



EFFECTS OF FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION ON FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NYANDARUA COUNTY, KENYA

Susan Warukira Wanjohi¹, Antony. K. Sang¹, Frederick Ugwe Ngesa²

¹Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Management; Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya. Email: suewarukira@gmail.com, sangatoney@live.com

²Department of Agricultural Education and Extension; Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya
Email: ngesauf@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The main aim of introducing Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya was to improve access to education through enhanced enrolment, retention, transition and completion rates. Abolition of school fees led to a significant improvement in enrolment but a decrease in frequency of assessment and other indicators of quality instruction. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of free primary education on frequency of assessment in public primary schools in Nyandarua County, Kenya. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The target population was 1675 class teachers while the study sample comprised of 313 class teachers. Data was collected using the class teachers' questionnaire. The face and content validity of the instrument was examined by experts from the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Management, Egerton University. The comments of the experts were used to improve the instrument before it was used to collect data. The class teachers' questionnaire was piloted for reliability. It was deemed reliable as it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Data was analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The t-test was used to determine the difference in frequency of assessment before and after the introduction of free primary education. The findings of the study revealed that the frequency of assessment after the introduction of FPE was higher than that of before the introduction of FPE. The results also revealed that the difference between frequency of assessment between the two epochs was statistically significant at .05 level. It was thus concluded that FPE positively affects frequency of assessment which in turn enhances quality of instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is the process of determining the level of performance of a person in a particular skill or subject area (Ministry of Education, 2008). In a school setting, it involves testing learners on curriculum based tasks that have been taught in class (Kumari & Srivastva, 2005). Assessments enable teachers to continuously monitor the impact of their lessons on students' achievement and collect information about the knowledge and skills that learners have attained (Hammond, 2010). Assessment also provides teachers with information which can be used to adapt the teaching to meet student needs (Mwabaza, 2010). Regular assessment and feedback are

useful to students as they assist learners to identify areas in which they could be having difficulties and concentrate on them (De Paola & Scoppa, 2010). Feedback given after assessment has been found to help students to progress in learning throughout the school cycle thereby improving their academic achievement (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality [SACMEQ], 2012). Studies have further shown that assessments affect quality of instruction as they provide information that is used as feedback to enhance teaching and learning activities (Olade & Kuku, 2017).

Literature shows that quality of instruction is influenced by the way in which learning is assessed (McMillan, 2008). Instruction is concerned with the way content is delivered to the learners (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins & Major, 2014). It is defined as actions taken by teachers to create a stimulating learning environment for the purpose of carrying out activities that facilitate learning and help students to develop appropriate attitudes and behaviour (Eristi & Akdeniz, 2012). In education, quality instruction is often defined with respect to inputs and outputs, or the relationship between the two (Milligan, 2014). Inputs include behaviour, materials, and characteristics of instructors and instructional process (Spaull, 2017). According to Bunyi (2013) outcome-based definitions of instructional quality focus on student behaviour and accomplishments in subjects chosen, course grades, achievement of learning outcomes like attitudes and behavior. Literature shows that quality of instruction is affected by many factors. Rao (2007) established that the number of students in a class, the amount of time spent in school, availability of textbooks, teaching materials, knowledgeable and skilled teachers significantly affect quality of instruction. Ncube (2004) noted that availability of physical facilities, use of appropriate teaching methods, actual time of learning, class size and assessment influence instruction quality. Samson (2011) contends that frequent assessment helps teachers to plan and implement effective instruction. It also assists students to learn at deeper and higher levels.

Assessment is considered to be frequent when the number of tests administered to learners range from more than once a term to weekly (Shirvani, 2009). It thus refers to the rate of test administration during a term or semester other than the end-of-term/year examination. Olade and Kuku (2017) observed that frequent testing during teaching and before national examinations offer teachers and students feedback on their performances and areas of strengths and weaknesses. Despite the significant role of assessment in enhancing quality of instruction, many primary schools in Kenya rarely test their pupils (UNESCO, 2005). Mango (2013) attributed the infrequent assessment to high enrollment, inadequate instructional material and heavy teacher workload. Public primary schools in Nyandarua County like those in other parts of the country schools rarely assess their pupils (County Director of Education [CDE, 2016).

