



# The impact of professional athlete sponsorship on educational attainment in Western Kenya



Svitlana Maksymenko<sup>a,\*</sup>, Anna Tranfaglia<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Economics, University of Pittsburgh, 4703 Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15230, USA

<sup>b</sup> Department of Economics and Global Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15230, USA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how a primary school affiliation with a professional athlete affects pupils' educational attainment on Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Taking an advantage of a data set of 2010 KCPE scores for 80 primary schools in the Eldoret district, the study statistically illustrates a strong positive correlation between professional athlete sponsorship and educational attainment of pupils on all subject portions of the KCPE exam, except Kiswahili. The evidence presented in this paper highlights the impact of the athlete sponsorship on quality of education in Kenya.

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## 1. Introduction

Education is widely regarded as the route to economic growth and prosperity. If access to education is equally distributed across a country, it eventually might result in socio-economic equity. Secondary and tertiary education allows a scientific and technological advancement—a prerequisite for economic growth. Education not only combats unemployment and poverty, but it is one of the best tools for acceleration of global economic growth (Glewwe et al., 2007). Therefore, the factors that promote universal access to a quality education should be established and supported in the developing world.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UN MDG) Program declares the achievement of universal primary education as a benchmark for development. Target 2.A of this Program states that by 2015 “children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” (The United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000, 19:2). The quality of education needs to guarantee that students who attend schools acquire knowledge and meet the requirements of standardized tests. Universal education is useless unless it produces individuals who have basic skills to empower themselves—writing and reading (Oketch et al., 2010).

This study acknowledges that many professional athletes in Western Kenya, particularly in the Eldoret–Iten region, are active

in their communities and often invest in philanthropic causes. A few have started their own schools or provided financial support to existing institutions. From visiting many primary schools in this region and speaking with Kenyan professional athletes who actively engage in development projects, we believe that pupils who attend the athlete-sponsored schools have educational advantages over their peers.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether a primary school affiliation with a professional athlete is an important factor of pupils' success as measured by achievement on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) score. The KCPE exam score determines the eligibility of each pupil for secondary education and is imperative for students' continuation of formal education past Standard (Grade) 8. Therefore, exploration of factors that positively influence pupils' achievements is an important task for scholars and policymakers alike.

This study takes an advantage of a data set of 2010 KCPE scores for 80 schools in the Uasin Gishu North (Eldoret) district. There are 18 private and 62 public primary schools in the district; some of these schools receive a substantial amount of support from professional athletes. Using the data, we examine whether pupils in athlete-sponsored primary schools produce higher test scores on the KCPE exam compared to other Eldoret district primary school students. The purpose of this paper is to statistically illustrate a strong positive correlation between sponsorship from a professional athlete and educational attainment of pupils, and thus further the discussion on the role of athletes in educational development.

The major contribution of this paper is to highlight the role of professional athletes among the drivers of educational performance

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 412 383 8155.

E-mail addresses: [maks@pitt.edu](mailto:maks@pitt.edu) (S. Maksymenko), [aet16@pitt.edu](mailto:aet16@pitt.edu) (A. Tranfaglia).

of pupils in Western Kenya, and to show that it may be one of the alternative routes for improving the primary education system in this developing country. Even though many researchers looked at the factors that improve Kenyan educational attainment (Bold et al., 2011; Hungi and Thuku, 2009; Mukudi, 2003; Oketch et al., 2010; Ozier, 2011), to the best of our knowledge this is the first attempt in exploring the impact of professional athletes as a possible driver for pupils' performance. Another contribution of this paper is to develop meaningful policy implications on the role of professional athletes within the country-specific system of education.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 offers a historic background of Kenyan educational system and presents a brief overview of literature on the nature of factors that explain educational attainment in Kenya. Section 3 describes the data collected. Section 4 presents the empirical model, estimations, and offers a detailed analysis of the results. Finally, Section 5 discusses various policy implications and provides conclusions.

## 2. Primary education system in Kenya. Literature review

Kenya has a hierarchal organization of education similar to its administrative system. Under its old constitution, the country consisted of eight secretarial provinces: Central, Coast, Eastern, Nairobi, North Eastern, Nyanza, Rift Valley and Western. Prior to 2013, each of these provinces comprised of districts, which were further divided into educational divisions and then into zones. Under the Constitution of 2010, and subsequent integration of the provincial administration with a new system of counties, 47 Counties with elected governments replaced provinces<sup>1</sup>. Every district (county) in Kenya faces a combination of private and public educational institutions, from primary school level to universities. The proportion of children attending private primary schools is relatively large compared to other Southern and East African countries, and has increased from 4.6% in 2004 to 11.5% in 2007. It suggests that parents react to the poor quality of public education (Nishimura and Yamano, 2013). On January 6th, 2003 the Ministry of Education launched the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy. It abolished fees for tuition with the original intent for the Kenyan government and other development partners to cover the cost of educating Kenyan citizens and achieving the UN MDG of universal primary education (Sifuna, 2003).

