

## **Quality of Education and its Role in National Development: A Case study of Kenya's Educational Reforms**

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### **Abstract**

Education is a vital tool in the developmental process of any given nation. In this article, a critical examination is made of various educational reforms that have been undertaken in Kenya in both colonial and post-colonial period and their correlation to national development. Specifically, the article examines historical development of Kenyan education and its challenges in meeting its national developmental goals. In order for education to foster development this article recommends: the need to separate educational policies from national politics, clear stipulation of educational policies and their role in national development and a sound implementation of educational reforms.

**Key words:** Educational policy; Education planning; Educational history; Educational administration; Comparative education; Education financing

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## Introduction

There has been a widespread belief among educational economists that educational development would lead to accelerated economic growth, more wealth and income distribution, greater equality of opportunity, availability of skilled human power, a decline in population growth, long life, better health outcomes, low crime rates, national unity and political stability. This belief has made many individuals and nations to invest immensely in education. But why has education become such a big business? In many of his works on this subject, Schultz has noted that population quality and knowledge constitute the principal determinants of the future welfare of mankind.<sup>1</sup> Expounding on this further, Harbison argues that the wealth of nations depend on their capacity to develop their human resources and not so much on their physical resources. He argues that “a country which is unable to develop skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else.”<sup>2</sup> According to Pscharopolos, education is considered the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat unemployment, the foundation of social equality, equal wealth distribution, and the spearhead of political socialization and cultural diversity.<sup>3</sup> Education is also seen as defining and guiding cultural, economic and political dynamics and generational developmental imperative of societies (Ayodo and Gravenir, 1999; Nafukho, 1998; Okech and Abagi, 1997; Amutabi, 2003). Similar studies indicate that countries with high literacy rates among men and women have lower levels of fertility, lower infant and maternal mortality and longer life expectancy. As evidenced by various studies, the socio-economic benefits accruing to formal education are now unambiguous, and when educational opportunities are opened to women such benefits are even greater.

It is against this backdrop that education reform and development have been long standing objectives of the Government of Kenya (GoK) since gaining its independence in 1963. Although the causal relationship between schooling and development in Kenya is less extensive compared to more industrialized nations, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that provision of quality education leads to both economic and social development. It is in this regard, that the Kenyan Government has continued to invest heavily in formal education. In the last two decades, for instance, public spending in education in Kenya as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased from 5.1% in 1980/1981 to 15% in 2008/2009. Compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with similar GDP per capita, Kenya spends considerable more funds on education in relation to its total Government expenditure and Gross National Product (GNP).

The recognition of the noble role of education in society has led for several years to the historic struggle over the control of education, that is, formal education in Kenya. This struggle has led to numerous conflicting interests among various “actors” in education in both colonial and post-colonial period. Today’s struggle in Kenyan education is no longer about seeking to regain control of the school, both privately and publicly; instead, it concerns the quality of education as provided in the school, family, and society. Today’s educational struggle in Kenya

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schultz, *Investing in People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Fredrick Harbison, *Human Resources as the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3.

<sup>3</sup> George Psacharopolous, *Education and Development: A Review* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1988).

is the need for pedagogy, more specifically, an African pedagogy that is responsive to the African condition today. This calls for what Bennaars refers to as the need for “genuine education.”<sup>4</sup> It is a pedagogy according to Gore that requires well defined “instruction and vision” in educational theorizing. It is a pedagogy that is expected to be liberating, empowering and responsive to societal needs.<sup>5</sup> This requires offering reflective education that attends mindfully to the social and political context of educating, as well as to its technical and practical aspects.

Amidst these contestations one question emerges: what is the possible good that is expected to come out of the Kenyan education? No society anywhere in the world educates its people without having good reasons for doing so. Obviously, no society or government will spend so much time, energy and money on an enterprise such as education, if it does not serve any purpose. Despite enormous investment in education, the Kenyan education enterprise since independence has been marked by various changes and severe predicaments, and so has been its impact on national development. The initial post-colonial euphoric confidence in education has to a considerable extent been replaced by a mood of disillusionment. The education system has been accused of being egocentric and materialistic at the expense of collective effort and responsibility, for adopting irrelevant and rigid curricula, for embracing antiquated teaching and learning techniques, for dampening initiative and curiosity, for producing docile and dependent-minded graduates, and for widening the gap between the rich and the poor. It is in the light of these tensions that this article critically examines various educational reforms and interventions that have been undertaken in Kenya in both colonial and post-colonial period and their role in national development.

## **Historical Development of Kenya’s Education System, its Vision in Fostering National Development and Challenges**

### **Historical Development of Kenya’s Education System in the Colonial Period**

The aftermath of the First World War saw a number of government measures with regard to African education. During this period, the colonial government ended its hitherto spectator status and initiated a system of grants-in-aid immediately after establishing the Department of Education in 1911 to help in the development of education provided by Christian missions. It also appointed East Africa Protectorate Education Commission in 1919 to review education provided in the colony for all races. According to Achola and Pillai, it was mandated “to look into unsatisfactory status of education for all races in the protectorate. The commission made a vague recommendation to the effect that while the provision of education would remain a major responsibility of the missionaries, the government should increase its role in the provision of education.”<sup>6</sup> During this period, the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1912-1925 also visited the

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<sup>4</sup> Gerard Bennaars, *Schools in Need of Education: Towards an African Pedagogy*. (Nairobi: Lectern Publications, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Gore, *The Struggle for Pedagogies* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Achola and Vijayan Pillai, *Challenges of Primary Education in Developing Countries: Insights from Kenya* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

colony. The reports of these two commissions formed the backbone on which Kenyan education was cemented during this phase. Among the major aims of the report was to make the individual efficient, promote and advance agriculture, develop native industries, improve health, train people in the management of their affairs and the inculcate citizenship and service (Bogonko, 1992; Sifuna, 1990, 1992). Equally important during this period was the passing of the education ordinances in 1924 and in 1931.

