

Influence of Government Policy Intervention Strategy on Class Repetition in Public Primary School Education, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract: The Government of Kenya has issued several circulars regarding class repetition in schools as a policy guideline. However, since the issuance, class repetition is still experienced in most schools across the country. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Government policy initiative as an intervention strategy on class repetition in public primary schools. The study was conducted in Uasin Gishu County comprising of 445 Public Primary Schools. The study found out that, government policy initiative as an intervention strategy, has an influence on class repetition. The study recommended that there should be a review on the role of tuition in primary schools and enhancement of Professional Development for teachers by Government. The study will assist government, schools, head teachers and teachers to address the issue of class repetition in the country. A further study of situational analysis of Professional Development Need analysis for the 21st century be done.

Keywords: Class Repetition, Education Policy, Government policy, Intervention Strategies, Public Primary School.

INTRODUCTION

Every official action in education must be backed by a policy, which defines the decisions to be made, but does not make the decisions [1]. Policy provides a guidance that facilitates the decision-making and educational policies give the direction for educational activities in countries and schools. Furthermore, educational policy development, is a shared responsibility and it should be clear from the onset of policy objectives and the intended outcomes [2]. The formulation of education policy sets the stage of implementation, which serves the purpose of ensuring that, every aspect of the official action, must have a basis. According to Okoroma [1], educational policies are initiatives mostly by governments, that determine the direction and expectations of an educational system in a country.

McConnell [2] posits that educational or any other policy, may experience challenges within the implementation stages and may lead to policy failure in most cases. Gacheche [3] argues that governments throughout the world today, experience periodic policy failure and circumventing such policy failure is a delicate issue for governments. This state arises from several and conflicting goals to satisfy, such as, mismanagement of the policy design. Most policies are emphasized by governments, but they are not backed by research evidence, as Oduol [4] says that, an evidence-

based approach to policy, ensures that information is gathered, appraised and used to inform both policy making and professional practice. There is need for policy in education to be made within the context of research, so as to make well-informed decisions about policies, programs and projects and ease the implementation process, leading to a successful policy. It is important to assess prevention and intervention strategies that are supported by empirical evidence in education [5].

Class repetition depends on the political situation in a country as found out by Roderick and Nagaoka [6] in their study which pointed to the effect that, politically the implementation of class repetition policy, has had unpredictable history for new government and administrators might maintain the policy or remove it. This is illustrated in the United States by the practice of social promotion which had been in place since 1940s till the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) under President Bill Clinton.

Decision-making in education in Kenya, has been steered by a number of policy documents. Nonetheless, political ideologies and policies have often been used in order to win the electorate and have resulted in major changes in education [4]. Moreover, in some cases, crisis situations, have led to abrupt

decisions that have been ineffective and unsuitable to effect reforms in education. "The Kenya Education Sector Strategic Plan 2003-2007" noted that there was scarcity of stated policy priorities, and targets in important areas; and lack of effective participation by stakeholders in the management of the sector; weak sector monitoring and evaluation systems [7].

Education in Kenya has been found to have positive impact on human development and attempts have been made since independence to expand and have many children access it [4]. Kenya has signed the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 1948 and the Jomtien Education for all (EFA) of 1990 indicating the country's commitment to education of its citizens, which had an impact on the development of educational policies [4]. The Education for All (EFA) brought drastic changes on access to education in the country as Free Primary Education was re-introduced in January 2003, with the accompanying benefits of access, promotion and transition in basic education. Kenya through its constitution of 2010, provided a commitment to provide Universal Primary Education for all school age going children [3].

However, with all these efforts, the country is experiencing wastage, as learners drop out and repeat classes arising within a sector, which is allocated more than 30% of the national budget [9]. In their report, UNESCO [8] takes cognizance that, Kenya was still facing drop out, class repetition and low transition to secondary schools, though there is Free Primary Education (FPE) program. The Free Primary Education was re-introduced and implemented by the government in 2003, and has put strains on primary schools and increased disparities in the quality of education offered in various primary schools in Kenya [10]. The FPE as an education policy, is seen by many as more of a political strategy than genuine development project in education. When it was implemented, it faced myriads of problems eventually contributing to school dropout, class repetition and poor transitions to secondary education. Teachers were not motivated as classes were congested and high levels of indiscipline [8].

