

Influence of the Free Primary Education Policy on Pupils Arithmetic Competence, in Public Primary Schools. A case study of Kimilili- Bungoma Sub County, Kenya

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7.1 Abstract

This study set to explore influence of the free primary education on Pupils Arithmetic competence in public primary schools in Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County. The specific objectives of the study were to investigate how the teacher- pupil ratios affect pupils' Arithmetic competence, to determine the role of textbooks ratio on learner Arithmetic competence and to find out how physical facilities affect the learner in understanding mathematics. The study was guided by education production function. This model explains the relationship between inputs and outputs of affirm. In education, a school is considered as affirm that is to process people into desirable and productive graduates. Educational output was indicated by learners' Arithmetic competence in mathematics which was explained by educational input made of teachers- pupils' ratio, textbook ratio and physical facilities. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This is because this design is suitable for the study of behavior, attitudes, values and characteristics and will help present response put forward by pupils and teachers of Mathematics. The target population comprised of standard six pupils and 24 teachers of Mathematics of the 8 selected public primary schools in Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County. Stratified random sampling was used to select. The sample while random sampling was to select the 200 respondents from standard six. Data collection instruments were the questionnaire, computation task and document analysis. Data analysis revealed that with the high influx of pupils due to free primary education (FPE), there was a higher teacher-pupil ratio inadequacy, Mathematics pupils' textbooks and inadequate physical facilities (classrooms, chairs and desks,). These inadequacies had resulted into ineffective and inefficient teaching of Mathematics, marking and a follow- up of pupils in the public Primary schools, lowering the mastery of the pupils' computation skills in Mathematics. In the light of these findings, it is recommended that the Government increases its funds so that more textbooks are purchased, employs more teachers and in partnership with the community constructs more classrooms in Primary schools. Also teachers should be serviced regularly. Inspected frequently, use a variety of teaching method, specialize in the teaching of mathematics and be role models. On the other hand, the pupils should do a lot of practice in Mathematics.

Key Words: Primary Education, Arithmetic Competence, Free Education, Pupils, Teaching.

7.2 Introduction

The millennium development goals(MDG) on education was to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Apart from Universal Primary Education (UPE), this goal three (3) aimed to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all level of education by 2015. The Government of Kenya, through the then Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) set six goals in order to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015, which were;

Expand and improve Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) by 2010;

Ensure that all children, particularly girls, had access to and complete quality primary education by 2015;

Ensure that learning needs of all young people and adults were met through suitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs by 2010;

Achieve 50% improvement in adult literacy, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adult by 2015;

Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 , and achieve gender equality in education with focus on ensuring girl's full and equal access to, retention and achievement in basic quality education by 2015 and,

Improve the quality of education and ensure excellence so that measurable outcomes were achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills, by 2010.(Ministry of planning and National Development, 2005)

Kenya Education Commission endorsed the pledge on UPE in 1964 (The Education Commission, 1964:66). In the sessional paper number 10 (1965) where the government spelt out its socio-political and economic goals, the government aimed at eradication of illiteracy, at the time Kenya attained independence. The third National Development Plan (1974/78) emphasized the promotion of UPE by removing fees from standard one to four. To this end, the President gave a directive, in 1974, for the implementation of UPE (Achola, 1992:37; Olembo, 1992:26). As a result, the government removed tuition fees, increased grants to cover tuition fees, expanded learning facilities to cope with increased enrolment, opened more teacher's training colleges to train more teachers to meet the increased demands, hired numbers of untrained teachers and stopped all forms of primary education levies (Olembo, 1992:27)

The implementation was met with a number of challenges which included shortage of enough personnel and lack of finances which were required to make the program a success. In an effort to overcome these problems in UPE, the government introduced cost sharing in schools and thus gradually reducing the government's expense on UPE. The changes were later to have negative effect on attainment of universal primary education (UPE). in fact, 8th National Development Plan (1997-200 1) indicated that of the pupils enrolling in class I, only 77% of boys and 80% of girls entered standard four, while only 55% and 35% girls entered standard eight, which was barely 47% of the pupils who had joined class one.

