



# Does community involvement affect teacher effort? Assessing learning impacts of Free Primary Education in Kenya



Julius F. Atuhurra\*

National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), 7-22-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-8677, Japan  
Twaweza East Africa, Plot 77, Suwara Road, Naguru Go Down, P.O. Box 40163, Kampala, Uganda

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 December 2014  
Received in revised form 31 December 2015  
Accepted 23 March 2016

### JEL classification:

I20  
I21  
H44

### Keywords:

Educational policy  
Learning achievement  
Teacher effort  
Community involvement

## ABSTRACT

While the impressive school participation impacts of Universal Primary Education policies in Sub-Saharan Africa are widely recognized, attempts to measure learning gains from schooling remain minimal. Utilizing a unique international test score dataset, we measure and explain grade six reading and math learning outcomes in Kenya. By comparing competences between public and private schools before and after the introduction of free primary education, we find large achievement declines and inequalities based on gender and socioeconomic status. The declines are associated with low teacher efforts and community disengagement. Policy studies on community involvement in schools will likely lead to improved learning.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Individual productivity, earnings and national development are strongly associated with the stock of knowledge and skills the workforce possess, and not merely the number of school-years attained (World Bank, 2011). Many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have recently introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) policies, providing tuition-free access to all children at government-aided (public) schools.<sup>1</sup> Previous studies have emphasized enrollment and grade-completion achievements, which accrued mainly to girls and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who were previously unable to pay tuition fees (Deininger, 2003; Nishimura et al., 2008; Lewin, 2009; Oketch and Somerset, 2010; Hoogeveen and Rossi, 2013). However, the quality of education has since declined and many graduating children are not achieving the minimum learning requirements (UNESCO, 2005). This study assesses the extent of the decline that could be associated with the FPE policy, delineates the competences by gender and

socioeconomic status (SES), and attempts to examine the pathways to the observed achievement levels. We utilize internationally standardized grade six pupil-level test scores for reading and math to measure learning proficiency—a significant improvement on the existing studies. The study therefore, draws primary education policy lessons relevant to several countries from the SSA region.

Although most studies have reported impressive participation impacts, they have also highlighted several challenges that were thought to compromise the quality of education in UPE schools. In the study on UPE impacts in Uganda, Deininger (2003) attributed the high end-of-cycle exam failure rates in 1999 to the excessively overcrowded classes that resulted into extreme pupil-to-teacher ratios (PTRs). A regional education initiative in East Africa – “Uwezo” – has since 2009 conducted annual learning assessments measuring the basic literacy and numeracy competences of six to sixteen year-olds in the three countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Using the results for 2011 and 2012, the Uwezo assessments reveal that even after several years of schooling, the majority of children in the region remained functionally illiterate and/or innumerate at grade two level (Jones et al., 2014). Moreover, the region’s education systems have for some time been characterized by inefficiency concerns of teacher and pupil absenteeism, grade repetitions and early dropouts.

A detailed review of the available evidence from previous school based management (SBM) studies reveals that SBM

\* Present address: Twaweza East Africa, Plot 77, Suwara Road, Naguru Go Down, P. O. Box 40163, Kampala, Uganda.

E-mail addresses: [favouritejulio@yahoo.com](mailto:favouritejulio@yahoo.com), [jatuhurra@twaweza.org](mailto:jatuhurra@twaweza.org), [phd11201@grips.ac.jp](mailto:phd11201@grips.ac.jp) (J.F. Atuhurra).

<sup>1</sup> Some of these countries include Malawi in 1994, Uganda in 1997, Tanzania in 2000, and Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda in 2003 (Grogan, 2008).

programs have mainly involved devolution of decision making authority and responsibility over various aspects of school operations to a specific individual or group of people (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). In Kenya's context, a unique and quite relevant cross-sectional empirical study, covering seventy schools from six districts, linked sixth grade students' math test score achievements to the quality of school-related social relations among key school actors—teachers, students, principals and parents (Kodzi et al., 2014). This study found significant school-level and pupil-level positive test score associations with local community-related variables such as the relationship between the school principal and the parents, parents' material and financial involvement, teacher connections with parents, and the quality of the teacher's commitment and engagement with their class. Some East Africa based studies on school management structures have analyzed UPE effects on local community participation and school accountability (Suzuki, 2002; Sasaoka and Nishimura, 2010). They suggest that UPE policies have largely been characterized by centralized political power that is likely to weaken local control of public schools.

