

# Fundamental Issues in Implementation of Government Policy on Class Repetition in Basic Education in Kenya

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## Abstract

Since the Dakar education forum of 2000, Kenya has committed herself to universalizing basic education. However, it faces the challenge of class repetition in both primary and secondary school levels has indicated by the government concern through a circular number MOE/HRS/3/7/4 to schools in 2013 (ministry of education, 2013). The World Bank noted with concerns that 6% of school going children repeat a class annually in the country (World Bank, 2014). Policy guidelines in Kenya has faced varieties of challenges in its implementation stages (McConnell, 2014; Gacheche, 2010) and this study sort to identify fundamental issues that need to be addressed so as to enable the class repetition policy to be a success not a failure. The study found out that research is essential in policy and quality of education should be a concern in the implementation process. Teachers play a crucial role in creating a new approach to teaching and handling of emerging issues in learning environments. The study recommended for a need assessment of the impact of the policy on academic performance and school infrastructure. Teachers being implementers of policy should be agents of change in any success of policy in education.

**Keywords:** Government policy, class repetition, intervention strategies, implementation, fundamental.

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Dakar World Education Forum 2000, governments established policies to realize universal access to primary school education by 2015 [1]. According to UNICEF, the available data on primary school enrolment indicates persistence of inequity, attendance and low completion based on gender and social economic status among others [1]. Chirombo [2] says that although developing countries especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa encountered massive growth in enrollment following independence; it has been attached also with varied challenges and dilemmas.

While Kenya made substantial progress toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), progress can be uneven across goals and within the country. Strides have been made in attaining universal primary education; however, it was noted by a cabinet secretary in charge for public service, youth and gender affairs in the government of Kenya that; "It is only by identifying the disadvantaged or excluded groups, that evidence-based policies, programs, and practices can be designed and inequalities tackled effectively..." This assertion opens up a debate on policy formulation and implementation that governments such as Kenya face in addressing issues

concerning education. When education policies are being put in place, critical issues should be formulated that address pertinent issues in education.

Kenya is among countries that adopted the SDGs with Goal 4 & 5 being the cornerstone of the other goals. Education according to the SDGs should be of quality, inclusive and equitable. Goal 5 of the SDGs proposes gender equality that promotes life-long learning opportunities for all. Put together goal 4 and goal 5 are essential in developing the human resource that is needed by countries for sustainable development. In Kenya, 15.9% of women age 18-24 were married by age 18 and 11.9% had a child by age 18. Among women age 18-24 living in the poorest 40% of households, 25.4% were married before age 18, or nearly half of the total. 34% of the populations live in the poorest households (lowest 40%). 16% of children ages 0 to 14 grow up in these households [3, 4]. This situation is important in Kenya's education policy as regards class repetition as majority of learners who repeat a class will grow older and be ready for marriage. Policy implementers have to put in mind progression of learners within the school limit years to support government policy implementation as regards class repetition.

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensuring that, all children have access to quality education and the chance for lifelong learning. The goal goes further to identify school enrolment and competence levels, the disposal of trained teachers and sufficient school facilities, and discrepancies in education outcomes as critical issues. Regardless of considerable gains in primary school enrolment between 2000 and 2014, 9% of primary-school-aged children worldwide were out of school in 2014, with little progress since 2008. This aspect shows that class repetition is a hindrance in pupil progression to next level of education. Global statistics between 2007 and 2015 in selected countries show that children from the richest 20% of households achieved greater proficiency in reading than those from the poorest 20% of households, and urban children scored higher in reading than rural children. Data for 2011 indicate that only about one quarter of schools in Sub-Saharan Africa had electricity, less than half had access to drinking water, and only 69 per cent had toilets. In fact, children from the poorest households are four times more likely to be out of school than those of the richest households [5]. Household environment should be considered while developing government policy as regards class repetition in countries that are faced with economic disparities.

Gender inequality continues worldwide, denying girls of their basic rights and opportunities. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will require more robust determinations, comprising legal frameworks, to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination often resulting from patriarchal attitudes and related social norms. According to evaluations undertaken in 2015 about 30 countries where the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is concentrated, over 35% of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 had been subjected to the procedure [5]. Countries have to strive to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. However, in just about every way, women and girls lag behind as many still experience gross inequalities in education, work and wages, lots of unpaid “women’s work” such as child care and domestic work, and discrimination in public decision-making [6].