Some of the key commissions that were undertaken to review education during this period included: a Ten Year Plan, Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924, the Beecher report of 1949, and the Binns Commission of 1952. A Ten Year Plan sought to provide 50% of school age children with an education lasting six years and to offer within ten years a full primary course for undergraduate teachers to ensure that there was adequate supply of trained teachers. In addition, a satisfactory number of pupils of both sexes was expected to receive education up to the certificate level (Bogonko, 1992; Sifuna 1990). The plan however, was not implemented for the whole cost was to be borne by local government authorities that had inadequate finances.

Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924 advocated for both quantitative and qualitative improvement of African education. One objective of this qualitative improvement was to give Africans academic type of education similar to that available to European and Asian children. It recommended a practically oriented education for Africans. This was reinforced further by the permanent Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa that was set up by the British colonial Africa office. Its purpose was to develop rural areas. It advocated for continuity in policy and fuller cooperation between governments and missions (Otiende, Wamahiu and Karugu, 1992).

Although the Commission was expected to create avenues that could make Africans have more access to education and national development, this was not the case. Education during this period remained racial. Europeans and Asians had an education that laid more emphasis on academics and aimed at preparing them for white-collar jobs while Africans on the other hand received an education that geared them towards manual labor. Although the commission made some important contributions in teacher education it failed to meet Africans personal goals and paid little attention to affective domains of education. Most Africans did not want the type of education it was propagating and thus rejected it. They yearned for an academic education that was not racial and one that could promote development. Because of its inadequacies many Africans opted to set up their own independent schools (Bogonko, 1992; Sifuna 1990).

The Beecher Committee of 1949 was mandated to examine the scope, content, methods, administration and financing of African education.<sup>7</sup> The report reinforced the argument of Phelps-Stokes and the Ten Year Developmental plan on the provision of practical education to Africans. Its recommendations formed the basis of the government policy on African education until the last year of colonial rule. The Africans were strongly opposed to the Beecher Report. They felt it did not meet their utilitarian, cultural and personal needs. The general African view to the report according to Bogonko (1992) was that it was to lead to Europeanization rather than Africanization of education and it sought to maintain the status quo of perpetually keeping Africans in low cadre positions. In addition, the Africans did not find its recommendations on:

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Otiende et al, *Education and Development in Kenya: A Historical Perspective* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

control of secular education, provision of universal primary and higher education, African teachers' responsibilities, and learning facilities adequate (Sifuna, 1990; Bogonko, 1992).

In 1952, Binns Commission of education was set up. It was sponsored by the secretary of state for the colonies and the Nuffield Foundation. It examined educational policy and practice in British Tropical African territories. It was mesmerized by the high level of wastage within the education sector. The commission was a landmark in Kenya's education because it expressed concern regarding the internal efficiency of African education and its ability to address their needs (Sifuna, 1992). It made far-reaching recommendations that influenced the development of teacher-education both in the colonial and post-colonial period. Like previous commissions it met fierce criticism from Africans because of its advocacy for racial education, inability to address social and cultural goals and its emphasis on keeping Africans on native reserves. The state of emergency of 1952 rendered the implementation process of both the Beecher and Binns reports difficult. In addition to several commissions that were undertaken during this period, the colonial government also passed three major education ordinances in 1921, 1931, and 1934 and set up several educational committees, councils and boards aimed at improving the quality of African education (Bogonko, 1992).

In the mid 1950s, the colonial office realized it needed a new policy of education. This led to the drawing up of a developmental plan. The plan advocated for speeding up of output of high-level African workforce by expanding secondary and higher education. Within five years the pace of education was enormously increased for there was anticipation of African rule that required training of more manpower. Sifuna (1992) and Bogonko (1992) observe that the colonial education policies, even after the 1950s, continued to favor European population in terms of finance, curricula and structure and the African education was always the residuary legatee of the wealth of the state. Moreover, only a small number of African children went to school and the rate of attrition was very high compared to European and Asians. The openings for post-primary education for the Africans were also limited and those Africans who qualified were restricted by the many examinations they had to undertake (Bogonko, 1992). An examination of educational reforms undertaken during this period depicts colonial government efforts of using education to foster development that was racial.

#### Historical Development of Kenya's Education System in the Post- Colonial Period

In the post-colonial period, Kenya's struggle for political independence served as a major impetus for her educational development. During the struggle for independence, the nationalists' educational aim was to provide an education that would serve immediate needs of the country. In 1961, when independence was imminent in most African countries, a conference on the development of education in Africa was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Tananarive in Madagascar in 1962. In these two conferences, representatives from all over Africa set educational priorities that aimed at promoting economic and social development. It was upon this framework that Kenya like other African governments formulated its educational programs (Sifuna, 1990, 1992).