In a move strongly inspired by these negative trends and quest for change, the NARC (National Rainbow Coalition) government took a bold decision to reintroduce FPE as a means of achieving the goal of UPE from class one to eight (NARC, 2002;36). The introduction of FPE in January 2003 led to significant educational achievements. Enrolments in public schools increased significantly from 5.9 million in 2002 to 6.9 million in 2003; representing a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 99% (102% girls; 97% boys). Despite its performance, primary education continues to experience a number of challenges, such as overstretched facilities, overcrowding in schools (especially those in urban slums and Arid and Semi-Arid. Lands, ASAL, areas) , high pupils-teacher ratios, high costs of equipment for children with special needs, diminished support by communities, gender and regional disparities, increased number of orphans in and out of school as a result of HIV/AIDS, poor management and internal inefficiency that negatively impacts on access, equity and quality. In addition, most parents are tinder the impression that is the Government's exclusive responsibility to provide all the necessary resources to support the primary education sub-sector (Ministry of Planning and National Development, 2005)

There has been a marked increase in research on the challenges of the implementation of FPE in public primary schools in general and the influence of FPE on school accessibility, retention and performance in general, but little has been done to analyze the influence of FPE on learners' Arithmetic Competence in Mathematics, yet there is a public outcry right from primary school to secondary school up to the University level, on the deteriorating state of the arithmetic(mathematics) competence among the learners.

The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC, 2006: 10-13) lamented that in the 20051K.C.P.E (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education). Some candidates could not communicate at 411, while others had no single sentence that could be described as English although, there were some words recognizable as English; in fact, it send a hybrid of language- some Kiswahili, some not. It could not, even be described as sheng (a hybrid language for the Kenyan Youth). The errors ranged from those constructions, agreement. The overall mean score for the paper on composition writing was 36%. Out of 100%, quite a number of

candidates scored as little as 10% (KNEC, 2006:10). This entire trend affects mathematics Competence, because the language of communication in mathematics teaching is English. Therefore, there is need for an investigation into the influence of FPE on learners' arithmetic competence in Mathematics to afford opportunities for pupils to help them develop the ability to compute well as the computation skill is essential for success in any academic discipline and it is also, a lifelong skill that is needed.

The study was based on the Education Production function (EPF) Model borrowed from the theory of Production Function (PF) in economics. This model explains the relationships between inputs and outputs of a firm. In education, a school is considered as a firm, although its main aim is not profit maximization but to process people into desirable and productive graduates as indicated by pupils status of Arithmetic competence in mathematics was explained by education input made of teacher-pupils ratio, pupils textbook ratio and physical facilities, which are free primary education factors.

7.3 Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) and Nkapa (1997), descriptive research tries to describe and interpret existing phenomena Treavers (1969) observed that surveys are conducted to establish the nature of existing conditions. Good (1963), also states that descriptive studies may include present facts, current conditions concerning the nature of persons, a number of objectives or class of events and may involve the procedures of induction, analysis, classification, enumeration and measurement.

The research variables here, therefore, include:

Learners' Arithmetic competence which is the dependent variable

Factors of FPE-, physical facilities, pupils' textbook ratio and teacher-pupil ratio as the independent variables.

Funding, school status as moderating variables

The study was carried out in Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County. Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County is located in Bungoma county formally Western province of Kenya. The Sub-County was recently carved out from the Bungoma North Sub-County and has 4 administrative wards, Kamukuywa, Maeni, Kimilili and Kibingei wards. Kimilili- Bungoma sub-county covers an area of approximately 179.5 square kilometers and has a total of over 25 public primary schools. The inhabitants of the sub-county are mainly subsistence farmers with limited stock of animal. The sub county was chosen because the researcher had taught in the sub county for over fifteen years and so he is familiar with the poor performance in the sub-county in Mathematics, especially national examination. This being a worrying situation, the researcher set to investigate the influence of FPE on learner\Arithmetic competence in Mathematics in public primary schools Kimilili- Bungoma sub-county.

The target population consisted of the primary schools in Kimilili- Bungoma Sub-County. Out of these, 6 were mixed schools, 1 was a Boys' school and another 1 a Girls' school. All of them were day schools. Public primary schools were chosen because that was where the effect of FPE was being felt; out of the accessible population of 400 standard six pupils, 200 were used in the study. Standard six pupils were used since they had been in school long enough to display the impact of FPE on their Arithmetic competence in Mathematics and theirs was natural learning as opposed to standard 7 and 8 who were being drilled for national examinations and so would not give a true picture of the status of the arithmetic competence of pupils in public primary schools; all the teachers of Mathematics (40) in the 8 selected public primary school were used in the study because they were in direct contact with the learners and hence would give relevant information.

