation Process

According to Bellamy (2004), a child-friendly school is a rights-based school. Such a school actively identifies excluded children and gets them back to school; acts in the best interests of the "whole" child; is a safe gender sensitive environment that adapts to the needs of children; promotes active participation through interactive learner-centred teaching methods and learning materials; assesses learners' progress continuously; consults children in the development of curriculum, lesson plans, materials and resources; is well managed with children, families and communities actively participating in decision making and school management.

The CFS approach to education reform is grounded on a commitment to each child's right to an education of high quality. The CFS may be defined in terms of five dimensions of education: inclusiveness; effectiveness; safe and protective school environments; gender responsiveness, and involvement and active participation of all stakeholders in the life and work of the school and community (Bellamy, 2004). The idea of a "child-friendly" school grew out of efforts in the 1990s to link the concept of quality education with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). At the dawn of the new millennium, the concept continued to gain momentum in two continents. In Asia, representatives from 11 South and Southeast Asian countries participated in the UNICEF/Save the Children "Child-Friendly Learning Environments Workshop" in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In the sub-Saharan Africa, the 34 countries

participating in the African Girls' Education Initiative integrated child-friendly and girl-friendly initiatives and indicators into their programme evaluations. Since then, the CFS approach has continued to influence basic education programming around the world (Bellamy, 2004).

Uasin Gishu County in Kenya was badly hit by the post-election violence of 2007/2008 that left some of the schools completely destroyed. Some children were displaced and are still living in internally displaced persons' camps, while quite a number also reside in urban slums where they are challenged by poverty. In the quest for quality education, the Kenyan government, in the Sessional Paper No 1 of 2005 (GoK, 2005), has made an attempt to define the philosophy of education, that is, "Education and Training for Social Cohesion as well as Human Economic Development." Despite the government's efforts towards Education For All (EFA) and Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the year 2015, a number of challenges have been cited which include low completion rates and high cases of drop outs among deprived children.

Bellamy (2004), Karuga (2010), Ingubu and Kindiki (2012), all note that a gap exists between the education policies on paper and the actual situation in schools. As a holistic approach to education, CFS maximizes pupils' potential for future development and strengthens the child's ability to participate actively in the society. Thus, CFS process would provide a strategy for maximizing educational benefits and strengthening the nation's human resources to support the achievement of vision 2030 in Kenya (Karuga, 2010). A CFS approach to education remains vital in accelerating national and international targets and commitments of vision 2030, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which emphasizes the achievement of UPE and EFA, the elimination of gender disparity in schools and the promotion of human rights (UNICEF, 2010; MOE, 2010). Despite the government's commitment to the CFS policy the schools' socio administrative influence is of paramount importance in the overall implementation strategy. The interest of the study, therefore, was to analyse the influence of school community linkages on the process of implementation of CFS in the quest towards the provision of quality and meaningful education.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Uasin Gishu county Kenya. The authors adopted a pragmatic approach. The choice and adequacy of the approach that was used in the study to understand the socio-administrative influence on the implementation of the CFS process is rooted in the underlying assumptions or beliefs the author holds about the underlying nature of the objectives of this research. The study adopted a mixed methods research design. In the study, the 338 primary schools were stratified into seven educational divisions, from which 103 primary schools were selected proportionately from the divisions. This represented 30% of the primary schools in the County. Proportionate random sampling was used to select 20 primary schools in Soy Division, 16 in Turbo Division, 18 in Kesses Division, 8 in Kapseret Division, 15 in Ainabkoi division, 13 in Moiben division and 13 in Kaptagat Division to make a total of 103 primary schools involved in the study. The researcher used questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussion as the main tools for collection of data. Each one of these is described in subsequent sections.

Results and Discussion

School-community relations focus on how school learners and staff are viewed and treated by members of communities within which schools are located and vice versa. Members of the communities include parents/guardians with children enrolled in the schools and other community members who may not have children enrolled in the catchment schools. UNICEF (2006) notes that child-friendly schools linked to their communities is critical. Capacity building and support for communities component has not been realized in most public primary schools in Kenya. Otherwise it would allow effective implementation of CFS and specifically school infrastructure programme (GOK, KESSP, 2005).