Other studies have analyzed the school choice impacts of UPE policies and categorized the resultant decisions as reflecting either the demand for differentiated schooling – the differentiated demand model – or the demand for more schools – the excess demand model. Nishimura and Yamano (2013) find that the rapid emergence of private primary schools in Kenya – the number of private schools grew four-fold in three years after the introduction of FPE – reflected demand for higher quality schooling. A few studies have assessed the learning impacts of the UPE policies in SSA. Two such studies in Kenya were by Bold et al. (2010), and by Lucas and Mbiti (2012a). Both studies used grade eight primary-exit exam scores disaggregated at school-level by gender and categorized by school type and location. These studies find that the achievement declines that followed the introduction of FPE were induced by the peer quality decline resulting from the enrolment of lower ability pupils. In particular, Lucas and Mbiti (2012a) found no substantial declines in the test scores of pupils who would have taken the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exam in the absence of the FPE program. Since the outcomes of the KCPE exams are of great future consequence for all involved actors, schools and parents make their best efforts to prepare the candidates to perform well in these end-of-cycle high-stakes tests. As such, studies utilizing KCPE test scores are likely to suffer from selection bias concerns arising from factors such as early dropping out, sifting or retention at penultimate grades, and private tutoring (Koretz, 2002; MacLeod and Urquiola, 2009; Glewwe et al., 2010; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). Except for the proposition that a proportion of the pupils may have already dropped out before grade six, the test score data used in this analysis are free of such concerns.

Using a unique repeated cross-sections dataset obtained from the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ), this paper applies a before and after difference in differences (DIDs) approach to analyze the grade six pupil-level learning outcomes for both Reading and Math. By assuming a common trend and relying on the conditional independence assumption, we compare test scores of private schools to those of public schools. The study finds considerable test score declines for both subjects for pupils enrolled in public schools, especially for boys and in urban schools. Specifically, reading and math test scores declined by 0.415 standard deviations (SDs) and 0.510 SDs respectively. Positive spillover effects were observed for private schools in urban areas—their math test scores improved significantly by 0.384 SDs. The pathway analyses for the observed pupil test score changes in Kenya suggest considerable importance of the extra hours teachers put into their work in form

of lesson planning and correcting assignments—teacher effort. Teacher efforts significantly declined in public schools—by over 12 h for reading teachers and about 13.8 h for math teachers. The decline in teacher efforts mirrors the decline in local community involvement in school operations and in frequency of school inspection and monitoring activities.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 gives a brief background explanation of the FPE policy in Kenya. The SACMEQ dataset is explained in Section 3 after which our hypotheses and the DIDs empirical model are discussed in Section 4. We present the results in Section 5 and conclude with a policy relevant discussion and conclusion section.

## 2. The FPE policy in Kenya

In December 2002, a national coalition government was voted into power in Kenya after close to forty years of single party rule.<sup>2</sup> In fulfillment of a presidential campaign promise for free basic education for all Kenyans, the FPE policy was implemented effective January 2003. Since independence, this would be the third time such a policy was announced in the country—the first two initiatives were in 1974 and 1979 respectively (Somerset, 2009). Coming as a political promise, FPE was in many ways similar to the earlier two initiatives. Pronounced in December and effected starting the following month, it was plagued with various complications as there was no time to effectively plan the implementation, and teachers were neither inducted nor prepared for the extreme changes that they were to face at the start of the school year. Primary school enrollment jumped from 5.9 million in 2002 to 7.2 million in 2003, instantly pushing the net enrollment ratio (NER) from 61.8% to 74.2% (see Table 1) and the pupil-to-teacher ratio from the recommended forty pupils to sixty pupils per class (Abuya et al., 2015). This resulted in several other resource gaps that were reflected in form of overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teaching and learning materials. In addition, a new curriculum aimed at reducing student and teacher workload was implemented at primary and secondary levels (Wanyama and Koskey, 2013).

In June 2003, the new government embarked on a three-year “national Economic Recovery Strategy for wealth and employment” (ERS). As detailed in the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESPP), the ERS entailed education sector reforms that were to operationalize the FPE policy. In particular, the KESPP spelled out the adoption of the Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) for education planning, and the decentralization of education and training services to provincial and district levels (Government of Kenya, 2005). Several investment programs were undertaken, many of which focused on tackling the various educational challenges that had been manifested at the primary schooling level—most notably classroom overcrowding. The “Primary School Infrastructure Investment

**Table 1**  
Education Statistics Before and After FPE Introduction.

	2002 percent	2003 percent
Gross Enrolment Rate	91.6	106.9
Net Enrolment Rate	61.8	74.2
Girls share	48.4	48.5
Net Enrolment for Girls	62.1	74.2
Net Enrolment for Boys	61.6	74.2

Source: World development indicators, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> The Kenya African National Union (KANU) party ruled Kenya for almost forty years from the time the country acquired its independence (1963) from Great Britain. In 2002, the National Alliance of Rainbow Coalition (NARC) defeated the KANU party and assumed government leadership in January 2003.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841214>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841214>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)