Kenya's Education Policy versus Implementation: Implications on Wholesome Education for the Girl Child

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Abstract

The ultimate goal of education is to train an individual to fit in and work in society. Therefore, the education policy of a country is supposed to give a hint on what the education of that particular country looks like. This is because the policy contains the guidelines of how the system of education is to be implemented. In Kenya, the education policy stipulates wholesome education for all. It is well formulated, setting very clear provisions on wholesome education for all. However, there is a distortion at the point of implementation, an overemphasis on academic rigour, particularly, in covering the subject syllabus and scoring high grades in examinations. This is done at the expense of quality and balanced learning. The necessity for wholesome education, as stated, is to prepare one for life, in response to challenges that face humanity and to impart the necessary skills, values and competencies that help develop productive, healthy and globally engaged citizens. Wholesome education is, therefore, preferred so that children can be as good at school as they are at home, where the latter represents the family and the community at large. While wholesome education is necessary for all, it is particularly critical for the girl child since they will become mothers and caregivers around whom the family coalesces. With wholesome education, the girl child will equally handle what is learnable at school as well as at home, thereby, leading them to be better people in society. However, the efficacy of the policy can only be weighed against the level and method of the policy implementation. This paper therefore attempts to interrogate Kenya's education policy vis a vis its implementation. In particular, the paper purposes to investigate the implementation of Kenva's education policy in relation to wholesome education for girl children.

Key words: Wholesome education, Girl child, Education policy, School space, Home space

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a universal call, advocate for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which Kenya as a country has also domesticated. According to UNESCO (2017), education for sustainable development is one that involves wholesome training of learners through which they are able to acquire attitudes, values and professional knowledge, and not just limited to content learning alone. This expectation is anchored on the pillar that stipulates: "Learning to know, to be and to do (UNESCO, 2002, p. iii). This is further explained as the result of "a Wholesome and Integrated Approach to Value Education for Human Development", (ibid). Meanwhile, UNECSO (2017, p. 5), further terms this type of education as lifelong learning that meets the needs of the time. Specifically, this is quality education that ensures a well-rounded, wholesome and balanced individual, having developed all the capacities to meet the needs of the society: cognitive, critical, creative, aesthetic, imaginative and communicative.

Writing about wholesome training of children, Mokua (2013) recommends an approach that equally acquaints the learners with all the spaces within which learning takes

place. Only then can learners be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to realize their full potential. Mokua (2013) particularly identifies two spaces within which children's learning takes place: home and school. This in effect seems to suggest that for a child to develop into a well-rounded, wholesome and balanced individual, he/she is expected to be equally conversant with the knowledge and skills acquirable both at school and at home. The two teaching and learning spaces, were what this paper based its investigation on to rate the level of concurrence between Kenya's Education policy stipulation and its implementation. Specifically tracking the interaction of the girl child in the two spaces as our case study, this paper endeavoured to answer the fundamental question: Does the implementation of Kenya's Education policy meet the stipulations of wholesome education for children in general and the girl child in particular? The choice of the girl child and the methodology used to conduct the study are given exposition in the subsequent sections.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used mixed methods approach that involved both Qualitative and Quantitative research designs in collecting, analysing and reporting of the research findings. More specifically, the researchers used cross sectional survey research and case study research designs drawn from both qualitative and quantitative methods respectively. A cross-sectional survey design was used in the collection of data from a sample of populations and places as represented in Tables 1 and 2 below. These were used as a basis for inferring the characteristics of the populations and the places from which the samples came. The researchers used this design because of its flexibility in rapid data collection; description of the people involved in the survey; their attitudes; and their use of the identified spaces: (home and school). Consequently, the study applied the case study approach with the girl child as our target. As Zheng (2015) observes, a case study provides a more detailed account of particular findings. Indeed, this enabled the use of in-depth investigation of the current social phenomenon at home and at school as the teaching and learning spaces for girl child.

The Sample Matrix of the Respondents

Table 1: Sampling Matrix of the respondents

Categories	Target Population	Sample	Sampling
			Techniques
Counties	47 Counties in Kenya	2 Counties	Stratified
		(1 Rural &1 Urban)	Sampling
		Rural (Taita-Taveta)	Purposive
			Random
			Sampling
Teachers	All Teachers of basic	4 per school (male &	Stratified
	education in Nairobi and	female;10x4:40 teachers	Sampling
	Taita-Taveta Counties.		Purposive
			Random
			Sampling
Pupils	All pupils of basic	Primary Lower: 8	Stratified
-	education in Nairobi and	Primary Upper:8	Sampling
	Taita-Taveta Counties	16 x10:160 pupils	Purposive
			Random
			Sampling
Parents	All parents of basic	4 per school (male &	Stratified
	education in Nairobi and	female);10x4=	Sampling
	Taita-Taveta Counties.	40 parents	Purposive
			Random
			Sampling
Schools	All schools from Nairobi	5 schools each County	Stratified
	&Taita-Taveta Counties	Taita Taveta; 5 Rural	Sampling
		schools	Purposive
		Nairobi:5schools; Urban	Random
		schools=	Sampling
		10 Schools	

Source: Field data, (2020).