The results were as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Relationship between community linkages and child friendly schools implementation process

Statement	Excellent		Good		Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory		Poor		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%F	F	%	F	%	F	%
There is functional school management committee and child friendly school teams	23	11.2	86	41.7	64	31.1	20	9.7	13	6.3	206	100.0
The school management committee and the CFS is equally represented by males and females	23	11.2	59	28.6	57	27.7	32	15.5	35	17.0	206	100.0
The linkages with community based ECD centres promote child friendly schools	41	19.9	53	25.7	59	28.6	29	14.1	24	11.7	206	100.0
Income generating activities in place and effectively support child friendly schools	12	5.8	28	13.6	55	26.7	57	27.7	54	26.2	206	100.0
A high percentage of parents participating in school meetings is an enhancement of child friendly schools	26	12.6	53	25.7	70	34.0	47	22.8	10	4.9	206	100.0
There is evidence of community participation in the school development plan implementation in promotion of child friendly schools	12	5.8	53	25.7	68	33.0	45	21.8	28	13.6	206	100.0
Parents are interested and support pupil's learning at home and discuss pupils work with teacher	22	10.7	37	18.0	38	18.4	76	36.9	33	16.0	206	100.0
Outreach activities done by the school in the community	6	2.9	27	13.1	65	31.6	50	24.3	58	28.2	206	100.0

The hypothesis tested stated that there is no significant relationship between school community linkages and child friendly schools implementation process in UasinGishu County. The rejection level was set at 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected if the p-value or sig is less than or equal to 0.05. After testing the above hypothesis the results were as shown in Table 2 below..

Table 2. The correlation coefficient between school community linkages and child friendly schools implementation process in Uasin Gishu County

School community linkages	
Child friendly schools	r = .817 p = .008 n = 206

The results of Correlation Coefficient used for data analysis suggested that there is a significant positive relationship between school community linkages and child friendly schools implementation process in Uasin Gishu County at $p \leq 0.05$ significance level ($r = 0.817$) as shown in Table 4.8 above. This hypothesis was tested and $r = .817$ (204) and sig (p) = 0.008 was found. This reveals that $p < 0.05$. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there was a significant strong positive relationship between school community linkages and child friendly schools implementation process in Uasin Gishu County. Rise in school community linkages results to enhancement of child friendly schools process.

Focus group discussion was used to collect data from the standard seven pupils in the schools selected for the study. The pupils were put into groups of eleven members. In total there were two hundred and two focus groups in all the schools that were selected for this study. When the pupils were asked to state how the parents/guardians assist their school, some stated the following: “the parents/guardians assist in paying school fees, provision of guidance and counselling to the students, monitoring the progress of their children and provision of other basic needs required in the school”.

On whether or not the school and community was relating well, most of the members in the focus groups said that “the school relates well with the neighbours who sometimes visited the school wherever there were problems”. Some respondents, however, thought that “some neighbours did not relate well with the teachers and school management”. Some groups were quick to note that not all the teachers related well with some members of the community mainly because of personal differences and sometimes even political differences. It was noted, for example, that some children did not attend a school only a kilometre away from their home but preferred one that was four kilometres away because of personal differences between the school management and their parents. It is evident that school neighbours maintain silence in the neighbourhood to facilitate learning process. Further they do not trespass the school compound neither do they misuse school facilities. This enables a good working environment for both the teachers and learners.

On whether or not pupils visit the neighbouring homes for some lessons, most of the respondents noted that “at no time have we ever visited the neighbouring homes for some lessons”. The study, however, reveals that the community can be a very important resource in learning. Pupils could do very well in class if they could visit homes for English lessons where the elders could narrate to them stories and tales. They could also visit the farms for Agriculture lessons and the kitchen for home science lessons. There is, therefore, a need to involve the communities further in the learning that goes on in schools to attain a state of child friendly schools.

Recommendations

There is need to mobilize parents and communities further to enhance their role in community support towards provision of child friendly basic education in Kenya. The head teachers and teachers should strive towards promoting more parental involvement in education in schools. Parents should be encouraged to participate in schools’ academic work. This can be through organisation of more meetings that would empower the parents on their roles in CFS implementation process. Teachers could also involve parents further by taking school lessons beyond the school compound to neighbouring homes. This would work towards ensuring that learning is relevant.

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