The expansion and reform of the education system during this period was also motivated by political pressures. Sifuna writes that "almost every politician and election manifesto leading to the independence elections had called for more educational opportunities of all types, cheaper or free education, universal primary education, Africanisation of syllabuses and teaching staff

and an atmosphere in which the African personality and culture could flourish.”<sup>8</sup> The education system was expected to fulfill two main objectives: technical and social. The technical objective was to provide future human resource with necessary skills and knowledge, and the social purpose was to inculcate values that could enrich people’s lives and maintain cohesive sensibilities. In line with this thinking most African countries devoted their early educational policies to training personnel that could man their burgeoning economic and administrative units.

Based on this historical advance, Kenya embarked on various educational legal policies that could advance its development. The first undertaking by the government was the drafting of Sessional Paper Number 10 in 1965. This served as an important document for examining immediate needs and goals of post-independence Kenya. The paper saw education much more of an economic than a social service, a key means of alleviating shortage of skilled domestic workforce and of creating equal economic opportunities for all citizens (Republic of Kenya, 1965b). During this period the government established five major inquiries to look into the development of Kenyan education: The Kenya Education Commission-Ominde Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1964, Republic of Kenya, 1965a, Republic of Kenya, 1965b), The National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policy- Gacathi Report ( Republic of Kenya 1978), The Presidential Working Party on the Second University-Mackay Report (Republic of Kenya, 1981a), The Presidential Working Party on Education and Man-power - Kamunge Report ( Republic of Kenya, 1988) and Commission of Inquiry into the Education system of Kenya- Koech Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

The Ominde Commission outlined what education was and had to be during and after independence. It was the blueprint that laid the foundation of post-independence education. It was mandated to survey existing educational resources and to advise the government on the formation and implementation of the required national policies for education (Republic of Kenya, 1964; Republic of Kenya, 1965a). The commission was strongly influenced by the then existing international opinion, economic and political forces and available publications that underscored the importance of education in accelerating national development (Sifuna, Fatuma and Ibrahim, 2006).

The organization of education during this period was closely linked to the management of human resources and the labor market. This link led to the growth of enrollments, especially in secondary schools, a growth that continued to be experienced in the 1980s. Although formal education was expanding during this period, it was not directly accompanied by the economic growth. Thus, most school dropouts were soon left out with neither jobs nor training. By 1970, majority of secondary school drop outs began to experience unemployment crisis. Due to increase in demand for higher education and the need for highly qualified manpower, the government made more acts in the 1980s geared towards the improvement of education to enable it spearhead development.

A critical examination of various educational acts that were undertaken during this period illustrate the government’s commitment to improving education and the emphasis it placed on its ability to develop the nation. It is important to note that despite its noble objectives the Ominde Commission recommendations were not implemented in full, a blunder that has had significant effects on education. Amutabi writes that “if the first Ominde Commission Report would have

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel, Sifuna, *Development of Education in Africa: The Kenyan Experience* (Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1990).

been implemented in full... Kenya would not have been wandering and experimenting with dubious systems like 8-4-4 today.”<sup>9</sup>

The Gacathi Report reiterated objectives of the Ominde Commission and sought to enhance the use of the Kenyan educational goals to shape its national character and development. It recommended vocational, technical and practical education (Republic of Kenya, 1964a; Republic of Kenya 1965b). In 1975, the government realized that education was not doing much to achieve its stated objectives. Education curriculum was viewed as being too academic, narrow and examination centered (Republic of Kenya, 1979b; Republic of Kenya 1980). Rate of unemployment grew as school leavers went to urban centers to seek for white-collar jobs. This led to the formation of the third development plan of 1974/78 to address some of these challenges (Republic of Kenya, 1979b). Education system during this period was required among other things, “to provide high level skills needed for economic, industrial, vocational and technical training that was essential for employment and development.”<sup>10</sup>

In the 1980s the government changed its policy on education. This was because of the difficulties which were being faced by graduates of its education system at both primary and secondary levels. Most graduates who were matriculating from these levels could not be absorbed into the shrinking labor market. This made the government to reconsider changing its education system and to set up a Presidential Working Party in 1981 (Republic of Kenya, 1981a). The report sought to investigate ways in which education could make graduates from these levels self-sufficient, productive in agriculture, industries and commerce. Education system was expected to ensure that students acquired technical, scientific and practical knowledge vital for self and salaried employment, lifelong skills and nation building. The commission was also mandated to investigate the feasibility of establishing a second university that was development centered. It advocated for a practical curriculum that would offer a wide range of employment opportunities and equitable distribution of educational resources. It gave rise to the current education system, the 8-4-4 (Republic of Kenya, 1988).

An in-depth examination of the rationale for introducing the 8-4-4 system gives a hidden agenda. Available evidence seems to suggest that the change of the system was more political than an educational need. Amutabi notes that the system was introduced “partly as result of the Mackay Report and also as a political self-actualization by the government... inherent in the system was a hidden motive of an apparent settling of some imbalance and political scores.”<sup>11</sup> The concept of the 8-4-4 system of education was therefore from the beginning politically driven and there was no major crisis to warrant the change of the system. This is clearly evidenced in the numerous challenges that the system has faced right from its inception such as lack of: involvement of relevant stakeholders, infrastructure such as classrooms, workshops, curriculum,

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<sup>9</sup> Maurice Amutabi, “Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 23(2003): 141.

