

Teaching in a Changing Africa: Differential Academic Performance of Students from Academies and Public Primary Schools at KCSE Examination in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Examinations the world over are used by various stakeholders for various reasons. For policy makers, they are used to evaluate the curriculum for improvement, for teachers and learners they are used for promotion to the next level of learning and for certification. For quality assurance personnel they are used to evaluate the teachers' level of curriculum implementation. Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) is one such examination that learners encounter at the end of their primary education circle. It is used to select Form One students to various cadres of secondary schools on the premise that their sterling performance at KCPE will enable them to perform well at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) which comes at the end of secondary education. This has not always been the case. There have been cases of students posting very good results at KCPE but failing to post equivalent results at KCSE. A study on differential academic performance between examinations taken at primary and those taken at secondary schools has received little or no attention. The purpose of this study was to establish the causes of differential academic performance of students between primary schools examinations and secondary schools examinations in Kenya. The study was guided by Correlational and causal comparative research designs. Rotter's (1971) social learning theory formed a basis for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select six provincial secondary schools and three performing academies from three of the eight provinces of Kenya. Data was collected using document analysis and semi structured interview guides. Type of primary school attended and KCPE raw marks for the year 2006 for the sampled examinees were matched with their 2010 KCSE mean marks for the examinees 2010 KCSE examination results. Data analysis was done both qualitatively and quantitatively by the use of Pearson correlation and regression analysis as well as in-depth description and analysis of interview responses. It emerged that the type of primary school attended does not affect the scores of a candidate at KCSE examinations and that KCPE and KCSE examination scores are moderately correlated. The study also revealed that examinees' socio-economic situations influenced their academic performance at KCSE examinations. The findings should assist policy makers in making informed decisions on issues pertaining to selection of students joining Form One especially the quota system mode of admission to Form One. Secondly the debate on whether to scrap KCPE or not will be based on

informed empirical research. For parents they can choose to enroll their children in academies or public primaries based on informed decisions.

Keywords: Africa, academic performance, examination

INTRODUCTION

End of stage national examinations are usually seen as predictive of performance at the next level of schooling. This however has not always been the case as sometimes students perform very well at one stage but perform poorly at the next stage. This study compared student's performance at the end of primary education (KCPE) to that at the end of secondary education (KCSE). Students who had done well while learning at public primary schools and at private primary schools were compared against their performance at the end of their secondary school education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Examinations are an inevitable part and parcel of the education process. Among other things they are used to measure the level of a candidate's achievement and certify the candidate's levels of education, training and employment.

Kenya's education system is such that one takes examinations after eight years in primary education and these examinations determines the type of school a candidate gets admitted in to at secondary level. Kenya's primary education system has a structural feature of two separate school systems, one supported by public taxes and are called public primary schools and the other run by private entrepreneurs and parents pay for the services rendered and are commonly referred to as academies. Candidates from academies usually perform better than those from public primary schools and there is overwhelming evidence for this assertion. Otieno, S. (2010, December 30). KCPE: The "Curse" of free education The Standard, P.1 paints a very grim picture of the situation when he reported that "This year, the class that started off Free Primary Education eight years ago sat for KCPE and the results show that private schools have eclipsed those run by the state". Admission to National and top Provincial secondary schools is usually based on this performance meaning therefore that the available vacancies at national and provincial schools have always been taken up by pupils from academies. Ironically, the pomp and celebratory mood that characterizes the release of KCPE results is usually replaced by forlorn and downcast faces as the KCPE giants crumble at KCSE examinations.

It is still unknown whether candidates from academies who perform very well at KCPE also perform well at KCSE examinations or whether the few from public schools who had performed well are the ones who maintain the good performance achieved by the few candidates each year at KCSE. In the absence of a systematic study which has identified factors which contribute to differential academic performance of pupils at KCPE and KCSE levels of examinations, there is an urgent need for an empirical study to address this issue hence the need for this current study.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study was guided by two objectives namely:

- To investigate the relationship between academic performance at Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) who had attended academies.

- To investigate the relationship between academic performance at KCPE and KCSE of secondary students who had attended public primary schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Julian, B. Rotter's (1971) theory. The theory argues that a person grows to believe that his or her own actions will bring about reinforcement that one values most. These values include personal competence and effort. This theory which is one of the cognitive theories hold that the intervention of human thinking has a substantial influence on one's motivation. Cognitive theorists argue that a person's awareness of what is happening to him or her has an important effect on his/her future behavior in similar situations. The theory was selected on the premise that in a learning environment an individual learner is seen as an array of potential actions in response to external settings which is the learning environment. It is against this theoretical framework that the study compared performance of learners at primary school (KCPE) and later that at secondary school (KCSE).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Available literature, (Adriaan, 2008) asserts that many of the performance problems at the secondary level have their roots from the primary level of education. This he says is due to a few countries having effective strategies for teaching languages to pupils who enter primary schools. He says that this poses a challenge, because English is the medium of instruction and plays a key role in understanding the content of any subject taught in the curriculum. Secondly apart from Kiswahili and other languages studied in schools, all school books and examinations are written in the English language. A look at the year 2006 KCPE (KNEC) report at Table 1 confirms this.