There are educational policies that have failed so far in Kenyan context, such as, the language policy where the use of mother tongue has been in policy documents since 1976 [9]. When the government revised the curriculum in 2002 and published the language policy in the local media, it sparked controversy as critics viewed the policy, as a waste of time in an era of globalization and the use of English in modern technology. Gacheche [3] argues that, for any successful implementation of policy in Kenya, a number of challenges need to be addressed and furthermore, McConnell [2] point that, government has to judge the resources required, feasibility and clarity of

goals and measures needed in the implementation process.

Class repetition policies in Kenya have been tied to the international commitments, the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 and the Basic Education Act of 2013. Several circulars concerning the occurrence of class repetition, have been in place since 1999 with banning of class repetition in schools [39]. Forced class repetition in schools has been experienced since then and the Cabinet Secretary for Education in 2013, was concerned over the occurrence of class repetition in schools [40]. Despite these circulars and policy in education as regards class repetition in schools, there is still prevalence of class repetition in primary schools within the context of the Free Primary Education in Kenya. Muricho and Chang'ach [11] observed that, since the attainment of independence, Kenya has attempted to formulate and implement educational reforms, but the recommendations have not served Kenyans adequately. Kenya, therefore might be experiencing policy implementation challenges in certain aspects of education.

In counter contemporary years, Frey [12] point out that the emphasis of accountability placed on schools, teachers, pupils and even education officers, has lifted expectations to a higher level and revived the debate on the use of class repetition as an academic intervention strategy. Schools have to perform to the expected standards as an indicator of quality which is measured by the standardized tests whether by state or district level as Wu, West and Hughes [13] argue that the utilization of testing has led to having schools, teachers and pupils responsible. Furthermore, Bali, Anagnostopoulos and Roberts [14] affirm that standardized tests are linked with educational accountability while Roderick and Nagaoka [6] posit that class promotion or inversely class repetition is based principally on standardized test score. The consequence of using standardized test scores as a decision making to promote a pupil to next class has led to decrease in class promotion in most countries [13]. Schools are placed under pressure not to permit pupils to move to the next class without having mastered the class level prerequisites by doing examinations for that class [12].

Class repetition literature refers it also as retention and was first defined by Jackson in 1975 as cited by Beebe-Frankenberger, *et al.*, [15]. According to him, class repetition is an action for retaining a pupil in the same class level for a succeeding school year. Furthermore, Silbergliitt, *et al* [16] argue that class repetition is a practice of requiring a pupil to remain at his/her current class level the following school year in spite of spending a full school year in that class.

Class repetition and social promotion debate is not new in education [14]. Social promotion or automatic promotion is viewed as a choice available, with class repetition being an alternative to those who decide to practice it [12]. The debate between the two policies of intervention being based on standardized tests, concerns how repetition or social promotion influences the pupil in the long run. Indeed, proponents of social promotion argue that class repetition practice has diverse outcomes. However, the critics of class repetition argue that, previous research findings indicate that, class repetition affects the pupil psychologically [17]. Bushra and Qadir [18] point out that social promotion is a widespread and controversial educational policy found in most countries and spurns from the critics' argument that it can frustrate the unprepared pupils and require teachers to deal with.

Whilst there are several effective intervention strategies that can be implemented to assist pupils, the number of approaches that can be used to enhance teacher implementation of these interventions, are not plentiful [19]. They further suggest that implementing an intervention requires that teachers are supplied with the necessary training before the beginning of the intervention measure in the classroom [19]. The framework suggests that there are reasons behind class repetition and ways can be developed to ameliorate the problem within the school and are referred in this study as intervention strategies.

While there are several types of resources, such as, online programs for identifying appropriate interventions, schools should establish an action plan that identifies these resources and ensures that they are regularly reviewed and updated [20]. Schools should adopt regular teacher training and the application of that training, planning for the teachers being trained and ensure that data is collected on successful implementation after the professional development. Teachers will need professional development opportunities to learn about differentiated instructional methods to use in the primary schools. Stuart, Rinaldi and Higgins-Averill [21] noted that [22-28] teachers play active roles in school reform efforts and are responsible for the implementation and success of best practices.