<sup>10</sup> George Eshiwani, *Education in Kenya since Independence* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Amutabi, “Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection”, 137.

and trained personnel, funds and relevant literature and pedagogy (Sifuna, 1990, 1992, Amutabi, 2003). It was from these shortfalls that the Government of Kenya and other stakeholders realized that there was need to review and re-evaluate the system. The GoK, appointed the Commission of Inquiry into the Education system of Kenya (Koech Commission) in 1999. The commission was expected make recommendations on ways that could be used to provide quality education (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

Based on the collected views the commission evolved the concept of Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training (TIQUET) to reflect the vision of Kenyan education. TIQUET, as a concept embraced the values and substance that was to characterize the education system. It was to be “total” because it was expected to be inclusive, accommodative and life-long. It was to be “integrated” in its view of the purpose of learning. It focused on “quality” of delivery and outcome of the education and training process. The report reiterated that, the proposed education system was to become a ticket to a better life, and future for the individual, community and the nation.

As a departure from the 8-4-4 system of education, TIQUET according to Sifuna had some basic innovations, namely: the expansion of access to basic education; elimination of disparities in education based on geographical, social and gender factors; introduction of manageable curriculum content; introduction of modular learning approach and credit accumulation in post-secondary education; increased access to education through expanded alternative and continuing education; flexibility in university admission; introduction of early childhood, special and technical education and; continuous assessment.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of this was make education demand-driven and to tie it to the labor market. The changes were also expected to promote equity, quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the education system. Contrary to past beliefs, the proposed education encompassed important societal ideals and values that the content of education was expected to offer rather than the mere belief on the numerical value (Sifuna, 1990).

Specifically, the report called for legal educational reforms, for instance: reviewing of the education act, political will and commitment by making public policy pronouncements on the required changes, enhancing of efficiency and effectiveness in educational administration and management, ensuring there is prudent governance and management of resources, building and strengthening genuine partnership and collaboration among educational stakeholders. In addition, the report also called for cutting-edge reforms like: totally integrated quality education training, abolition of the 8-4-4 and replacement with a system not very distinct from the pre-8-4-4 system of 7-4-2-3, and universities maintenance of 1:10 ratio of graduate/undergraduate student; (Republic of Kenya, 1999, Amutabi, 2003).

Despite its candid professional research, assessments and honesty on the challenges that were facing Kenyan education system, Koech Report was never implemented by the government. It was perceived as being expensive and complex. A critical analysis of the report indicate that the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MoE & HRD) argument appeared far fetched. A cursory assessment of the report indicate that even with increasing expenditures towards teachers’ remuneration and development, the report still promised significant financial savings. It is my thesis that the recommendations made by the

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Sifuna, *Implementing the Koech Report: Realities, Challenges and Prospects* (Nairobi: Lectern Publications, 2000).



report were not only pertinent but timely, they provided the way forward and were aimed at resuscitating the education sector by making it more focused, manageable, relevant and cost-effective. As Amutabi's notes "these were avant-garde recommendations that would have moved Kenya to higher levels of efficiency in education but which unfortunately were scuttled."<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that the key reason why the findings of Koech report were rejected were more political than the logistical and budgetary claims. In the first place the commission was appointed majorly because there was a lot of popular uprisings and professional uproar over the shortfalls of the 8-4-4 system and not because there was a genuine commitment from the government to address the educational challenges that were being experienced. The reports recommendations on abolition of the 8-4-4 system and the School Milk Programme (Republic of Kenya, 1999; Amutabi, 2003) were executive orders that were valuable to President Moi with regard to his legacy and he was not ready to abolish them.<sup>14</sup> It was ironical that after the rejection of the Koech Report, the MoEST went ahead and introduced some few cosmetic changes to the system.

Going by the rejection of the Koech Report perhaps because it did not agree with the political motives of the government, it is increasingly being suspected that may be the Mackay Report of 1981 was just used a ploy to legitimize the system. Just like the Mackay Commission of 1981 and Kamunge Report of 1988 and other minor reports like Sagini Report (Republic of Kenya, 1995a); Archbishop Kirima report (Republic of Kenya, 1995b); the Mungai Report (Republic of Kenya, 1995c), any educational reforms acceptable to the system were expected to favor the position of the government.<sup>15</sup>

### **Free Primary Education and its Role in National Development**

Since attaining its independence in 1963, the concept of offering Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) has been central to Kenya's efforts to advance national development. In their struggle for independence, African politicians everywhere in the region promised free and universal primary education once the political goal was attained. These aspirations were reinforced by the recommendations of UNESCO Addis Ababa Conference of 1961 which set 1980 as the year when all African states should achieve UPE. All the Kenya African National Union (KANU) manifestoes issued between 1963 and 1979 committed the country to attaining the goal of a seven-year free and UPE since they believed that Kenya's ability to develop faster depended on the quality and quantity of the literacy of its population (Republic of Kenya, 1979a; 1965b, Bogonko, 1992; Amutabi, 2003). It is with this mindset that the Kenya education Commission Report of 1964/65 supported the objective of offering free UPE to every Kenyan child. The Report expected this to be achieved by 1971, facilities and finances permitting (Republic of Kenya, 1964; Republic of Kenya, 1965a; Republic of Kenya, 1965b). These

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<sup>13</sup> Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection", 141.

<sup>14</sup> Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection", 141.