Sub-Saharan Africa shows both the lowest rates in enrolment of 31% and the highest class repetition of 20%. When compared to other regions worldwide, Sub-Saharan Africa still has the largest repetition rates compared to Central Asia, Eastern and Western Europe and North America which have much lesser repetition rates that vary between 1% and 2% and Latin America with 6%[7]. Class repetition is an educational practice that has been mentioned and censured in educational research [8]. However, a debate persists concerning the efficacy of the repetition [9]. The system has been mentioned as an unproductive, classifying, waste of resources and others point to the

success of failure [10]. Notwithstanding its prevalent use by primary schools, class repetition is an exceptionally contentious practice in education [11]. The public education has failed many pupils [12] who are in need of thorough and all-inclusive interventions to counteract environments that lead to poor educational outcomes. Class repetition is inadequate to tackle the multiple needs of pupils and to ensure long-term positive outcomes. The issue of class repetition goes on with divergent views held by scholars and government. Will government policy intervention on class repetition work in countries like Kenya who have undertaken a guideline of non-repetition policy? What are the fundamental issues that need to be addressed for such policy intervention to succeed and ensure learners progress to next level of education without a hindrance?

Despite high enrolment rate of 82% and outlawing of class repetition in basic education in Kenya, the practice is still persistent [13, 14]. It is documented that 6% of pupils repeat a class among both boys and girls in schools in Kenya [15, 14]. According to Lazarus and Ortega [12], class repetition has been found to be ineffective and detrimental to the pupil and educators and policy makers have the responsibility to develop a diversity of alternatives.

#### **Statement Problem**

The government of Kenya in January 2013 issued a circular on non-repetition in Basic Education Circular NO, MOE/HQS/3/7/4[13], and an indication of education policy on class repetition. It is documented that 6% of pupils repeat a class among both boys and girls in primary schools in Kenya [15, 14]. Class repetition is a current reform issue in education [16] and less attention has been paid on fundamental issues in the implementation of government policy on class repetition intervention strategies in primary school education in Kenya.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Government Policy in education**

In education, every official action must be supported by a policy which marks out the decisions to be made, but it does not generate the decisions [17]. Policy only provides a guide that facilitates the decision-making and educational policies gives the focus for educational undertakings in countries and schools. Further educational policy advancement is a collective obligation and it should be faultless from the onset of policy objectives and the intended outcomes [18]. The planning 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 [17], educational policies are arrangements mostly by governments that determine the direction of an educational system.

There is need to understand educational intervention strategies in an expansive framework of the

subsequent interventions and optimizing behavior on the part of pupils, head teachers, teachers, parents and schools. According to Jacob and Lefgren [10], an intervention in one period affects subsequent interventions and may change pupils' incentives in ways that satisfy or worsen the long term impact of the initial intervention. With the growing emphasis on standards and accountability in education, it is crucial that educational professionals attend to research addressing the outcomes associated with intervention strategies and utilize this knowledge to inform school practice [19]. Research ultimately may inform and facilitate the design of appropriate prevention and intervention programs that may enhance the socio-emotional adjustment and educational success of pupils who are at risk of school failure and class repetition.

The debate over class repetition and social or automatic promotion is not new and the center of the debate between class repetition and social promotion will influence the pupil in the long term [20]. However, the consideration lingers on regarding the effectiveness of the practice [8, 9] and recent research conclusions contests each other [21]. Class repetition is an intervention that has received increasing scrutiny as policies, practices and results of research differ [22].

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 [17]. To satisfy this function of policy, educational policy has to be distinct from other policies that government adopts [18]. This suggests that educational policies have to be geared towards an implementation strategy within educational institutions and must be rational and purposeful to enable them stand the test of time. Furthermore, policies are designed without prior knowledge of how policy will perform when subjected to multiple and interacting forces that are political, economic or social which shape the implementation process.