The Sample of the Schools Selected for the Study

The schools selected for the study are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Sample schools for the study

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Nairobi County		TaitaTaveta County		
1.	Loreto Convent Valley Road	1.	Ngolia Primary School	
2.	Langata West Primary School	2.	Mghamboni Primary School	
3.	Olympic Primary School	3.	Paranga Primary school	
4.	St. Nicholas School	4.	Kishushe Primary School	
5.	Moi Avenue Primary School	5.	Nyachea Primary School	

Source: Field Data, (2020)

For the purpose of this study, we stratified the 47 counties of Kenya into urban and rural, from which we randomly selected one county to represent urban (Nairobi) and one to represent rural (Taita-Taveta County). The authors purposively sampled five schools in Nairobi County. These were Olympic Primary School in Kibera to represent slum dwellings; Moi Avenue Primary School to represent the Central Business District and public urban; Langata West Primary in Langata Estate as the most depended on school in the estate, to represent middle class estate settings; Loreto Convent Valley Road – as an institutional private girl's primary school in Kilimani and finally, St.

Nicholas School a mixed private school owned by an individual and located in a suburban environment. For Taita-Taveta, we purposively sampled Wundanyi as perhaps one of the most rural sub-counties in the county. From this, we randomly selected five schools to represent the experiences of the rural settings. The process gave us the following primary schools; Ngolia, Mghamboni, Paranga, Kishusheol, and Nyachea.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved a cross sectional survey targeting sampled teachers, parents and pupils in the two counties: Nairobi and Taita Taveta that were sampled through stratified sampling and random sampling to reflect rural and urban counties in Kenya. In Nairobi, information was sought on policy implementation in urban environments, while Taita -Taveta provided information on rural settings. Both schools and homes were visited. We also sat in some classes while teaching was going on. For diversity, the study used several data collection instruments, which enabled the researchers to avoid the deficiency that springs from using one data collection approach. We therefore applied questionnaires; interview guides; focused group discussions and cognitive mapping for the ECDE respondents since they were not capable of offering textual responses.

The researchers developed questionnaires for pupils, parents and teachers. The questionnaires embraced both open-ended and closed items, with the following sections: background information, opinions on the activities carried out and time spent in the school spaces. The questionnaires also sought information on the activities carried out and time spent in the home spaces, the challenges faced and suggestions on how to address the identified challenges. We also visited Ministry of Education offices to gain more insights into the education policy, its implementation and the challenges faced. Besides, since our task involved visiting schools, it was necessary to seek permission from the ministry as per the ethical requirements.

Data Analysis Procedures

Having gathered information on how the girl child interacted with the teaching and learning spaces, we embarked on the processes of data handling: analysis and interpretation. With the aid of an analytical framework comprising of related questions, the collected data was analysed, described and interpreted in a systematic manner as per the research process. The analysis and documentation aided the researchers to identify the trends and patterns that would compare the provisions of the education policy on wholesome education and its implementation on the ground, while keeping in mind the position of the girl child in the implementation process. The observations of this process are explained in the subsequent section.

A Cursory Look at the Kenyan Education Policy

This section makes a brief introduction to Kenya's education policy with the view of establishing the objectives of primary education. A look at the policy is necessary for equipping the reader with albeit brief terms of reference, as we embark on the journey of interrogating its implementation. The policy delineates universal, free and compulsory basic education which emphasizes quality, equity, accessibility, affordability, and relevancy, (MoE, 2014). Meanwhile, according to the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat (2014), pre-primary and primary education should provide the learner with the opportunity to acquire life-long skills. These include literacy, numeracy, creativity and communication skills. The learners should be able to enjoy learning and develop the desire to continue learning. In addition, the learners are expected to develop the ability for critical thinking and logical judgment, as well as

appreciate and respect the dignity of work. These skills are core to the development of desirable social standards, moral, aesthetic and religious values, and the self-discipline, that may facilitate the appreciation of one's own and other peoples 'cultures. Finally, learners must demonstrate the awareness and appreciation of the environment, (ibid.).