<sup>15</sup> Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection", 142-143.

sentiments were equally underscored and reflected in all the Five-Year Development Plans between 1966-1983, educational reviews and commissions. In all these efforts UPE has been seen as a fundamental factor for human capital development.

Within this broad policy framework the expansion of learning institutions has been one of the greatest achievements in the education sector. Kenya has achieved an impressive increase in adult literacy (Sifuna, 2001). The achievements in literacy have reflected the country's impressive progress in expanding access to education during the last four decades largely by establishing a comprehensive network of schools throughout the country. The substantial expansion of education has resulted in increased participation by groups that previously had little or no access to schooling such as girls.

### **The Free Primary Education Declarations of the 1970s**

In the 1963 elections, when the Kenya African National Union (KANU) became the ruling party, it published a manifesto that committed the party to offering a minimum of seven years of free primary education. In the 1969 election manifesto the party again re-echoed its commitment to the same and pledged to extend its educational programmes to sparsely populated areas and those which were neglected during the colonial rule so that every Kenyan could participate fully in nation building. In 1971, a presidential decree abolished tuition fees for the districts with unfavorable geographical location. A second presidential decree on 12 December 1973 tried to bring the country closer to achieving FPE. The directive provided free education for children in standards I-IV. It gave a uniform fee structure for those in standards V-VII. Other subsequent directives that followed went further and abolished school fees in primary education. The aim of providing FPE during this period was to offer more school opportunities, especially to the poor communities since school fees was inhibitive to their access to education.

Whereas this was an aspect already considered by the government at both party and state level, the implementation machinery was not ready for the mission. The announcement was met with "great panic and whirlpools in the education circles, manifested by massive recruitment of teachers on almost an ad hoc basis. This decree instantly raised enrolments in primary schools from 1.8 million in 1973 to 2.8 million in January 1974."<sup>16</sup> Just like the appointment of previous educational commissions and reviews the presidential decree providing FPE in the early classes was one of the most dramatic political pronouncements of the Kenyatta era since it took planners and the public by surprise. The financial implications as well as the various methods for its introduction were not subjected to close scrutiny by the public or relevant stakeholders.<sup>17</sup> The decree forced in January 1974, the Ministry of Education to start rethinking of ways of how to cope with the staggering rise of pupil enrolment. Enrolment in standard one rose by a million above the estimated figure of about 400,000. The total enrolment figure for standards 1 to 6 increased from 1.8 million in 1973 to nearly 2.8 million in January 1974 (Sifuna, 1990; Bogonko, 1992; Amutabi, 2003).

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<sup>16</sup>Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection", 131.

<sup>17</sup> Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection.

Since the decree was unexpected and was not in conformity with the projected estimates of the Ministry of education, it caused numerous problems to the primary school system in January 1974. By the time of abolishing school fees no counter measures were announced on how to replace the lost revenue. Most primary schools did not have a clear directive from the Ministry on how to recover the lost revenue and most school management committees gave themselves the prerogative of raising school revenue under the guise of a “building levy” that ostensibly was aimed at putting up new facilities (Sifuna, 1980; Amutabi, 2003).

The building levy varied from one district to another and in most cases, it turned out to be higher than the school fees charged prior to the decree. This frustrated many parents who had little alternative but to withdraw their children from the school. Initially, in most districts, except Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL), enrolments almost doubled showing a radical change during the 1973-74 year. After that the situation reverted to what it had been in the previous years. It is estimated that around one to two million school age children dropped out of school after the decree due to building levy (Sifuna, 1990; Amutabi, 2003). As a result of high enrolments, there was a lot of overcrowding in classes and many schools were unable to cope with the high enrolments. The supply of teaching and learning materials was minimal. Because of large enrolments, a country-wide building programme was required to cope with extra classes. In some schools as many as five extra streams were created. “It was common to find classes being conducted in the open, under trees or in church buildings to supplement the available space. Many schools introduced double sessions, for morning and afternoon to cope with the upsurge. Many others introduced several streams to scrape through the upsurge. Those schools that opted for multiple streams did not have enough teachers and this saw one teacher hop from one classroom to the next. Teachers were overloaded and therefore fatigued and as a result learning suffered.”<sup>18</sup> Further, the teacher/pupil ratio was very high with some schools recording ratios of 1:150. Bogonko notes that “immediately after the post-1973 decree standard 1 enrolment increased by 153% from 379,370 in 1973 to 958,980 the following year. Some schools permitted between 25 and 40 pupils per class. In terms of pupil/school ratio, “standard 1 pupil to a school was 54.7:1 in 1973 and 124.4:1 in 1974.”<sup>19</sup>

The political decree affected greatly the quality of education that was being offered. Pupils in lower primary require greater teacher attention in their learning process yet this was overlooked. The adhoc introduction of the decree also did not allow learners to sustain their interest in schooling because of the many challenges they were experiencing. For instance, slow learners felt ignored and a number of them dropped out of school. Whereas explanations for these drops have mainly been interpreted in economic terms the teacher/pupil ratio was also a significant indicator (Amutabi, 2003).

With the increased enrolments, a countrywide construction program had to be launched to build extra classes. This disrupted many essential education activities as much emphasis was placed on construction instead of the teaching and learning. The Kenya School Equipment Scheme (KSES) which was formed in 1969 and had become one of the most efficient

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<sup>18</sup>Amutabi, “Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection”, 131.

