

Improving Access to Quality Education in Kenya: Strategies for Enhancing Primary and Secondary Education

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Abstract- Access to quality education is a fundamental right and a key driver of social, economic, and political development in Kenya. Despite significant progress in recent years, the country still faces challenges in ensuring access to quality education for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This paper explores strategies for improving access to quality education in Kenya, focusing on enhancing primary and secondary education. The main strategies discussed include increasing enrollment rates by expanding school infrastructure, providing financial support, and implementing community awareness programs; addressing the challenges of out-of-school children through targeted interventions, collaborations with stakeholders, and flexible learning approaches; and improving the quality of education in Kenyan schools by investing in teacher training, updating curricula, integrating technology, and strengthening school management and accountability systems. The paper also highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement, including the government, schools, communities, NGOs, and international organizations, in achieving educational goals. Case studies and examples of successful initiatives are presented to demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for a holistic approach and providing actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to improve access to quality education in Kenya. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of educational initiatives are crucial for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of these efforts. By implementing the strategies and recommendations outlined in this paper, Kenya can make significant progress towards achieving inclusive and equitable quality education for all, thereby unlocking the potential of its youth and building a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable society.

Indexed Terms- Access, Quality Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a crucial driver of social, economic, and political development. In Kenya, the education sector has made significant strides in recent years, with increased enrollment rates and improved gender parity in primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2021). However, despite these achievements, the country still faces challenges in ensuring access to quality education for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mbugua, 2022).

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021), the net enrollment rate for primary education in Kenya stands at 85%, while the rate for secondary education is 53%. These figures reveal that a significant number of children, especially at the secondary level, are not accessing formal education. Furthermore, the quality of education in Kenyan schools varies widely, with many schools lacking adequate resources, qualified teachers, and appropriate infrastructure (Oketch & Somerset, 2021).

Access to quality education is essential for Kenya's development, as it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to participate effectively in the country's social, economic, and political life (Wambugu & Mokoena, 2022). Quality education also contributes to reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, all of which are critical for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2021).

This paper aims to explore strategies for improving access to quality education in Kenya, with a focus on enhancing primary and secondary education. The main strategies to be discussed include increasing

enrollment rates, addressing the challenges of out-of-school children, and improving the quality of education in Kenyan schools. By examining these strategies and their potential impact, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational development in Kenya and provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders.

II. ENHANCING ACCESS TO PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Current enrollment rates in Kenya have shown improvement over the years, with the introduction of free primary education in 2003 and free secondary education in 2008. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021), the net enrollment rate for primary education in Kenya is 85%, while the rate for secondary education stands at 53%. Despite these advances, challenges in access to education persist, particularly for children from low-income families, marginalized communities, and rural areas (Oduor, 2022).

Several strategies can be employed to increase enrollment rates in primary and secondary education:

1. Expanding school infrastructure and facilities: Investing in the construction and renovation of schools, especially in underserved areas, can significantly improve access to education. The Kenyan government has been implementing the School Infrastructure Development Program, which aims to build new classrooms, laboratories, and sanitation facilities in schools across the country (Ministry of Education, 2021). This initiative has helped to reduce overcrowding and improve the learning environment for students.
2. Providing financial support and scholarships for underprivileged students: Financial constraints are a major barrier to education for many Kenyan families. To address this, the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been providing scholarships, bursaries, and cash transfers to support the education of underprivileged students. For example, the Wings to Fly program, a partnership between the Equity Group Foundation and Mastercard Foundation, has been providing comprehensive scholarships to academically gifted but financially disadvantaged

students since 2010 (Equity Group Foundation, 2021).

3. Implementing community awareness programs to promote the importance of education: Engaging with communities and raising awareness about the value of education can help to increase enrollment rates and reduce dropout rates. The Kenyan government, in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations, has been implementing community sensitization campaigns to promote the importance of education, particularly for girls and children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). These campaigns have been successful in changing attitudes and increasing community support for education.

Case studies and examples of successful initiatives in improving access to education in Kenya include:

1. The Tusome Early Grade Reading Program, a partnership between the Kenyan government and USAID, has been working to improve literacy skills among primary school students. The program has provided teacher training, learning materials, and community engagement activities, resulting in significant improvements in reading outcomes (USAID, 2021).
2. The Kakenya Center for Excellence, founded by Dr. Kakenya Ntaiya, is a boarding school for girls in rural Kenya that provides quality education and empowers young women to become leaders in their communities. The school has achieved a 100% transition rate to secondary education and has been recognized globally for its impact on girls' education (Kakenya's Dream, 2021).

These case studies demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted interventions, partnerships, and community engagement in improving access to quality education in Kenya.

III. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Despite the progress made in improving access to education in Kenya, a significant number of children remain out of school. According to a report by the Ministry of Education (2021), an estimated 1.2 million children aged 6-17 years are not enrolled in primary or secondary education. Several factors contribute to this

high number of out-of-school children, including poverty, cultural barriers, child labor, and inadequate school infrastructure (Ochieng, 2022).