The frequency of assessment is affected by several factors. According to National Assessment Centre (2010), frequency of assessment is affected by teacher workload since preparation, administration and marking tests; and analysing results is considered additional work. Availability of instructional materials, national and schools assessment policies also influence frequency of testing. Kemboi (2015) observed that availability of instructional materials such as computers, printers and photocopiers make preparation and organization of tests easier. O’Kwu, and Orum (2012) noted a significant change in frequency of assessment when assessment policy in Nigeria was changed from a one-time examination at the end of the term or school year to whole or in part on continuous assessment. School financing policies such as Free Primary

Education (FPE) have also been associated with frequency of assessment as they affect funding, physical facilities, instructional materials, enrolment and teacher workload (UNESCO, 2005). Free Primary Education policy was introduced in Kenya in 2003 to improve participation in primary education (MOEST, 2005b). The policy abolished payment of levies for tuition in public primary schools. In addition to teachers' salaries, the Government of Kenya was to meet the cost of teaching and learning materials, wages for critical non-teaching staff and co-curricular activities by paying KES 1020 per year for each child enrolled in a public primary school (MOEST, 2007). There was significant increase in enrolment after introduction of Free Primary Education (Republic of Kenya, 2012). The increment was however not accompanied by corresponding increase in physical and instructional resources, and teaching staff. This resulted to a lot of challenges in schools which included overcrowded classrooms, high student: teacher ratio, inadequate infrastructure and high student: textbook ratio (UNESCO, 2005).

The foregoing studies have shown that introduction of Free Primary Education led to increased enrolment, pupil teacher ratio and teacher workload, and a decline in pupil: textbook ratio and frequency of assessment. The infrequent assessments of pupils in public primary schools observed in Nyandarua County could be due to the introduction of Free Primary Education. The purpose of this study was to establish the effects of Free Primary Education on frequency of assessment. A hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between frequency of assessment before and after the introduction of free primary education in public primary schools was tested.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 1675 class teachers. A sample of 313 class teachers selected using stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling procedures participated in the study. Data on frequency of assessment was collected using the Class Teachers Questionnaire CTQ. The face and content validity of the instrument was examined by three experts in the Faculty of Education and Community Studies, Egerton University. The recommendations of the experts were used to improve the instrument before it was used to gather data. CTQ was also piloted and its reliability estimated using the Cronbach Alpha method. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The instrument was deemed reliable given that its coefficient was above the 0.7 threshold as recommended by Panayides (2013). Data were analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science. A hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between frequency of assessment before and after the introduction of Free Primary Education in public primary schools in Nyandarua County was tested at .05 level using the t-test.

RESULTS

Frequency of Assessment

Data on frequency of assessment was collected using the CTQ. The teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they assessed their students before and after FPE. Their responses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of Assessment before and after the introduction of Free Primary Education

Frequency Duration	Before FPE		After FPE	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Weekly	17	5.6	17	5.4
Every two weeks	67	23.6	222	71.2
Monthly	104	33.3	52	18.7
Once a term	114	37.5	11	3.7

The results in Table 1 show that 70.8% of the teachers indicated that students were assessed either monthly or termly before the introduction of Free Primary Education. This is an indication that students were rarely assessed during this period. The results in Table 1 show that 71.2% of teachers indicated that student were assessed on fortnightly basis after the introduction of Free Primary Education. This is an indication that the frequency of assessment increased after the introduction of Free Primary Education.

The teachers' responses to the items on frequency of assessment before and after the introduction of FPE were assigned scores as follows: Once a term = 1, Monthly = 2, Every two weeks = 3 and Weekly = 4, and transformed into before and after FPE frequency of assessment indices. The effect of Free Primary Education on frequency of assessment was then determined by comparing the two indices. A hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between frequency of assessment before and after the introduction of Free Primary Education was tested using a t-test. The results of the test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison between Frequency of Assessment before and after the Introduction of Free Primary Education

Period	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Before FPE	312	1.96	0.91	611	13.567	.000*
After FPE	312	2.79	0.59			

The results in Table 2 indicate that after introduction of Free Primary Education frequency of assessment mean ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.59$) was higher than that ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.91$) of before the introduction of Free Primary Education. The high mean is an indicator that assessment was more frequent after the introduction of Free Primary Education. The results further show that the difference between the two means was statistically significant at .05 level $t(611) = 13.567$, $p < .05$. The high frequency of assessment mean of the after introduction of Free Primary Education and the significant difference implies that introduction of FPE positively affects frequency of assessment. On basis of these results the hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference between frequency of assessment before and after the introduction of Free Primary Education in public primary schools in Nyandarua County was rejected.

The results in Table 2 reveal that after the introduction of Free Primary Education frequency of assessment mean was higher and significantly different from that of before the introduction of Free Primary Education. The findings of this study are in agreement with those of Chuck (2009) and Oates (2014) which established that although workload had increased after introduction of Free Primary Education, improvements in the provision of teaching and learning resources have enabled teachers to assess students more often. However, the findings are not consistent with those of UNESCO (2005) which reported that after introduction of Free Primary Education in Kenya, the number of assessments had reduced due to the large classes. National Assessment Centre (2010) also noted a decline in frequency of assessment and attributed the observation to the time and materials required to set, administer, mark and analyse test results.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to establish the effect of Free Primary Education on student frequency of assessment in public primary schools in Nyandarua County. The results of the study showed that the mean ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.50$) of frequency of assessment after the introduction of Free Primary Education was higher than that ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.91$) of before the introduction of Free Primary Education. The results further showed that the two means were statistically significant. The conclusion drawn from the result was that introduction of Free Primary Education affected the frequency of assessment positively.

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