The research opted for stratified, simple and purposive sampling techniques. The population (public primary schools) as grouped into subsets that shared similar characteristics. Hence the public primary schools were stratified into Mixed, Boys' and Girls' public primary schools. This ensured that the public

primary schools were grouped into homogeneous subsets that shared similar characteristics, thus, ensuring equitable representation of public primary schools in the sample. Fifty percent of subjects from each school were selected using simple random sampling. This simple random sampling technique was used because it guarded against the sampling error. Under non-probability sampling unresponsive sampling was used to select all the teachers of Mathematics and standard six pupils' in 8 selected public primary schools. This ensured that only typical and useful respondents were used.

The Sub-County had over 25 public primary schools Out of these 8 schools were selected for the study. Out of the accessible population 400 standard six pupils in 8 selected primary schools, 50% (200) were used in the study as 50% recommended by Fisher (Mug et. al., 1999:384) as the most representative sample of the target population where cost and time are issues to be considered. All the teachers of Mathematics (40) in the 8 selected public primary schools were also, used in the study since they were in direct contact with the pupils and hence had relevant information on the influence of FPE on their pupils' Arithmetic competence.

The researcher sought permission from the relevant authorities. The researcher sought permission to carry out research from the Ministry of Education, the Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County Commissioner and the Sub-County education officer Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County, before undertaking the research. Therefore, the researcher, first, visited selected schools to get permission from head teachers to carry out study in their schools. Respondents were assured that their responses would only be for the purpose of the research and would be treated confidentially. Data was collected from standard six pupils, teachers of mathematics, documents (class registers/lists and Mathematics exercise books and a computation task that was given to the 200 standard six pupils in the 8 selected public primary schools.

Kombo and Tromp (2006) look at analysis as the examination of what has been collected in a survey or experiment and making deductions and inferences. It involves uncovering underlying structures, extracting important variables, detecting any anomalies and testing any underlying assumptions. It also involves scrutinizing the acquired information and making inferences. Statistical data analysis divides the methods of analyzing data into two categories;

Exploratory methods are used to discover what the data seems to be saying by using simple arithmetic and easy to draw pictures to summarize data. This is used mainly in qualitative research. Confirmatory methods use ideas from probability theory in the attempt to answer specific questions. These methods are mainly applicable by whether the researcher is qualitative (pp.1 17-8). The data collected was expected to answer questions on teachers' opinions on the influence of Free Primary Education (FPE) policy on learners' Arithmetic competence. This included data on teachers' opinion towards the following;

How the teacher-pupil ratio affects pupils competence in mathematics

The role of the pupils' Mathematics textbook ratio on pupils' competence in mathematics and,

How physical facilities affect the learners competence in mathematics

The data was analyzed through the use of statistics, that is, frequency and percentage tables, graphs and charts. The use of descriptive statistics enabled the researcher to, meaningfully; describe a distribution of measurements using a few indices or statistics. It was the best way to dedicate data and make it manageable in analysis and interpretation.

7.4 Findings

Average Class Size Table 1 shows that most of the teachers 21(53.2%) have classes of 70 pupils and above, 12 (30.8%) teach classes of between 60-70 pupils, 04 (11.2%) have classes of between 50-60 pupils, 2(4.2%) teach classes of between 40-50 pupils while 1 teacher (1.4%) teaches classes of between 30-40 pupils. This means that the majority of teachers are directly experiencing one of the major effects of Free Primary Education. Congestion in classes and, therefore, will give reliable information on how congestion in classes affects pupils' Arithmetic competence in Mathematics.

