

ABSTRACT

Free Primary Education (FPE) was first introduced in Kenya in 1974, when fee payment for the first four years of primary education was waived. The programme was stopped in 1988 and replaced with the cost-sharing policy. FPE was re-introduced in 2003 with the aim of improving access to education through enhanced enrolment, retention, transition and completion rates. Abolition of school fees led to a significant improvement in enrolment. A study by UNESCO reveals that the re-introduction of free primary education in 2003 in Kenya experienced implementation challenges on quality of instruction factors such as student: teacher ratio, teacher workload, classroom space, availability of textbooks and assessment. This study examined factors which influence quality of instruction before and after the introduction of FPE with respect to; student: teacher ratio, teacher workload, student: textbook ratio and frequency of assessment. The study was conducted in Nyandarua North Sub County, Kenya. It adopted the comparative study research design. The accessible population was 179 head teachers and 1675 class teachers. A sample of 112 head teachers and 313 class teachers selected using purposive stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques participated in the study. Head teachers and class teachers questionnaires were used to collect data. Content and face validities of the two instruments were examined by experts from the faculty of Education and Community Studies, Egerton University. Their recommendations were used to improve the instruments before they were used to collect data. Data were analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe and summarise data while the t-test was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of confidence. The findings of the study indicated that there was a significant improvement in the student: textbook ratio and frequency of assessment after the introduction of FPE. However, the student: teacher ratio and teacher workload increased after introduction of free primary education. The study concluded that introduction of Free Primary Education positively affected student: textbook ratio and frequency of assessment while it negatively affected student: teacher ratio and teachers workload. Based on the increasing number of students relative to staffing and more teaching load after introduction of Free Primary Education, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education should provide more teachers in public primary schools. Also, the Ministry of Education should establish ways of improving student: textbook ratio to a target of 1:1 in order to uphold quality of instruction in public primary schools.