To bring out-of-school children back to the education system, various strategies can be employed:

1. Identifying and addressing the root causes: Poverty is one of the main reasons children drop out of school or never enroll. To address this, the Kenyan government has been implementing cash transfer programs, such as the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Cash Transfer Program, which provides financial support to families to help keep children in school (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, addressing cultural barriers, such as early marriage and gender discrimination, through community sensitization and advocacy can help to reduce the number of out-of-school children.
2. Implementing targeted interventions and support programs: Providing targeted support to out-of-school children can help to bring them back to the education system. The Child-to-Child (CtC) approach, implemented by the Kenyan government in partnership with UNICEF, has been successful in identifying and supporting out-of-school children through peer-to-peer outreach and community engagement (UNICEF, 2021). The program trains children to identify and support their out-of-school peers, helping to create a more inclusive learning environment.
3. Collaborating with communities and stakeholders: Engaging with communities and stakeholders is crucial in creating a conducive learning environment for out-of-school children. The Kenyan government has been working with NGOs, faith-based organizations, and community leaders to raise awareness about the importance of education and to identify and support out-of-school children (Ministry of Education, 2021). These collaborations have helped to mobilize resources, provide alternative learning opportunities, and create community-based support systems for out-of-school children.

Examples of successful reintegration programs for out-of-school children in Kenya include:

1. The Education and Social Integration Program (ESIP), implemented by the Kenyan government in partnership with the World Bank, has been

supporting the reintegration of out-of-school children in informal settlements in Nairobi. The program provides accelerated learning, life skills training, and psychosocial support to help children transition back to formal education (World Bank, 2021).

2. The Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET) program, although implemented in Tanzania, offers valuable lessons for Kenya. The program provides a condensed curriculum and flexible learning arrangements to help out-of-school children catch up and reintegrate into the formal education system. COBET has been successful in reaching and supporting marginalized children, particularly those in rural areas (UNICEF, 2021).

These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted interventions, community engagement, and flexible learning approaches in bringing out-of-school children back to the education system.

IV. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN KENYAN SCHOOLS

While access to education has improved in Kenya, the quality of education remains a significant challenge. Many schools face issues such as teacher shortages, inadequate resources, and outdated curricula, which hinder the delivery of quality education (Odhiambo, 2022). According to the World Bank (2021), the pupil-teacher ratio in Kenyan primary schools is 40:1, which is higher than the recommended ratio of 25:1, indicating a need for more qualified teachers.

Several strategies can be employed to enhance the quality of education in Kenyan schools:

1. Investing in teacher training and professional development: Providing continuous professional development opportunities for teachers is crucial in improving the quality of education. The Kenyan government, in partnership with international organizations like the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has been implementing teacher training programs to enhance pedagogical skills and subject knowledge (JICA, 2021). These programs have been successful in improving teacher competencies and student learning outcomes.

2. Updating curricula and teaching methods to meet the needs of the 21st century: Modernizing curricula and teaching methods is essential in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. The Kenyan government has been implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which emphasizes the development of core competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy (Ministry of Education, 2021). The CBC also promotes learner-centered pedagogy and the use of formative assessment to support student learning.
3. Integrating technology and innovative learning approaches: Integrating technology in education can enhance the quality of learning and make education more accessible. The Kenyan government has been implementing the Digital Literacy Program (DLP), which aims to provide digital devices and content to primary schools across the country (Ministry of Education, 2021). The program has been successful in improving digital literacy skills among students and teachers and has facilitated the adoption of innovative learning approaches, such as blended learning and flipped classrooms.
4. Strengthening school management and accountability systems: Effective school management and accountability are essential in ensuring the quality of education. The Kenyan government has been implementing the School Improvement Program (SIP), which aims to strengthen school leadership, governance, and accountability (Ministry of Education, 2021). The program provides training and support to school leaders and boards of management, helping to improve school performance and student learning outcomes.

Best practices and examples of schools or programs that have successfully improved educational quality in Kenya include:

1. The STEM Mentorship Program, implemented by the Kenyan government in partnership with the private sector, has been providing mentorship and support to secondary school students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. The program has been successful in improving student performance and increasing the number of students pursuing STEM

courses in higher education (Ministry of Education, 2021).

2. The Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa is an example of a school that has successfully implemented a holistic approach to education, focusing on academic excellence, leadership development, and community service. The school has been recognized for its innovative curriculum, which emphasizes the development of 21st-century skills and global citizenship (Aga Khan Academies, 2021).

These examples demonstrate the importance of teacher training, curriculum reform, technology integration, and effective school management in improving the quality of education in Kenyan schools.

V. THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PROMOTING ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Promoting access to quality education in Kenya requires the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, including the government, schools, communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations. Each stakeholder plays a crucial role in supporting and strengthening the education system.