Table 1: Candidates' Performance in English between 2003-2006

Year	2003		2004		2006		2006	
Paper	Obj.	Comp.	Obj.	Comp.	Obj.	Comp.	Obj.	Comp.
% Mean	44.90	30.73	45.74	33.77	43.10	36.10	45.88	35.47

Source: (KNEC, 2007)

From the table it is evident that at KCPE English as a subject is performed poorly with the objectives paper performed at an average of 44% and the composition paper performed at an average of 34.56%. This performance falls way below the average performance. Composition paper which tests the ability to communicate in English is performed at 34.56% implying that pupils who graduate from primary schools in Kenya can hardly communicate in English. If this is so then one wonders if they can understand or take instructions in English. The report in its analysis concurs and suggests that objectives could have been performed better simply due to guess work. It says in part that out of four options "... the other two options were rightly dismissed by the greater majority, attracting only those who were probably guessing" (KNEC, 2007, p. 3).

Primary school leaving examinations according to Lewin (2008) are largely content rather than skill based and reward recall more than higher cognitive capabilities characterized by the secondary examinations. He argues that this could be one reason for differential performance between KCPE and KCSE examinations. Several studies (Adriaan 2008, Tellai et al 2011, Kamunge report 1988 and Ominde 1976) submitted to the overcrowding of the secondary curriculum as a recipe for poor performance at KCSE.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted both Correlational and ex-post factor designs. The latter design was used because the cause and the effect had already occurred while the data involved in the study were as they were collected from the source without any manipulation. Correlational design was used to investigate associations in performance at KCPE examinations and KCSE examinations. This was done by comparing marks scored by learners at KCPE and four years later at KCSE in the year 2010. The study was conducted in provincial secondary schools in three provinces namely: Nyanza, Rift Valley and Western Provinces. Performing Academies from the three provinces also formed part of the study. Respondents from provincial secondary schools were selected based on whether they had attended Academies or Public Primary schools.

Purposive sampling specifically criterion purposive sampling was used to select six secondary schools from the three provinces. This was done by examining the 2010 KCSE examinations school means. Two schools one for boys and the other for girls with almost the same mean score were selected for the study. Thereafter one stream per school was randomly selected for the study giving a sample size of 240 respondents. For the performing academies one school per province was selected based on the criterion that they had been posting good results for the last 5 years. From one admission records, 2010 KCSE results, questionnaire and individual interviews guides were used to collect data for the study. Data was analyzed both qualitatively as well as quantitatively by the use of inferential statistics.

RESULTS

First Research Objective

The study sought to investigate the relationship between students' performance at KCPE and that at KCSE for those who had attended Academies.

To achieve this objective the following research question was formulated and answered in this study: what is the relationship between KCPE and KCSE examination performance for students who had attended academies. To answer this question data on students primary schools attended and their performance at both KCPE and KCSE were coded, tabulated and correlated.

Table 2: Demographic Description of participants

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mena	Std. Deviation
Primary School Category	240	1	2	1.50	.501
KCPE raw mark	204	50	83	69.53	6.429
KCSE mean Mark	240	84	84	60.53	13.167
Valid N (listwise)	240				

The scatter results show a strong positive linear correlation between KCPE and KCSE scores. Table 2 gives means and standard deviations for both KCPE and KCSE examinations as 69.53 and 60.33. The standard deviation for KCPE stood at 6.429 while that of KCSE stood at 13.167. The findings of the study showed that there is no significant relationship between the type of school attended (Academy or public primary school) and performance at KCPE examinations of individual students. Pearson Correlation between KCPE raw mark and school category was realized at -0.060 with P-value at 0.176. Although the results seem contradictory to the general belief it is worth stating that the results were from a sample purposively selected for the study after passing their KCPE examinations.

Second Research Objective

The study sought to investigate the relationship between academic performance at KCPE and KCSE of secondary school students who had attended public primary schools. To achieve this objective the following research question was formulated and answered in this study:

What is the relationship between KCPE and KCSE examination performance for students who had attended public primary schools?

To answer this question data on primary schools attended, KCPE scores and KCSE scores were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Analysis.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Analysis (P. 69)

	Primary School Category	KCPE Raw Mark	KCSE Mean Mark
Primary School Category	1	-.060	.038
Pearson Correlation (Sig 1 tailed)	.176		.281
N	240	240	240
KCPE Raw Mark	.060	1	.452
Pearson Correlation (Sig 1 tailed)	.176		.000
N	240	240	240
KCSE Mean Mark	.038	.452	1
Pearson Correlation (Sig 1 tailed)	.281	.000	
N	240	240	240

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 indicates a Pearson Correlation between KCPE raw mark and KCSE mean mark =0.452 P-Value =0.00, whereas the relationship between KCPE raw mark and primary school category was .060 with P-Value at 0.176. The Correlation between KCSE and primary school category was 0.038 with P-Value at 0.281.

These results indicate that there is no relationship between the type of primary school attended and performance at KCSE examinations. The results therefore concluded that on average the type of primary school attended does not reflect on a student's future performance for those who pass and proceed to provincial secondary schools.

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