<sup>19</sup> Sorobea Bogonko, *A History of Modern Education in Kenya, 1895-1992*(Nairobi: Evans Brothers, 1992), 116.

departments in the ministry prior to the directive could not cope with the increased demands and steadily begun to decline and eventually collapsed with the introduction of the school milk programme by another political decree in 1978 (Amutabi, 2003; Sifuna, 1990). With increased enrolments and schools, it became difficult to dispatch the necessary materials and equipment to most schools. The situation was worsened with the varied topography in the country and long distances. It was thus not surprising that many schools went without basic learning materials greater part of 1974 (Sifuna, 1990).

In terms of the teaching force the decree had a lot of effects too. At the time of the decree, the country was already experiencing a acute shortage of properly trained teachers. In 1973, the teaching force stood at 56,000 teachers, out of whom 12,600 untrained. In 1974, an additional 25,000 teachers were needed for the new classes. By 1975, the number of unqualified teachers stood at 40,000, out of a teaching force of 90,000 teachers.<sup>20</sup> To meet the need for more additional teachers the Presidential decree of 1973 recommended more recruitment of teachers, a process that led to enormous increase of untrained teachers. Many unemployed school leavers, some of them who had not done well at form II and IV levels were recruited in large numbers as teachers. A Form II or Form IV school-leaving certificate with professional training teaching was adequate to guarantee a person employment at the primary level. As a result of this, the country recorded an estimated 38.5% increase in teachers from 56,543 in 1973 to 78,340 in 1974 (Bogonko, 1992; Sifuna, 1992; Amutabi, 2003). This increase was by all measures was very high and the Ministry of Education was under great pressure to meet challenges emanating from it especially, financial, supervisory and quality teaching. Amutabi observes that the high number of untrained teachers may have accounted for the weak performance in the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exams between 1977–1982 by many schools compared to the previous years as these were the first group of free education beneficiaries' from 1974.<sup>21</sup>

The presidential decree was counter-productive in many ways. Education became insurmountable to many parents more than it was prior to the decree. After the abolition of school fees, the institution of building fees, the cost of schooling quadrupled and many primary schools “imposed supplementary fees for such items as building funds, activity costs, uniforms, feeding schemes among others”<sup>22</sup> This increased drop-out rates a situation that was exacerbated further by the presidential decree in 1979 where there was a big annual increase of 23.5% in enrolment because of a 1978 presidential directive by for an additional free education for standard V–VII that was intended to declare the entire primary education free in Kenya. This time however, there was no significant increase in the number of schools. There was, however, an increased number of Teachers' Training Colleges' enrolments to meet the need (Sifuna, 1992; Amutabi, 2003).

These decrees caused enormous enrolments, increased teacher recruitment and building of new schools, compared to previous years. Increased numbers of teachers meant increased government expenditure on salaries more than physical development. The two presidential

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<sup>20</sup> Sifuna, *Development of Education in Africa: The Kenyan Experience*, 174.

<sup>21</sup> Amutabi, “Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection.

<sup>22</sup> Sifuna, *Development of Education in Africa: The Kenyan Experience*, 280.

directives were never supported by adequate professional advice or infrastructural framework and they caught many teachers and education planners by surprise, a factor that had a great impact on its implementation and quality of education. (Amutabi, 2003). With such teaching atmosphere, high drop out rates in primary education became a norm and the newly created building fund, which was meant to act as an emergency became “legalized” fee in most schools. Despite creating the mess, the government apart from helping in the recruitment of mediocre teachers played a dismal role in the implementation process. If anything, it was satisfied that school committees had “successfully” implemented the programme with minimal cost from the government.

### **The Free Primary Education Intervention of 2003**

During the 2002 general elections, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) made the provision of free primary education (FPE) part of its election manifesto again. Following its victory, on January 6, 2003 the Minister for Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) re-launched FPE to fulfill its election promise. Fees and levies for tuition were abolished as the government and development partners pledged to meet the cost of basic educational materials as well as salaries for non-academic faculty and co-curricular activities (Sifuna, 2005). Unlike the 1960s and 1970s decrees, the FPE under NARC government did not require parents and communities to build new schools, but they were expected to refurbish and utilize existing facilities within their environment. In situations, where school heads and committees felt there was need to do so they were required to obtain approval from the MoEST. This request had to be sent to the District Education Board by the Area Education Officer, after a consensus among parents through the Provincial Director of Education, a fairly lengthy and tedious process.<sup>23</sup>

Before the NARC pronouncement the number of primary schools in the country had increased steadily from 14,864 in 1990 to 18,901 in 2001/2 representing a 27.2% increase. Enrolments had also gone up from 5,392,319 to 6,314,726, being a 17.1% rise over the same period. The percentage of girls’ enrolment had also increased in the same period to 49.3%, implying that gender parity in enrolment in primary schools at the national level had effectively been achieved. The primary school Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs), however, showed a very worrying scenario in North Eastern Province where boys constituted 16.5% and girls 9.8%, with an average of 13.4% for the province. Following the NARC government decree, it was estimated that the NER rose from around 6,314,726 to 7,614,326 by the end of the year, representing a 22.3% increase nationally. It was also estimated that another 3 million children were not enrolled in school.<sup>24</sup> Despite the various logistical problems that seem to be hampering a successful implementation of the FPE, the policy to some extent sounds commendable as it has meant cushioning children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, especially girls from failing to participate in primary education or dropping out of school due to lack of fees and other levies. Overall, the policy intervention could prove determinative in the efforts to achieve UPE and EFA (Sifuna, 2005).