Whilst there are several effective intervention strategies that can be implemented to assist pupils, the number of approaches that can be used to enhance teacher implementation of these interventions are not plentiful [19]. They suggest that implementing an intervention require that teachers are supplied with the necessary training before the beginning of the intervention measure in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers are able to make instructional changes when receiving progress-monitoring data along with discussing with a curriculum tutor and receiving

recommendations for making instructional changes. They noted that, using teacher training strategies comprising classroom rehearsal and feedback, occasioned a better intervention as performance feedback provides direct information as regards the accuracy of performance of teachers while in a suitable setting in order to enhance and maintain behavior change

On the other hand, Shinn [22], is of the opinion that, intervention strategies are those processes that, are benefiting pupils and ensures that they benefit from the classroom instructions they are receiving. Professional development can influence teachers' classroom practices leading to improved pupil performance. Kratochwill [23] opined that, professional development has greater significance as a link between the teacher skills and the pupil performance index. Therefore, for any improvement in pupil performance which is related to class repetition, high-quality professional development should be effected in the teacher training and in-service training.

Parent involvement, through a combination of a parent's attitude towards education and school, and willingness to support the child by creating a home environment, that is supportive to doing assignments, are associated with high performance among pupils. Parent involvement is often a vital constituent of broad-based interventions strategies aimed at improving pupil academic performance [24]. The addition of a parent component in class repetition intervention may enhance the outcomes of other interventions [24]. Policy dynamics that support parent involvement, increasing understanding among head teachers, teachers and inviting parent's involvement in all aspects of their pupil's education, are proactive strategies that make parent involvement more feasible.

Yeager and Walton [25], argue that, educators should put precedence on finding out whether or not, the interventions they reflect on have been shown to be effective through well designed experimental research. Head teachers and teachers should carry out an evaluation by collecting information to assist in a particular decision making, as regards class repetition. It is critical for schools and education administrators, to collect evaluation data on implementation and outcomes when a new intervention program is implemented. The formative evaluation data, helps to refine the components of the program to make it work better in a particular school setting and the summative evaluation data helps the schools to consider whether the intervention program is yielding the intended results.

The study aimed at finding out class repetition intervention strategies in public primary school education in Kenya. Kenya is a signatory to international conventions, especially the MDGs

regarding education. The Kenyan government anticipated that by 2015, the EFA goals shall have been attained. But with class repetition and its associated effects, this goal may not be realized in the long term. Therefore, by studying class repetition intervention strategies in public primary school education, the Kenyan government can strengthen its efforts to attaining the EFA goals in the long run. Research based supported interventions have had major impact in improving education in many countries. The study therefore, has made recommendations on intervention strategies on class repetition based on research findings.

Most of education policies have been developed as a consequence of research and piloting of programs. To this extent, the findings of the research will form part of such an endeavor. Research forms the basis for policy formulation and master plan on how class repetition intervention strategies can be implemented in public primary schools in Kenya and other levels of education. The knowledge gained from the study, will also stimulate among education planners, administrators, researchers, school managers, head teachers and teachers the need for further research on class repetition since very little has been done on class repetition intervention strategies in primary school education in Kenya. The study findings contribute to the existing literature on class repetition and recommendations for further areas of study within class repetition intervention strategies.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The country has experienced high enrolment rate of 82% since the re-introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 and experiences class repetition in public primary schools. In 2013, class repetition was outlawed by the Ministry in charge of education [27]. It is documented that, 6% of pupils repeat a class among both boys and girls in primary schools in Kenya [27]. In a study on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, it was found out that the release of the results of this examination contributes positively to class repetition in Kenya [29]. Wafula, Wamocha and Epari [26], in their study of effects of class repetition on pupils' academic performance found out that, class repetition is rampant in Bungoma North Sub-County and contributes to boys dropping out of school. In Uasin Gishu County, more pupils are enrolled in class 7 than class 8, indicating an occurrence of class repetition and 4.2% and 4.3% repeat a class among boys and girls respectively [26]. Unless this trend is significantly reversed, occurrence of class repetition in primary school education in Kenya, will still be experienced [27]. No study so far has been done as regards the influence of Government policy intervention strategy initiative on class repetition in public primary school in Uasin Gishu County.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the influence of the Ministry of Education policy directive on class repetition
2. To determine the role of teachers on class repetition