On the other hand, McConnell [18] posit that, educational or any other policy may experience challenges within the implementation stages and may lead to policy failure in most cases. Gacheche [23] argue that, governments throughout the world nowadays experience periodic policy malfunction and thwarting such is a subtle issue for authorities. This state stands up from numerous and inconsistent goals to satisfy such as mismanagement of the policy design. Many policies are emphasized by governments, but they are not backed by research evidence. For any successful policy implementation, it should be evidence-based on the utilization of the policy in the policy making process in education. It can be concluded that many policy makers have been interested to the recommendation of educational policies for which there is no seeming evidence of effectiveness in most cases.

Oduol [24] says that, an evidence-based approach to policy ensures that information is gathered, appraised and used to inform both policy making and professional practice. This reduces opinion-based policy making that relies on the discriminating use of evidence or untested views often inspired by political prejudice or impulsive conjecture. 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 and eventual success of a policy.

Decision-making in education in Kenya has been steered by a number of policy documents. These include the country's development plans and reports of various education commissions, working parties and committees, and from international research sources such as the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the World Bank. Furthermore the principles and values embodied in international declarations such as the United Nations Charter of 1946, the Convention on the rights of the child, and the Dakar Framework on Education for All have also been studied and used. Nonetheless, political ideologies and policies have often been used in order to win the electorate and have resulted in major changes in education [24]. 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 [25]. These have been some of the issues faced in the management of the education sector in Kenya and thus these need to be addressed for the development of an effective and efficient education system.

The Free Primary Education (FPE) was re-implemented by the government in 2003 and did put strains on primary schools and increased disparities in the quality of education offered in various primary schools in Kenya [26]. The FPE as an education policy is seen by many as more of a political strategy than genuine development project in education as it was a political pledge by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in their election campaign. When it was implemented, it faced multitude of problems that eventually contributed to drop out, class repetition and poor transitions to secondary education. Teachers were not motivated as classes were congested and high levels of indiscipline [27]. Educational policies made within a political framework tend to fail or experience challenges that have consequences as regards quality.

There are educational policies that have been unsuccessful so far in Kenyan perspective such as the language policy where the use of mother tongue has

been in policy documents since 1976[28]. When the government revised the curriculum in 2002 and published the language policy in the local media, it triggered debate as critics viewed the policy as a misuse of time in an era of globalization and the use of English in modern technology. This indicates that the country faces policy failure most of the time as it may not be informed by evidenced-based findings and lack of consultation in policy formulation. Gacheche [23] argue that, for any successful implementation of policy in Kenya, a number of challenges need to be addressed. For McConnell [18], 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[29] and the Basic Education Act of 2013 (Government of Kenya, 2013). Several circulars concerning the occurrence of class repetition have been in place since 1999 where there was banning of class repetition in schools (Circular No. QAS/N/1/22/39). 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 (Circular No. MOE/HRS/3/7/4). Despite these circulars and policy in education as regards class repetition, there is still prevalence of class repetition in primary schools within the context of the Free Primary Education in Kenya. This is observed by Muricho and Chang'ach [30], who point out that since the attainment of independence, Kenya has attempted to formulate and implement educational reforms, but the recommendations have not served Kenyans adequately. This means that the country might be experiencing policy malfunction in certain aspects of education.

### **Role of teachers in implementation of Intervention Strategies in Education**

Educational intervention decisions making require progress-monitoring data which is of high quality and teachers must understand how to interpret those data to measure a pupil's academic progress. Stecker, Lembke and Foegan [31] point out that curriculum based management data are the best monitoring data for pupil academic progress and making instructional changes. Teachers need to rely upon collected progress monitoring data to make instructional changes, for the information contained in the progress monitoring data is examined by teachers to evaluate if academic improvement has transpired. The data inspires teachers to change instructional strategies to meet individual pupil requirements at the same time, strengthening academic weaknesses and eliminating recorded achievement gaps.

Yeager and Walton [32] 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 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. This formative evaluation data help to refine the components of the program to make it work better in particular school setting and summative evaluation data help the schools to consider whether the intervention program is yielding the intended results.

It would suit all school stakeholders to recognize that teachers who are the means to deliver the changes need assistance and direction to pursue these principles. As noted by Kovaleskil [33] that for any effective implementation of any intervention strategy, schools are required to provide targeted, intense and continual training, collaboration, and support and administrative follow up. While implementing an intervention strategy is a challenge, stakeholders and schools must take note that for any intervention strategy change to be effectively implemented, an inspiring purpose must be developed and all stakeholders working to its success and sustainability.