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<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Education , Science and Technology, “ Free Primary Education: Every Child in School”, Nairobi (2003).

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Education , Science and Technology, “ Free Primary Education: Every Child in School”.

Although free primary education under NARC government seems to have increased pupil enrolments, it has at the same time created considerable problems as the preliminary surveys show. The program seems to have exacerbated the problem of teaching and learning facilities, there is a lot of congestion in classrooms, learning facilities are minimal, and many school management committees feel they are restricted in improving the state of learning due to the government's ban on school levies and the conditions laid down to request for concessions are cumbersome and slow.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of FPE, the situation of the teaching force in most districts in Kenya is not promising. Teachers complain of increased pupil teacher ratios, many primary schools are understaffed. Many school management committees are of the opinion that as a result on the ban of levies, they are unable to recruit extra teachers through the PTAs. In addition, these problems are contributing significantly to high school drop out rates and have seriously affected the inflow of pupils in primary education, for instance, districts that had registered over 20% increase in enrolment in 2003, hardly recorded more than 5% of standard one enrolment in 2004 ( Sifuna, 2005). Most of these logistical problems bedevilling the implementation of FPE are well known to the educational administrators in the country. But due to the "culture of fear and silence" inculcated by the former regimes, coupled up by an inept administration at the MoEST headquarters, the official rhetoric is that FPE is working smoothly when in reality it not. This has casted doubts on quality of education that is being provided by FPE and its role in national development.

Apart from the logistical problems and other challenges being experienced in the implementation of FPE, the central question remains: is the programme sustainable by the Kenyan government? In the 2003/04 financial year, the government increased its education budget by 17.4% to Kshs.79.4 billion, with over Kshs. 7.6 billion specifically allocated to the FPE programme (Sifuna, 2005). A retrospection look at the funding of the FPE since its retrodution in 2003 show that the bulk of its funding is from the donor community. Although the FPE program is a noble undertaking its future still remains illusionary. It is difficult to comprehend how it will be sustained on a weak economy like Kenya's and donor aid that is temporary. The implementation of FPE, like previous similar education interventions, seems to have been a matter of political expediency rather than a well thought out educational undertaking. The NARC government, just like its predecessors, did not carry out a situation analysis prior to the implementation of the program. The consequence has been poor quality education and a host of challenges. The incompetent administration at the MoEST, which attempts to deal with some of these challenges, only serves to aggravate the situation. With these problems, the attainment of FPE will continue to be illusionary.

From the outset the emphasis on educational expansion that took place during the post-independence period was complimented by an increasing priority accorded to programmes of quality improvement in education and have been closely linked to Kenya's evolutionary, reformative and developmental processes. In the first two decades of independence, according to Eshiwani, curriculum reforms played a pivotal role in directing the expected quality of development in Kenya. Major innovations were introduced in the curriculum namely: the new mathematics, agricultural, industrial and science education Project for Africa (SEPA), the SPP

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Sifuna, *The Pastoralist Communities and Free Primary Education in Kenya: A Preliminary Survey* (Nairobi: Lectern Ltd, 2005).

Nuffield-based science programmes, the New Primary approach among others. These curriculum efforts unfortunately did not bring about desired quality in the education system. They failed to respond to the problems of low quality curriculum materials, irrelevant content and inappropriate instructional approaches and contributed minimally to development.<sup>26</sup>

Close examination of educational reviews that have been undertaken in Kenya in the post-colonial period also indicate that they have operated under the framework of the country's national goals. The goals of Kenyan education enunciate an answer to the question earlier posed on the purpose or function of Kenyan education today. By any standards Kenyan educational goals and objectives as formulated in numerous reports and commissions are of high quality. If this is so, how come they have not brought much development to Kenya over the years as earlier envisaged? Apparently, the quality of educational goals and objectives is not reflected in educational practice. There is a chasm between theory and practice. A cursory glance at schooling in Kenya today shows that educational practice suffers chronically from what Dore identified as the 'diploma disease' four decades ago.<sup>27</sup> Both the formal curriculum and its objectives are intentionally subverted in order to give way to an entirely new curriculum, an informal curriculum, overtly meant to guarantee success in examination.

The sole criterion of educational quality, it appears, is high performance in national examinations. Whatever various education commissions and reports have stated about the importance of attitudes and values of practical skills and an all-round development is conveniently forgotten and is rather crudely replaced by a very opportunistic theory of education. As a result, we may speak of two distinct educational theories, one idealistic and another opportunistic, existing side by side. But only the second is put into practice, the first remains a highly formalized ideal, used solely for bureaucratic and political purposes. Given the predominance of this instrumental theory of education, and its subsequent practice, we cannot fail to observe a number of problems. One most noticeable is that the widely acclaimed (informal) theory of education and the practice thereof has given rise to false expectations. Due to this educational approach, presently schooling in Kenya is taken to be kind of ritual through which learners must honorably pass if they are to succeed in life. Schools are widely used as "chief means of sifting each generation into those who get the prize jobs and those who don't."<sup>28</sup> This selective function tends to dominate, if not obliterate, the school's basic function of providing education that is supposed to lead to societal development.