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The mixed methods, as a third methodological development, could have surprising outcomes for future research in the social sciences [30]. Plano, Catherine, Churchill, Green and Amanda [31], Mixed Method refers to the combination of both the quantitative and qualitative research and its premise is that the combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach by itself. The necessity of integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, is to maximize the strengths and minimize the weakness of each type of data [32]. Pragmatism has gained extensive support as a perspective for Mixed Method researchers [33, 34] and it is involved with solving practical problems in the real world rather than on assumptions about the nature of knowledge [33].

The study adopted the Concurrent design within the Mixed Method approach. Creswell, Plano, Gutmann and Hanson [35] noted that, by collecting concurrently quantitative and qualitative forms of data, the researcher gets to contrast both varieties of data to search for compatible outcomes. A large sample size in either quantitative or qualitative sample will yield statistical generalization in mixed method study [36]. From the target population of 993, the researcher used simple random sampling to select 341 respondents comprising of 137 head teachers, 137 teachers, 64 parents and 3 Sub-County Education officers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study show that, 181 (70.2%) and 21 (8.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that, there should be an end to National examinations as a Government policy initiative on class repetition, while 32 (12.4%) and 24 (9.3%) strongly agreed and agreed respectively on the same. A national examination is a benchmark of quality education in Kenya and its termination may affect one of the measurements in quality. Majority of the respondents strongly disagree with any policy development that may abolish national examinations. There is no relationship, therefore, between ending national examinations and class repetition this is further confirmed by the interview through focus group respondents who observed that;

“Government has been wavering over national examinations which is unfortunate. Ending KCPE will be a disaster for our education system, as no measure of quality is in place and, it is a measure to ensure that teachers work and pupils are placed in secondary education.”

Ending national examinations shall not be an intervention strategy as a government policy intervention initiative on class repetition. There is a concurrence between the findings of the study, with those of Nichols and Berliner (2005) and Polesel, Duffer and Turnbull (2012), which links national examinations with quality standards in schools.

In this study, it was revealed that, 191 (74%) and 46 (17.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that, head teachers and teachers, should attend seminars on New Trends in Curriculum Instructions and School Management as a Government policy initiative intervention strategy on class repetition. However, 11 (4.3%) and 10 (3.9%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the same. There is a positive relationship between head teachers and teachers training on curriculum instruction and management, as an intervention strategy and class repetition. Training among a professional group who implement the actual teaching and management of the curriculum is vital in enhancing government policy intervention strategy on class repetition. It is established from the study that training, is core in creating strategies for intervention. This was further confirmed through respondents' views who were interviewed through focus group. Their views were as follows:

“Teachers need to know of what is happening lately concerning the teaching and learning as the learners are so dynamic due to the digital world influence. They have to update their profession annually through seminars and refresher course or further studies in their field.”

The finding is similar to those of Stecker, Lembke and Foegan [19] and Swanson, Solis, Ciullo and McKenna [20], who pointed out that, professional development is critical in imparting skills and equipping teachers in their profession.

The findings also show that, 146 (56.6%) and 112 (43.4%) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that, the Government should monitor teachers so as to be committed to their teaching and professional development, as a Government policy intervention strategy, on class repetition. Teacher monitoring is central as government intervention strategy on class repetition. The Ministry of Education through the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, should be at the forefront in monitoring teachers on their teaching and implementation of the curriculum by supervising their work. Most school teachers, have not been effective in their work and more supervisory work should be in place by government through field officers who are in charge of quality and standards in schools. Field officers act are the main monitoring and evaluation personnel, who ensure that Government policy, is implemented and teaching occurs in schools.