Danielson, *et al.* [34] points that, teachers and administrators must be provided with training for purposes of supporting them to implement and sustain an intervention strategy. The training and support provides teachers a model for instructing and intervening on behalf of pupils to help better their academic achievements. Progress, monitoring and administration of an intervention strategy require a high degree of integrity, support and coordinated efforts across all levels of teaching staff and leadership within the school. Glover and Perna [35] highlight that professional development and training will only be of significance within the context of a changed school system within which schools work.

Shinn [36] 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 [19] 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.

It is important to assess prevention and intervention strategies that are supported by empirical evidence [37]. It is very important that one must consider a pupil's developmental, cultural, and linguistic and gender differences among pupils when

selecting and implementing any class repetition interventions. It should be noted that there is no intervention strategy that can meet the needs of all pupils. Rather it is important to put into consideration the context and specific needs of all pupils that are affected by class repetition and are receiving the prevention or intervention services. Kratochwill [19] pointed out that, once the need of the individual pupil or the entire group of repeaters is understood, it is vital for educators to be knowledgeable with specific intervention strategies that are evidence based.

Pupils are most repeated because of low academic performance, experience behavioral challenges or a combination of the two [38]. Alternatives designed to prevent academic failure, remediate academic under performance address behavioral challenges, and reduction of repetition rates include a range of possible school-wide interventions and instructional strategies. School-wide interventions are the administratively specially made programs that are all encompassing throughout the school. Instructional strategies are direct, teacher-led interventions implemented within the classroom structure and interventions serve a preventive purpose for at risk pupils who have not yet been repeated or as interventions for pupils who have been recommended for repetition.

Comprehensive intervention programs in schools are likely to be successful when they incorporate strategies to promote pupils academic and emotional learning. Comprehensive programs emphasize a systems approach for redesigning schools to avoid academic and behavior challenges through practical instructions and school-wide behavior support [39]. Programs should be developed to strengthen pupil's social and academic knowledge and promote problem solving and conflict resolutions skills. Implementation of comprehensive programs demands a significant commitment by the school administration, parents and teachers through provision of training and resources. However, if these programs are implemented successfully, they may lead to reductions in class repetition.

Pre-school intervention program are generally to assist at risk pupils before they experience academic under performance through improving foundation essential skills for consequent academic success. Fundamental literacy skills, pro-social behaviors, and socio emotional development are often stressed in preschool programs. Early childhood interventions program provide comprehensive educational and family support for pupils from economically challenged families to increase school readiness. Schwartz, Garfinkle, & Davis [40] argue that important information and guidance related to pre-school is important information and guidance related to pre-school is important to enhancing skills for academic

performance, therefore preventing class repetition in the future. The information includes membership, relationships and skills that promote positive outcomes for pupils.

Parent involvement through a combination of a parent's attitude towards education and school of the child and willingness to support in 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 goals at improving pupil academic performance [41]. The addition of a parent component in class repetition intervention may enhance the outcomes of other interventions, it is crucial to put in mind the cultural diversity among parents and the way in which cultural forces may interact with the schools' access. 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.

Quality school leadership improves academic performance as a head teachers' transformational leadership intervention strategy on class repetition. School leadership has an essential role to play as regards academic performance in schools. Poor leadership has been related to inefficiency in schools for schools have been changed by head teachers through new approaches being initiated and implemented collectively with teachers. Schools have been changed by transformative leaders and therefore, leadership by head teachers can be an intervention strategy for class repetition in schools [42]. In their study, they concluded that, Curriculum instructions are guided by the head teachers' leadership and is the basis in which schools' function. The implementation of the curriculum is at the center of any learning forming the blueprint for schools. Head teachers' roles are that of being the supervisors of the curriculum implementation and evaluation; therefore, they are supposed to provide guidance and support to teachers. Good curriculum implementation and supervision can introduce changes that affect performance of pupils, hence mitigating class repetition among pupils in primary schools. Head teachers' transformative leadership provides guidance to school planning and decision making in regard to curriculum implementation and evaluation in schools [42].