It is important to note that in post-independence Kenya there has been a lot of political interference in the education reform process and the larger educational policy making. Some of the educational initiatives that illustrate political interference in Kenya's education sector include presidential decrees on: Harambee school system, free education, school milk programme, quota system, 8-4-4 system of education, model schools, the National Youth Service and higher education. Many of these initiatives according to Amutabi were introduced with little or no input from various relevant stakeholders and were undertaken as responses to certain pressures and

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<sup>26</sup> Eshiwani, *Education in Kenya since Independence*.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Dore, *The Diploma Disease* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976).

<sup>28</sup> Dore, *The Diploma Disease*, 9.

crises to wade off public concern. It is no wonder then that many of their reports were discarded immediately the crises waned.<sup>29</sup>

Because of political interference in the education process, policy environment has been characterized by lack of popular consultation, with decrees, circulars and political rhetoric replacing policy-making apparatus. The education sector has been the most affected in this regard. This over the years has initiated uneasy relationship between the political establishment and various educational stakeholders in Kenya and has had a negative impact on policy formulation and implementation of educational programs.<sup>30</sup> It is a trend that requires re-thinking if education has to spearhead national development.

Despite heavy investment in education by the government and various players, the corresponding educational indicators in school participation and achievement have been on the decline signifying limited returns on investment. Some of the critical challenges facing the education system include: declining enrolment and participation rates; low transition rates; declining gross enrolment rates (GER) at the secondary school; widening gender and regional disparities particularly in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL); declining quality and relevance of education; the rise in the costs of education and training; under-enrolment of the handicapped and gifted students; inefficiency, poor governance and management of educational structures and institutions.

In order to address these challenges, this article contends that it is important to separate the management of the education from the national political process. Change and management of education process should be handled by relevant stakeholders and should follow appropriate procedures namely: examining educational historical trends, theoretical considerations, objectives of the education process, curriculum and administration demands. Above all, it is imperative to develop a clear educational policy and to correlate it to national, societal and global demands. To make this effective, it is vital that the Kenyan government tie its educational planning to its developmental agenda. Currently, there is widespread misalignment between the two which is a major source of ineffective use of existing resources and I argue a hindrance to Kenya's aspirations of a future medium sized developed nation. Take for instance, Vision 2030.

The aim of the Vision is to make Kenya globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life by 2030. It aims at "transforming Kenya into a newly – industrializing, middle income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens in a clean and secure environment."<sup>31</sup> The Vision is anchored on three pillars: economic, social and political governance and has flagged out various projects addressing key sectors such as agriculture, education, health, water and environment. The three pillars of the Vision will be anchored on the following foundations: macroeconomic stability; continuity in governance reforms; enhanced equity and wealth creation opportunities for the poor; infrastructure; energy; science, technology

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<sup>29</sup> Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection", 141.

<sup>30</sup> Amutabi, "Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospection

<sup>31</sup> Republic of Kenya, *Vision 2030*(MoP, 2007), vii.



and innovations (STI); and land reform; human resources development; security; and public sector reforms.<sup>32</sup>

A critical examination of Kenya's Vision 2030 indicate that there is minimal emphasis on the role of education in enabling Kenya become a medium size industrialized nation by 2030. Education is mentioned in generalities and its role in the process is ambivalent. From the contents of the document it is not clear how the education sector will be able to meet the objectives of the Vision "creating sustainable development."<sup>33</sup> Much of the emphasis in the document is placed on the role of economic and political pillars in advancing national development. In order to achieve Vision 2030, the role of education in the process will require redefinition. The truth of the matter is, Vision 2030 is unattainable without a robust investment in good education. The good news however, is that the core elements of the nascent developmental parameters are in Vision and hopefully, at an appropriate time, Vision 2030 will assume its proper role as an organizing framework for Kenya's economic governance.

### Conclusion

Education is a central component of any nation's developmental process and for it to facilitate this function the process should be: clearly defined, legislatively protected from any political dictates, owned by relevant stakeholders, adequately financed and constantly subjected to periodic technical consultations and reviews to ensure that it is in harmony with both local and global needs. For this to be realized, it is essential that a fundamental theory of education is conceived. From such an educational theory, one may derive a pedagogy of hope, and empowerment that is essential for development. This requires going beyond the myth of traditional pedagogy. Pedagogy of hope, almost by definition, will place great emphasis on both the creative and dialogical dimensions of education that utilize technological advances that are essential for societal growth. As such it is expected to assume the presence of an acting person, one who constructively acts upon problematic situations, and who thereby creates a new world and a new hope.

Pedagogy of hope is expected to transform the learner "into a problem-solving agent, a creator rather than a creature."<sup>34</sup> To this end, the education process must go beyond mere transmission of factual knowledge. Instead, educators must present knowledge, skills and values that are liberating in as far as they create new horizons and opportunities that are vital for development. The learners too must become critically aware of their potential as humans, of their "power to use circumstances rather than being used by them."<sup>35</sup> This requires a paradigmatic shift in the conceptualization and management of the education process. For this to be effective the education process must be multi-dimensional and should encompass cognitive and a normative dimensions.

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<sup>32</sup> Republic of Kenya, *Vision 2030*.

<sup>33</sup> Republic of Kenya, *Vision 2030*, 99.

<sup>34</sup> Julius Nyerere, *Adult Education and Development: The Tanzanian Experience*, (Hamburg: UNESCO Publication, 1979).

<sup>35</sup> Nyerere, *Adult Education and Development: The Tanzanian Experience*.