While the Kenyan government covers the cost of tuition for primary students, there are other costs associated with attending schools. Even with the FPE policy in place, families continue to financially contribute to their children's education. All public schools have committees, which are legally allowed to – and often do – charge user-fees: exam fees, haram-bee, extracurricular activity fees, textbooks, uniforms, and caution fees<sup>2</sup>. While tuition is covered by funds allocated through the Ministry of Education, these funds are usually insufficient to finance all the school needs. Many districts need to hire more instructors than those employed centrally through teachers' service commission – in order to achieve the national average student – teacher ratio of 39.5:1 (Koech, 2011). To this end, many schools in Western Kenya use their right to levy fees in order to finance salaries of additional teachers. These fees deprive some students from attending school, specifically those whose parents cannot afford it. Various public schools fees create a barrier to achieving universal education in Kenya.

<sup>1</sup> As in 2010 – the time frame of our study – counties were non-existent, we will continue to refer to provincial and district administrative division in Kenya throughout this paper.

<sup>2</sup> A security deposit should a student damage or destroy school property. Caution fees are refundable, but families need to pay the fee in order for a child to attend school, thus adding to the cost of education.

The question of private vs. public primary schools is a popular topic for education researchers. In Kenya, there is a documented market for private education in both rural and urban regions. Oketch et al. (2010) assert that the private and public sectors are separate parallel systems, as opposed to competing with each other. As the number of private schools increases, the supply side expands shifting the costs away from the government spending on education. Therefore, private schooling in Kenya is viewed as supplementing inadequate public education spending. Moreover, it helps Kenya reach the second MDG of achieving universal primary education.

In 1985, Kenya adopted the 8–4–4 education system<sup>3</sup>. This is a hybrid system modeled after the U.S. and the British systems (Bedi et al., 2004). The school year begins in January and commences in late November, with three long holidays during April, August, and December. The first eight years of schooling are compulsory. The starting age is six years old. Unfortunately, Kenya lacks the resources to enforce the starting age of schooling. Many students do not attend primary school when they are six years old. Instead, the financial health of the family dictates when a pupil is able to enroll in primary school, and explains why a sizeable percentage of pupils in each grade are older than required age for each level (Otieno and Colclough, 2009).

An introduction of the 8–4–4 system originated the need for standardized testing in order to measure pupils' achievement and to allow progression from one level of schooling to the next. Two national exams were introduced in 1985: the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) – a national administrative body responsible for supervising the national assessment on Kenya – administers both exams. KNEC is a subdivision of the Kenya Ministry of Education. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the KCPE results, a multi-subject test for the Standard 8 students to gain admittance into secondary schools.

The KCPE exam tests the five areas of study that all Kenyan students cover in primary schools. These are: Math, English, Kiswahili, Science, and Social and Religious Studies. There are two writing segments: the Insha, which is completed in Kiswahili, and the English Composition. The maximum achievement score on the KCPE is 500 points: 100 points for each of the five subjects. The Kiswahili and English scores are composite scores of the writing element and the comprehension test. The exam takes 4 days to complete. It is usually taken in November during the last year of primary school (Standard 8), with the results habitually publicized a few days after Christmas. The results of this exam determine what kind of secondary school – if they qualify at all – Kenyan students are able to apply to and thus attend for their secondary education.

It is highly competitive to gain entrance to the first year of secondary school. This is primarily due to the excess demand for secondary education in Kenya, and the inability of secondary institutions to increase enrollment simultaneously with the new education demand introduced by the FPE policy (Oketch et al., 2010). Most Kenyan provinces send the vast majority of their children to primary school, but these provincial units then witness a sharp decline in attendance for Standards 7 and 8 pupils (Bagaka, 2010).

The FPE policy of 2003 has been the catalyst for a great deal of changes in primary education. Bold et al. (2011) analyzed how different implications of FPE policy influence pupils' achievement. First, public spending on primary education as a share of total public expenditures increased greatly. The share of government spending on primary education in 2003–2004 was seven times of public funding allotted in 2000–2001 fiscal years, with the

<sup>3</sup> The years of primary, secondary and tertiary (university) education, respectively.

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