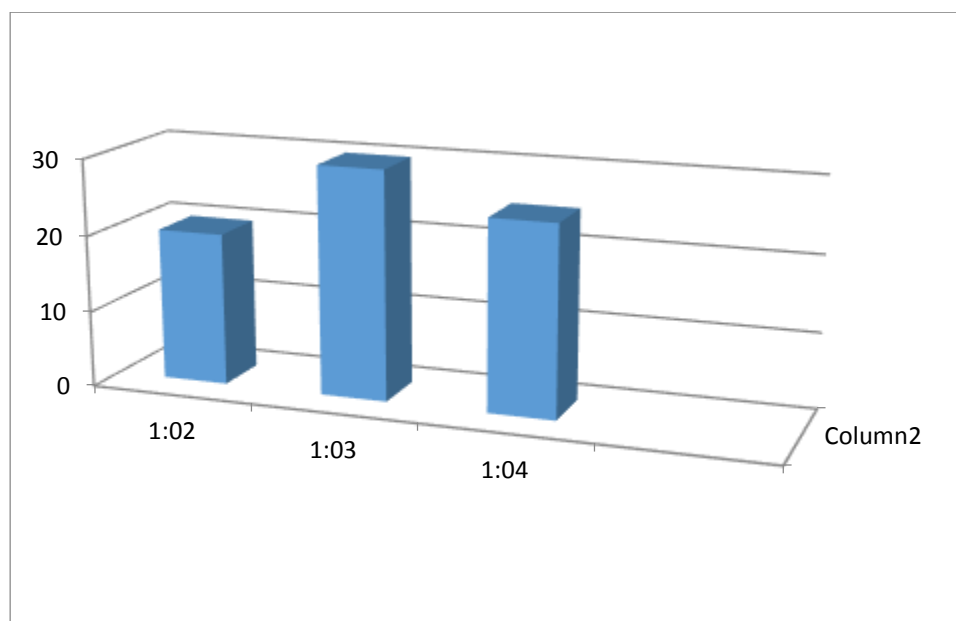
Table 1: Average Class size

| Average class size | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| 20-30 pupils | 00 | 00 |
| 30-40 pupils | 01 | 1.4 |
| 40-50 pupils | 02 | 4.2 |
| 50-60 pupils | 04 | 11.2 |
| 60-70 pupils | 12 | 30.8 |
| 70 pupils and above | 21 | 53.2 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Pupils' Mathematics Textbook Ratio

Figure 1 shows that a significant majority of teachers of Mathematics 19 (47.6%) have a ratio of 1 pupils' Mathematics textbook ratio of 1 textbook to 3 pupils' ratio 1 textbook to 4 or more pupils. So, it became necessary to find out this inadequacy of mathematics textbooks in the majority of the classes and explain its possible impact on the arithmetic competence in majority of pupils (see figure 1)

Figure 1: Pupils' Mathematics Textbook Ratio



Pupils' Mathematics Textbook Ratio

KEY

1:02 fairly adequate Mathematics Textbooks

1:03 Inadequate Mathematics Textbooks

1:04 Very inadequate Mathematics textbooks

Class Size and Arithmetic Competence

The teachers indicate clearly that free primary education (FPE), has led to congestion in classes since the present building in the schools cannot cope with the high influx of pupils due to free and compulsory primary education. This overcrowding in classrooms poses the following challenges to the teaching and learning of Mathematics, as was observed by the teachers.

First of all, the teacher cannot reach every individual pupil resulting into him/her moving with fast learners while ignoring slow ones. This was evidenced in their Mathematics exercise books that were checked by the researcher, some pupils had done two Mathematics problems, while others had either not computed any or the Mathematics were incomplete.

This may be as a result that the teacher did not have a chance to check the pupils' exercise books or even mark them, for that matter. This can adversely affect the computation competence of a majority of the pupils since practice that should lead to perfection in Mathematics is lacking. In addition, not attempting tasks can easily and negatively, affect their performance in other subjects since the pupils would not have the skills that would enable them compute correct computation methods, use a variety of operations i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, use correct forms of Math sign/symbols and think creatively and critically.

Secondly, in order to make teaching, marking and revision easier in the other subjects in the school curriculum, teachers are compelled to give the pupils few and simple arithmetic tasks, irrespective of the classes being handled. A check at the Mathematics exercise books by the researcher revealed that in 6(75%) of the 8 classes that were used in the study, two months after the opening of schools, there only two marked exercise in mathematics.

Thirdly, it came out clearly from the teachers that crowded classes have made it easier for pupils to copy from each other or even assist peers in doing assignment/examinations. This makes it hard for the teacher to Identify individual weaknesses in mathematics computations.

Therefore, he/she moves on with the gifted few leaving behind the majority who end up not developing the ability to use correct computation methods, use a variety of operations i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, use correct forms of Mathematical signs/symbols and think creatively and critically, thus having poor computation competence. This will result into poor performance in arithmetic and mathematics at large, not to mention its effect in the other subjects in the school curriculum.