The Kenya education policy places education at the centre stage of the country's national development agenda. It focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and skills for lifelong living and lifelong learning, which in essence demands for wholesome education. Thus, education in Kenya has a development agenda of the individual potential in a wholesome and integrated manner aimed at producing individuals who are intellectually, emotionally and physically balanced. The purpose of such education, therefore, is to provide quality education and training that promotes the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of learners. For that reason, it is expected to instil values such as patriotism, equality, honesty, humility, mutual respect and high moral standards, (EAC Secretariat, Primary Education, 2014, pp. 11-12). The philosophy of this kind of education is: Education and Training for Social Cohesion as well as Human and Economic Development", (Ibid, p. 12).

In summary, the key concerns of Kenya's Education policy are; access, retention, equity, quality and relevance and internal and external efficiencies within the education system (Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST), 2005a, p. 3). The question that concerned the researchers was: Are these concerns met on the ground? This paper was particularly interested in the two aspects of equity and quality. The concerns of equity arose because both Mokua (2013) and World Bank Report (2018), observe that big disparities still exist in terms of girl child access to education. On the other hand, the quality of education is still wanting.

Free Primary Education in Kenya was introduced in 2003, in recognition of its importance as a basic right of all Kenyan children. The introduction of free education caused an influx of children in schools. The numbers doubled, even tripling in some classes. But as Musungu (2015) observes, the infrastructure remained the same, while the number of teachers remained constant. A situation then arose where up to as many as over one hundred and twenty learners would be squeezed in a single classroom attended by one teacher. This greatly impacted the quality of education. Even though later the patterns started to shift slightly as some learners dropped out, the situation did not quite improve that much, particularly in public schools where the numbers still remain very high to date.

Although primary school education in Kenya is universal, free and compulsory, we found the systems of enforcing compulsory attendance of school by children lacking. Unlike Kenya, Finland and Japan are known to ensure that no child of school-going age remains at home. Incidentally, Kenya's education policy is well designed and compares very well with those of the two countries: Finland and Japan, whose education models have been applauded the world over for their inclusivity, equity and quality. Indeed, just like in the two countries, the goal of primary school education in Kenya is to develop self-expression, self-discipline and self-reliance, while at the same time providing wholesome education.

Interrogating Education Policy Implementation in Kenya

This section is an exposition of some of the aspects defining the implementation of the education policy that we established during our visit to selected teaching and learning spaces for children. The section offers a general review whose outcome later informs our discussion on the implications of the said implementation for the girl child.

Considering the objectives of education in Kenya, as cited in the previous section, it was notable that the country's targets are meant to achieve wholesome education. In particular, the focus appears to be on the acquisition of knowledge and skills for lifelong living and lifelong learning. The provisions of the acquisition, in fact, suggest an approach that is wholesome and integrated, thereby involving all the spaces in which a child's learning takes place, which for this study are home and school. The expectation here, it seems, is that children should be trained to fit in and work with/for the society. In this regard, not one space (home or school) alone can adequately train a child.

But as Stoneham (2013) points out, "academic rigour has become today's buzz phrase for schools in Kenya. As a result, the system of education has become shackled by the needs of syllabus, exams and positions on the academic league tables. Indeed, from our visit to different schools and discussions with the teachers it came to our realization that most activities obtaining in the school environment prioritized syllabus coverage and the passing of exams, thereby, confirming Stoneham's assertion above. According to Stoneham (ibid), therefore, the method of teaching and learning in schools is mainly focused on drilling for passing examinations, with a near exaggerated emphasis on tests and past papers.

From the responses of some of the teachers who felt free to share their experiences with the researchers, the apparent concern of every teacher appeared to be covering the syllabus. The pressure on syllabus coverage became more intense as the learners moved closer to exams, whether internal or external, and end of course final exams. Teachers then tried to device all ways of getting as much time with the learners as possible. They arranged for remedial classes to occupy any available time that appears to relieve the learners from classroom taught allocations. This took over the slots for physical education (PE), games, private library reading, debating and incidentally, even lunchtime when the learners were allowed only a couple of minutes to have a hurried bite before running back to class. This meant that all through the day it was work, work and more work inside the classroom.

Visits to the schools further established that more time for class work was created by starting classes very early. By the time the official start of classes reaches, learners were already one and half hours, or more, into class work. Weekends, school holidays and national holidays were also all targeted for class work. Of course, this type of working only meant one thing: the learner in the system was exposed to cognition alone. The other necessary dimensions of development cited by Bennaars (1998), such as creative, psychomotor, normative and dialogical, were missing as there was no time for these. Needless to say, the product of such a system would obviously not be wholesomely developed.