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Many impact evaluations include both quantitative and qualitative investigations of program effects, including exploration of implementation and its relationship to program impacts [43]. Class repetition policy by government is a program that needs to be understood in an in depth study. This research adopted a mixed method research where the researcher mixed quantitative and qualitative research techniques,

methods approaches, concepts, or language into a single study [44]. The underlying premise of mixed method studies is that qualitative and quantitative methodologies offer distinct yet complementary advantages [45, 44]. In particular, a key advantage of qualitative studies is the opportunity to explore policy issues in greater levels of depth and detail, understanding the role of place, time, practice, and processes [46, 47]; while a key advantage of quantitative research is working with a larger sample of the population, giving the researcher the statistical power to look at effects and empirical associations among intervention variables and outcomes [48]. The sample was drawn among teachers and head teachers of public primary schools in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY**

Research is fundamental in any successful formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy in education. The study found out that government should carry out a thorough investigation to its policies in education before being rolled out to the education sector (88%). To ensure successful implementation of class repetition policy, most of the respondents pointed out lack of consultation with all stakeholders which may lead policy failure (56%). Previous policies in regard to class repetition should be put into force especially the recent ones of 2013(72%) by ensuring that pupils are promoted automatically to next class not based on academic performance (85%). Most policies in education have been adopted from global commitments by government as education currently is a global good or service. Graduates from the education systems have to serve humanity and complete favorably with others. The SDGs for instance in 4 and 5 emphasize quality, inclusivity and equitable education. Quality therefore is of concern when class repetition is being implemented by schools (65.5%). Within this context, the study found that class repetition as practiced by schools has a system that is unproductive, classifying, waste of resources and failure (84%)[10]. Many pupils have dropped out of school, long years of studying and waste of resources especially in countries with EFA practice (78%). Nonetheless its predominant use by primary schools, class repetition is an extremely controversial practice in education [11] and disadvantages many as it creates inequality. This assertion opens up a debate on policy formulation and implementation that governments such as Kenya face in addressing issues concerning education. When education policies are being put in place, critical issues should be formulated that address pertinent issues in education (68%). It is important to assess prevention and intervention strategies that are supported by empirical evidence [37]. It is very important that one must consider a pupil's developmental, cultural, and linguistic and gender

differences among pupils when selecting and implementing any class repetition interventions.

Teachers are central in a successful implementation of class repetition through curriculum instructions (60.5%) and teachers should consider other factors that contribute to class repetition (63%). Professional development and training of teachers on curriculum trends is important in any policy implementation (62%). All-inclusive intervention programs in schools are likely to be successful when they integrate approaches that promote pupils academic and emotional learning. Comprehensive programs emphasize a systems approach for redesigning schools to avoid academic and behavior challenges through practical instructions and school-wide behavior support [39]. This only occurs in situations where transformative head teachers are appointed to head schools for leadership is an essential component in policy implementation [42]. It is imperative for schools to create a learning environment which is critical on class repetition policy with teachers bestowed with the responsibility of creating learning environment in schools (58%). Parent involvement through a combination of a parent's attitude towards education and school of the child and willingness to support in creating a home environment that is supportive to doing assignments, are associated with high performance among pupils 67%). Parent involvement is often a dynamic constituent of broad-based interventions targets at improving pupil academic performance [41]. Class repetition is inadequate to tackle the multiple needs of pupils and to ensure long-term positive outcomes (82%). Many pupils are in need of in-depth and all-inclusive interventions to counteract environments that lead to poor educational outcomes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study indicates very inherent issues that need to be considered in class repetition policy implementation. Research is critical especially in assessment of issues emerging in the implementation process. The ministry of education needs to be carrying out evaluation of the policy with informed targets and involve the stakeholders. Quality of learning should be considered and teachers need in-service training on emerging issues in education. They have to be conversant with current trends in pedagogy to meet pupils' needs in the classrooms. They are responsible for creating a learning environment for the pupils while in school.

### **Recommendations of the study**

As government is committed to ensuring the policy on class repetition is implemented, there is a need for assessment of the impact of the policy as regards academic performance and school infrastructure. Further, teachers are the implementers of policy in education, their involvement is crucial as they act as monitoring and evaluation agents. They are

agents of change in the implementation process on class repetition policy hence its success.

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