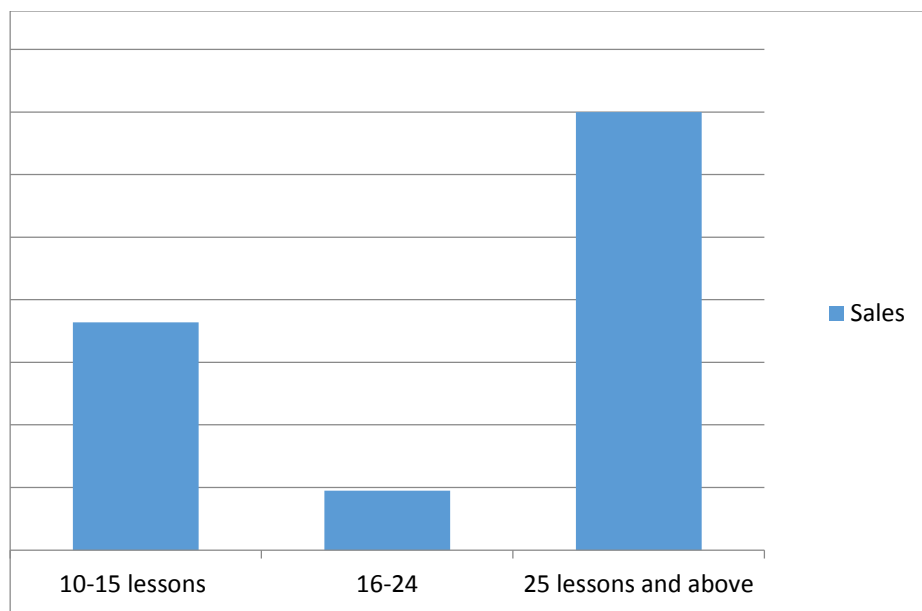
Last but not least, teachers indicated that congestion had led to stuffy classrooms creating discomfort for both pupils and teachers this was likely to disrupt pupils' attention and demotivate the teachers to the extent of not effectively and efficiently teaching mathematics and learners' simply not absorbing maximally what they are taught and hence performing poorly in mathematics, specifically arithmetic.

Pupils' Textbooks Ratio and Arithmetic Competence

The teachers were in agreement that because of the overcrowding, the pupils' mathematics textbooks were adequate.

Figure 3 show that most of the teachers (34) indicated that the pupils' textbook ratio in classes was 1 textbook to 3 pupils (1:3). This ratio, as observed by the teachers of mathematics is not conducive for success in their pupil's arithmetic competence as discussed below.

Figure 2: Number of Lessons per week



To begin with, it is difficult for pupils to do homework since there are no textbooks to carry home and refer to. This denies the pupils a chance to work on their own and, hence, display their individual weakness to the teachers for assistance. Thus, they might not improve on their arithmetic competence. Additionally, pupils especially those with sight impairment struggling to get the words down because of the distance between them and the textbook, this is likely to result to untidy work or poor handwriting which are factors in mathematics.

Also, time is wasted as pupils have to do assignments in shifts. This might lead to teachers not completing the syllabus in time hence affecting, negatively, the performance of pupils in mathematics. Finally, the shy and the slow learners will always be left behind since they will fear asking for the textbook from the mean or fast learners. This is even made worse by the fact that the majority of the schools (75%) were mixed schools (Table 2) where we have a mixture of boys and girls making it even more difficult for the shy ones to be seen borrowing. Mathematics textbooks over and over by the opposite gender.

Table 2: Type of school

| Type of school | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Mixed schools | 6 | 75 |
| Boys schools | 01 | 12.5 |
| Girls school | 01 | 12.5 |
| Day school (total) | 8 | 100 |

Physical facilities and arithmetic competence

Most teachers indicated that there were inadequate physical facilities (classrooms, chairs and desks/lockers) in their schools. This was brought about by the over enrolment from FPE. On the side of the inadequacy of chairs and desks/lockers, teachers raised the following issues; in some schools, some pupils sat on the floor/stones and used their laps to hold mathematics materials; in others, a desk meant for 2 pupils was being used by 4 or even 5 pupils; and, yet in others, some desk tops were broken/uneven. These conditions lead to poor handwriting, untidy work and discomfort. The results are poor handwriting, untidy work and discomfort. The results are poor Arithmetic competence among the pupils since neatness, good handwriting and comfort are key in Arithmetic competence.