As observed earlier, the intention and decision to spend all the time for the learner in the classroom was in contravention of the provisions of Kenya's model of education, which itself was for all purposes designed to offer learners wholesome learning. It is perhaps because of this that the ministry of education has time and again declared weekend and holiday remedial classes banned. But as some teachers confided to us, this has not always deterred schools from carrying out the classes. School heads, teachers, and parents – of course with the cooperation of the learners themselves – have always made it possible to have the class sessions go on. On the part of the learners, the pressure on them to perform and their own fear of failing, coupled with a lack of confidence in their ability to work away from their teachers made them volunteer any time suggested to them for coaching. Meanwhile, on the part of the teachers, there was

the push to avoid vilification that may come in case the learners failed exams. But further to our conversation with the teachers, some of whom happened to be parents as well, we concluded that there was also an economic interest attached. Perhaps as a way of boosting their meagre earnings, the teachers enthusiastically encouraged remedial classes, which would normally be paid for by the parents. So, remedial classes seemed to be a double-edged sword that kept the teachers on the academic league tables on one hand, while lining up their pockets on the other.

Our analysis, even though, raised some misgivings about this remedial classes mania. For the teachers, it appeared to have compromised their professionalism because some could begin to see their learners as cash cows from which to get milk. Indeed, as one teacher who termed himself "anti-remedial teaching" commented: "Some of my colleagues no longer go to class at the designated time and instead push the teaching to remedial time where they know they'll earn a coin for the supposed 'extra work'". The teacher also gave further insights: "Besides, the practice of remedial teaching has enslaved us. We no longer have the time for our duties at home. Some of us have become absentee parents to our children and strangers to our spouses".

On the part of the parents, some complained that the remedial programmes had often placed an extra financial burden on them. In one urban school which is known to perform well in exams, the following financial requirements were shouldered by the parents in an education system that is known officially to be offering 'free education': a payment for remedial lessons (the amounts are different, for morning, evening, weekends and holidays); books; uniform; lunch; desks; watchman; school bus; electricity; water, games and swimming lessons and educational trips. Besides, parents were also to meet the salaries for the cooks as well as the teachers employed by the school board to address staffing deficit, both in ECDE and primary school classes. The calculation for the above items, as we learnt, sometimes demanded that every pupil paid more than ten thousand Kenya shillings per year. This then made the government's remission (quoted in Musungu, ibid) of about one thousand Kenya shillings per pupil, laughable. Consequently, many children dropped out of school in spite of what the government touted as free education.

The burden of hiring support teachers by the school boards was particularly bothersome. Indeed, one school in Taita Taveta which had only ten Teachers Service Commission teachers has had to hire eight extra teachers; three for the ECDE classes and the remaining for the primary section. The ECDE teachers would then be further called upon to teach some classes in the primary section once their learners left for home. The result of this, as we established, was a huge bill for the parents to meet. Incidentally, the amount itself, distributed among the teachers was in fact peanuts for those involved. Meanwhile, another school with eight classes – not including ECDE streams – each overflowing with learners, had only five teachers. This meant that some classes remained without teachers for a good part of the day.

From our observation of when the learners went to school and the time they left for home, it may be emphasized that school took up most of the active day's time of the children. Many of the schools we visited, particularly in the urban areas, opened their gates as early as six in the morning. This was because, those schools that used school buses to ferry children to school must have their buses on the road as early as fourthirty or latest five in the morning if they were to escape the traffic jams that begin to pile up and don't ease until as late as ten or eleven. Even those children who use private means must be dropped early, either to avoid the traffic jam, or so as to allow

their employed parents go to work. Similarly, those who use public transport must also time the earliest vehicles for the same reason of avoiding traffic jam.

We noted that while the rural schools didn't face the challenge of traffic jams, many nonetheless started early as the teachers designed to effect morning remedial classes aimed at covering the syllabus. And since the teachers wanted to utilize games time and after, children could often still be at school until as late as six in the evening, which brought us to the same conclusion: children spent most of their time at school.