1. Government policies and initiatives to support education: The Kenyan government has been implementing various policies and initiatives to support education, such as the Free Primary Education (FPE) program and the Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) program (Ministry of Education, 2021). These programs have helped to increase enrollment rates and reduce financial barriers to education. Additionally, the government has been investing in infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum reform to improve the quality of education.
2. Partnerships between schools, communities, and non-governmental organizations: Collaborations between schools, communities, and NGOs have been instrumental in promoting access to quality education in Kenya. For example, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has been partnering with schools and communities to implement the School Improvement Program (SIP), which aims to enhance school leadership, teacher competencies,

and community engagement (AKF, 2021). Similarly, the Kenyan government has been working with NGOs like the World Vision to implement the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) program, which focuses on creating safe, inclusive, and learner-centered environments (World Vision, 2021).

3. International collaborations and support from organizations like UNESCO: International organizations, such as UNESCO, have been providing technical and financial support to the Kenyan education sector. UNESCO has been working with the Kenyan government to develop and implement education policies, such as the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2018-2022, which outlines the country's priorities and strategies for improving access to quality education (UNESCO, 2021). Additionally, UNESCO has been supporting teacher training programs, curriculum development, and the integration of ICT in education through initiatives like the UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust (CFIT) project (UNESCO, 2021).
4. The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement in achieving educational goals: Achieving the goal of providing access to quality education for all children in Kenya requires the engagement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders. The Kenyan government has been promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships through initiatives like the Education Sector Stakeholders Forum (ESSF), which brings together representatives from the government, development partners, civil society organizations, and the private sector to discuss and coordinate education policies and programs (Ministry of Education, 2021). These partnerships foster a shared vision, facilitate the pooling of resources and expertise, and ensure the sustainability and scalability of education interventions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored various strategies for improving access to quality education in Kenya, focusing on enhancing primary and secondary education. The main strategies discussed include increasing enrollment rates, addressing the challenges

of out-of-school children, and improving the quality of education in Kenyan schools.

To increase enrollment rates, the paper highlighted the importance of expanding school infrastructure and facilities, providing financial support and scholarships for underprivileged students, and implementing community awareness programs to promote the importance of education. Addressing the challenges of out-of-school children requires identifying and addressing the root causes, such as poverty and cultural barriers, implementing targeted interventions and support programs, and collaborating with communities and stakeholders to create a conducive learning environment.

Improving the quality of education in Kenyan schools involves investing in teacher training and professional development, updating curricula and teaching methods to meet the needs of the 21st century, integrating technology and innovative learning approaches, and strengthening school management and accountability systems.

A holistic approach that encompasses all these strategies is crucial in ensuring sustainable improvements in access to quality education. This approach should involve the collaboration and engagement of multiple stakeholders, including the government, schools, communities, NGOs, and international organizations.

It is essential for all stakeholders to prioritize and invest in education as a key driver of Kenya's development. The government should continue to allocate sufficient resources to the education sector, implement supportive policies, and foster multi-stakeholder partnerships. Schools and communities should actively participate in education initiatives and work together to create inclusive and learner-centered environments. NGOs and international organizations should provide technical expertise, financial support, and capacity-building assistance to strengthen the education system.

Improving access to quality education has the potential to transform Kenya's future. It can lead to increased human capital, economic growth, social cohesion, and overall well-being. Education empowers individuals

to break the cycle of poverty, promotes gender equality, and enables active participation in democratic processes. By investing in education, Kenya can unlock the potential of its youth and build a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable society. In conclusion, improving access to quality education in Kenya requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. By implementing the strategies discussed in this paper and adopting a holistic approach, Kenya can make significant progress towards achieving the goal of inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The time to act is now, and every stakeholder has a role to play in shaping Kenya's future through education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the strategies discussed in this paper, the following actionable steps and policy recommendations are proposed to improve access to quality education in Kenya:

1. Increase government funding for education: The Kenyan government should allocate a higher percentage of its budget to the education sector to support infrastructure development, teacher training, and the implementation of educational programs.
2. Expand school feeding programs: To address the issue of poverty and its impact on education, the government should expand school feeding programs to cover all public primary and secondary schools, ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals.
3. Strengthen public-private partnerships: The government should foster collaborations with the private sector and NGOs to mobilize resources, expertise, and innovation in support of education initiatives.
4. Enhance teacher training and professional development: The Ministry of Education should invest in comprehensive teacher training programs, focusing on pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and the integration of technology in teaching and learning.
5. Promote inclusive education: The government should develop and implement policies that promote inclusive education, ensuring that children with disabilities, those from marginalized

communities, and girls have equal access to quality education.

6. Leverage technology for education: The Ministry of Education should continue to invest in the Digital Literacy Program (DLP) and expand its coverage to all schools, providing digital devices, content, and teacher training to enhance teaching and learning.
7. Strengthen school management and accountability: The government should provide training and support to school leaders and boards of management to improve school governance, transparency, and accountability.

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