On the other hand, the inadequacy of classrooms has led to some pupils learning under trees while others learning from simple makeshifts or classrooms without shutters. Consequently, they are exposed to adverse weather conditions and distracters that disrupt their attention in class leading to poor concentration in class and, hence, poor performance in mathematics.

The basic assumption of the study was on the quality of the pupils competence was due to the availability of adequate teachers, pupils' mathematics textbooks and physical facilities (classrooms, chairs and desks/lockers). These resources helped enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics. This is because the ability to compute well is essential for success in any academic discipline; computing is a life-long skill and part of the personal development skills that are useful beyond the classroom (ministry of Education, 2006:77).

The study used a descriptive survey and it was carried out in 8 public primary schools in Kimilili-Bungoma Sub-County. It involved 40 teachers of mathematics and 200 standard six pupils.

The study used teachers' questionnaire, analysis of class registers/lists and pupils' mathematics exercise books and a pupils; computing task as research tools. These were verified through a pilot study conducted in a randomly selected neighboring school that was not part of the sample, in Bungoma North sub-county, Bungoma County. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistical methods.

The study found out that Free Primary education had lowered pupil's Arithmetic competence in public primary schools. Thus, with the over enrolment in public primary schools after the introduction of free and compulsory education, the few available resources were strained leading to congestion in classrooms, inadequate textbooks and an acute shortage of teachers.

As a result, the teacher of mathematics did not engage their pupils in a much practice as possible to improve on their Arithmetic competence. Consequently, the majority of the pupils had poor competence in Mathematics (scored poor marks in mathematics), both in class and in the final national examinations.

7.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to establish the influence of Free Primary Education (FPE) policy on learners' competence in mathematics in public primary schools in Kimilili-Bungoma, Sub-County. On the basis of these main objectives, the following were the major conclusions;

- The majority of teachers were aware the FPE had resulted to a high teacher-pupil ratio, inadequate pupils mathematics textbooks and inadequate physical facilities (classrooms, chairs and desks/lockers) in public primary schools of Kimilili-Bungoma sub-county.
- That the majority of teachers of mathematics had large classes (60 pupils and above), a heavy work load (30 lessons and above per week), inadequate pupils' mathematics textbooks (1:3) and inadequate physical facilities -some pupils sitting on the floor/stones, learning from classrooms without shutters or outside or pupils congesting on desks and using their laps to hold writing materials. These conditions had inhibited the effective and efficient teaching majority of the pupils. Thus, the majority of the pupils lacked the ability to use correct computation methods, use a variety of operations structure for example addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, use correct forms of Mathematics signs and symbols and think creatively and critically.
- The majority of standard six pupils (47%) had poor writing competence (scored poor marks, 01-25%). The teachers of mathematics indicated that FPE which had led to congestion in classes, teachers heavy work load, inadequate pupils' mathematics textbooks and physical facilities (chairs, classrooms and desks/lockers) was the main reason for poor performance in mathematics in the majority of the pupils.

From what has been found out about the influence of Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy on pupils' Arithmetic competence in public primary school, this study recommends that;

- The Governments and community come in to construct more classrooms or schools to ease the congestion in classrooms so that each class, at least, has a maximum of 45 pupils and each pupil sits comfortably and be able to concentrate in class.
- The government to increase its funds for FPE so that enough textbooks and other supplementary reading materials are purchased.
- The government should employ more teachers to make the teachers' work load manageable.
- Pupils to be engaged in as much mathematics solving problems as possible which leads to success in quick computations in mathematics.
- Pupils to read as many interesting materials as possible and be encouraged to communicate properly the mathematical ideas.
- Mathematics panels in schools to be strengthened through encouragement and motivation, plus retraining or in-service through seminars.
- Teachers to use a variety of teaching methods in mathematics teaching and be good role models(compute systematically)

The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) to change their mode of examinations in mathematics in the Kenya certificate of primary education (K.C.P.E) from multiple choices to structured questions. This will enable the teachers train the pupils in computation competence right from primary schools hence improving on their solving problems in mathematics.

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