Implications of Policy Implementation for the Girl Child

We submit that the above culture of class work after class work, of course was obviously likely to have negative side effects for the children. One was that, this fulltime engagement of learners in the classroom was bound to deny them the learning of other aspects of life. They were always likely to end up as classroom robots that cannot apply themselves outside the classroom. They could even end up being strangers at home since they spent all their active time at school. Meanwhile, while both boys and girls were affected, it would be more so for the girl children growing up to become women. This is because the patriarchal social setup such as the Kenyan one puts a lot of responsibility on the woman as the central figure around whom the family coalesces. Women have often been considered as home makers and some observers argue that the direction a home takes is the direction the woman of the home gives. That a home is as organized as the woman of the home. She is in fact charged with managing the family and giving guidance to the children (Mokua, 2013). Consequently, she should have a good grip of what goes on at home.

The above view of who a woman is, or what she is supposed to be immediately starts to put a strain on the girl child growing up to occupy that position, and as pointed out, already, both boys and girls need to develop in a balanced manner. They are both required to be equally conversant with the workings of both the school and home spaces, but there is a higher demand on the girl child because of what the society expects her to become. Consequently, the lopsided training that keeps children at school throughout, could be estimated to deny them wholesome education, therefore, wholesome learning. It is a fact that activities that can only be learnt at home cannot happen if the entire child's active time is spent at school.

Besides, as some parents pointed out, the decision to start operations very early and end very late also raised issues of security, with the girl child being the most vulnerable. This scenario particularly obtained more commonly in the rural schools where children walked long distances to school. We were in fact made aware of instances where girl children would sometimes be waylaid by male predators as they walked to, or from home in the dark.

Owing to the fact that children in general and girl children in particular, spent most of their time at school, it would be expected that they maximized the time for learning all they needed in life. However, as we noted, this was hardly the case. The school environment was not totally up to this task. This was either because the teachers meant to effectively mould the children were not enough, or they spent most of the time preparing them to cover the syllabus and to pass exams. This obviously causes worry because the amount of time society appeared to have left for schools to stay with the children, in effect, suggested that the former had surrendered all training to the latter. But as already stated, school was evidently incapable of performing the task as would be expected. We then came to the conclusion that as a matter of fact, children in the country were not receiving wholesome education.

Besides, while the country's education system stipulates the age at which children should join ECDE classes and how long they are expected to stay in readiness for joining Standard One, we discovered that some schools had introduced programmes such as "Baby Class" which saw children as young as two years admitted. Incidentally, this class apparently didn't have an official syllabus. The reason for this was that the class was not part of the Ministry's policy; therefore, its existence was, for lack of a better word, 'illegal'. In other words, the schools that had this class (mostly private schools) conducted them without official permission from the ministry. Consequently, each school conducted its programme in the way suitable to the individual school, thus, not embracing standardization. But again this also went to point to the way the implementers of the Ministry's education policy could go off the track. Was it possible that the ministry wasn't really aware of the existence of such arrangements?

Meanwhile, admitting children at such an early age meant that the child was not allowed to learn, to understand and fully familiarize with the primary home environment before being introduced to a secondary environment, that is, school. This, in our view, could be detrimental to the child's appreciation of the home space, thereby causing an imbalance.

As we have already pointed out, the girl child bears the brunt of unbalanced development more than any other member of the society. A girl child who grows up displaced from the home space is likely to become dysfunctional as a member of the community. While a boy child in similar circumstances suffers a similar fate, the impact is more detrimental if it is the girl child because of the woman's central role in nurturing the family as a mother, teacher and caregiver. Indeed, the woman is the primary educator right from conception, to birth, up to weaning, as the child is always with the mother. One, thus, concludes that the failure of a woman in a family setup bears great dysfunction for the society. The need for wholesome training for children in general and girl children in particular cannot, therefore, be gainsaid. Thus, there is critical need for wholesome education.

CONCLUSION

Kenya's education policy is well formulated with the policy setting very clear provisions on wholesome education for both boys and girls. However, there happens to be a serious distortion at the point of implementation. There appears to be overemphasis on academic rigour, particularly, in covering the subject syllabus and scoring high grades in examinations. This is done at the expense of quality and balanced learning. Balanced learning here suggests a wholesome approach to learning that equally acquaints children with both teaching and learning spaces of home and school, the former being the primary learning space and just as critical as the latter. Since the ultimate goal of education is to train an individual to fit in and work with/for the society, a kind of training that produces classroom robots is not likely to be beneficial to both the individuals and the society. Wholesome education is, therefore, preferred so that children can be as good at school as they are at home, where the latter represents the family and the community at large. Indeed, while wholesome education is necessary for all, it is particularly critical for girl children since they have to later become mothers and caregivers around whom the family coalesces. With wholesome education, the girl child may equally handle what is learnable at school as well as at home, thereby, leading them to be better people in society.

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