The study finding concurs with those of Okoroma [1] and Stecker, Lembke and Foegan [19], who asserted that educational policy is directed towards increasing the quality of life. The objectives of policy, is to fulfil individual and community needs educated manpower through curriculum changes, which is achieved through teacher commitment.

The findings further reveal that, 157 (60.9%) and 63 (24.4%) of the respondents, agreed and strongly agreed respectively that, parents should be involved in decisions to repeat a pupil as government policy intervention strategy on class repetition, while 38 (14.7%) (38) strongly disagreed with the same. In any learning situation, parental involvement is required for the understanding of the pupil characteristics and their role is important in the process of deciding whether a child should repeat a class or not. Government should encourage parents and other stakeholders to participate in decision-making affecting the learning process and this should be done through policy and public education, through Parent Teachers Associations (PTA). The study finding is in agreement with those held by Kovaleskil (2007), who pointed out that, the education policy requires the means of delivering changes through stakeholders, especially teachers and parents.

From the study, it was further found that 227 (88%) of the respondents, agreed to the effect that new scientific findings should be used to solve the problem, as a government initiative policy on intervention strategy on class repetition, while 31 (12%) strongly disagreed with the same. Research is fundamental in providing an understanding of current problems affecting society and the findings have been of necessity in providing solutions. Class repetition intervention strategies, can be developed from a scientific research based framework and implemented with success. The views held by Oduol [4] and Munro [5], supports the findings that, an evidence-based approach to policy ensures that, information is gathered, appraised and used to inform both policy making and professional practice. It is a necessity for education policy to be made within the context of research, so as to make well-informed decisions about policies, programs and projects and ease the implementation process and eventual success of a policy.

The findings also show that, 146 (56.6%) and 71 (27.5%) of the respondents, agreed and strongly agreed respectively that, there should be public education on government policy on class repetition, as government policy initiative intervention strategy on class repetition. However, 41 (15.9%) strongly disagree with the same. Government policies fail due to lack of public awareness on various issues in the education sector. Policy faces a myriad of challenges at its implementation stages, making good policy to fail.

Public education needs to be emphasized in the education sector, to create awareness among parents concerning government policy on class repetition, for some parents support the practice and even enforce it against pupils' wishes. Parents, therefore, need to be aware of the policy and its consequences if not adhered to. From the focus group discussion, it emerged that;

“There is poor parental involvement and public education concerning issues affecting the education of our children. Its only through Parents, Teachers' Association meetings that, head teachers inform us concerning certain programs initiated by government. The information always is given by head teachers who seem to remove important aspects, especially those that affect the child.”

The study findings show that, there is minimal public education from the Government, especially the field officers, concerning Government policies on education. The finding of the study support those held by Okoroma [1] who says that, educational policy, is directed towards increasing the quality of life of a people in any country for the objectives of policy is to satisfy individual needs, community pressure and the need to have educated manpower. Education policy can be attained through public education by Government officers, as educational policies, have to be implemented within educational institutions and be rational and purposeful, to enable them stand the test of time.

From the findings of the study, 126 (48.8%) and 34 (13.2%) of the respondents, respectively agreed and disagreed that, schools should abide by the Kenyan Constitution [37] and Basic Education Act [38], which spells out the rights of the child to education as Government policy intervention strategy on class repetition. The rights of children to education are emphasized in the Constitution and the Basic Education Act, which are legal documents that protect the child from any form of discrimination as regards education. Class repetition, can be a form of discrimination which is against the spirit of the law. Legal approach as regards class repetition should be followed by schools, so as not to deny children their basic human right to education and government should ensure that the law is adhered to. Some respondents through focus group interview pointed out that;

“With laws, we can correct mistakes of individual schools that deny children access to learning through self-made regulations like that of pass marks. Not only are laws made for teachers, even parents have to abide by what the law spells out to enable children learn freely and be assisted to learn by all stakeholders.”

The study finding is supported by Okoroma [1] and McConnell, [2] who believe that official policy

defines the decisions to be made and provides a guide that facilitates decision making and direction.

From the findings of the study, 186 (72%) and 52 (20.2%) of the respondents, agreed and strongly agreed respectively that, Government policy on class repetition of 1999 and 2013, should be implemented fully as Government intervention strategy policy initiative on class repetition, while 20 (78%) strongly disagreed on the same. There have been previous policy initiatives on class repetition and schools have failed to implement them by having pupils repeat classes. Government policy failure may negate the achievements in education that indicated high enrollment in primary schools. Full implementation and evaluation of policy is important for purposes of reviewing them to meet emerging issues. Government should re-evaluate its policy implementation process to seal loopholes that have been abused by many schools to deny pupils opportunities of class progression. Full implementation of existing government policy can be an intervention strategy for class repetition. The findings of the study also concur with those held by Oduol [4] who argue that, decision-making in education in Kenya, has been steered by a number of policy documents which can be successful or not. There are issues facing the management of the education sector, that need to be addressed for the development of an effective and efficient education system [38].

Further, the findings analyzed indicates that, 145 (56.2%) and 41 (15.9%) of the respondents, agree and strongly agree respectively that, most Government policies in education fail in the implementation as a government intervention strategy policy initiative on class repetition. However, 72 (27.9%) disagree on the same. There is a negative relationship between failure in Government Policy and class repetition as the majority of respondents' point in the findings. Failure of Government Policy, has been the undoing of class repetition over a period of time, as several policies have been developed and commissioned, but fail in the implementation stages. This finding support those held by Bunyi [9] and Muricho and Chang'ach [11], who argued that educational policies, have failed so far in the Kenyan context, such as, the language policy, where the use of mother tongue, has been in policy documents since 1976. McConnell [2] and Gacheche [3], assent to this finding by asserting that, educational policy may experience challenges within the implementation stages, and may lead to policy failure in most cases.

The findings also show that, 186 (72.15%) and 72 (27.9%) of the respondents, agreed and strongly agreed respectively that, government policies are implemented by teachers. Teachers are the main policy implementers, and should have a role in implementation of government policies on class repetition in the

country. For any successful policy implementation, Government has to involve teachers from the formulation, implementation and even evaluation of the policy. Some of the respondents interviewed through focus group pointed to the fact that;

“Teachers of this country, have worked hard to make education progress though with a lot of challenges. For any successful child, there is a teacher, so is government policy. New changes introduced by government, teachers are always ready to implement as was the case with the FPE without any preparation.”

The study finding indicates that teachers are the agents of change in the education sector and Government has to ensure that they support teachers in their work as implementers of policy.

The findings from the descriptive analysis, Multiple Regression and Qualitative thematic approach indicate that, Government policy intervention strategies positively affect class repetition in primary school education. The government policy initiative with a standardized coefficient of -1.847, t-value of -14.084 and $p < 0.05$, has a highly significant negative influence on class repetition in primary school education. The study finding, therefore, supports those of Okoroma [1] and McConnell [2] who argued that, policy defines the decisions and a shared responsibility guiding official actions in terms of implementation of educational practices in countries.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study, it is concluded that Government should not abolish national examinations as this cannot improve class repetition. The study finding conclude that, Government policy has faced challenges and failed in the implementation stages, and teachers and parents have to be involved by government on class repetition policy implementation for any success to be realized. The Government, the study concluded, need to develop professional development for teachers to address new trends in curriculum and management of schools and use of new scientific findings. The study further concluded that, teachers need to be monitored by Government to improve their work performance through Quality and Standards Officers and the Teachers Service Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A new approach on the use of remedial or tuition in schools to assist pupils who are slow in learning, or with special needs, have to be developed. Government should not arbitrary ban tuition, yet teachers have used it to manage learning challenges among pupils.
2. Professional Development should be enhanced by having teachers and head teachers being trained on new trends in education. Government should

sponsor instead of leaving teachers to finance their own Professional Development and be based on an evolving curriculum that empowers teachers to deal with emerging issues and scientific approach in education.

SUGGESTED AREA FOR FURTHER STUDY

A situational analysis of professional development training needs for Head Teachers and teachers in the 21st century in Kenya be done.

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