2. As part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Universal education is a right for all children. Different governments have implemented free primary education in order to achieve this goal. With example from your country please explain the following:

a) Critically evaluate the implementation programme of free primary education for the first 2 years

**1.0 Introduction**

At  independence,  Kenya  inherited  an  education  system that was characterized by racial segregation and different types of curricula for the various races namely Europeans,  Asians,  Arabs  and  Africans, UNESCO, (2005).  The colonial schools had a different curriculum from that of the African independent and the65 missionary schools.  According  to  Otach, (2008) “before 1960, free and universal primary education  had  not  been  extended  to  African  children  in any  of  the  East  African  British  colonies,  racial  discrimination  in  primary education  was  still intact”  The  expansion  of  primary  education  remained  a crucial problem  in the colonial era. The situation did not radically change with the achievement of independence in 1963.  ACTIONAID-Kenya (2004)  reports  that,  the  achievement  of independence   heightened   pressure   to   increase the school  population  and  a  rapid  more  towards  universal primary   education.   The   purpose   of   education   was political, social, cultural, humanistic and economic, (UNICEF & World Bank, 2009). It was expected   that   the   education   would   mould   a   whole individual who will contribute profitably to society.

The  first  step  towards  free primary education was in1971 (Ngaroga, 2001);  this was  when  President  Jomo Kenyatta   abrogated tuition fees for the economically marginal districts  in  the  country.  By  July  1973  districts such as Marsabit, Mandera, West-pokot,  Wajir,  Tana River,  Turkana,  Samburu,  Garissa  and  Lamu  had  free primary education. The   government also built and supported boarding schools in these areas. A national feeding programme was also launched in these areas. The  main  idea  here  was  to  encourage  more  parents  to retain  their  children  in  school. In 1973 another presidential decree made education free for the first four years of   primary education throughout the country. (Ngaroga, 2001) observes that the presidential decree was one of the most dramatic political pronouncements since it took the planners and the public unaware. The  immediate result  was  increase  in  enrollments  in primary schools from  1.8  million in 1973  to 2.8  million in January 1974. The Ministry of Education had to rethink of its priorities and operations in order to cope with the staggering rise of pupil enrollment. In 1976 the Gachathi Report recommended an extension of the waiver of fees to the full seven years of primary education by1980, (UNICEF & World Bank, 2009). Despite the existence of free primary education by 1980, the schools witnessed many challenges that eventually contributed to its   failure   and   the   introduction   of   levies   in   primary schools.

In  January  2003  the  NARC  (National  Rainbow  Coalition)  government  implemented  the  free primary education programme with the aim of providing more opportunities to the disadvantaged school  age  children  (Otach, 2008). The programme created a positive outcome because it resulted in significant increase in enrolment in a majority of the schools (Otach, 2008).  The  policy abolished  school  fees  and  other  levies  arguing  that  fees  and  levies  posed  a serious  hindrance  to  children  wanting  to  access  education  in  schools  (Okwach & George, 1997). The free primary education policy has been described as laudable (Rob et al., 2004), because of its effect on gross enrolment rate (GER) which increased from 92% in 2002 to 104% in 2003 of the school age children population (Otach, 2008)), resulting in more than 1.5 million children who were previously out -of -school joining primary schools (UNESCO, 2005).

However,  serious  challenges  have  bedevilled  the  implementation  of  the  FPE  policy, (UNICEF & World Bank, 2009).  They include  congested  classrooms,  limited  physical  facilities  and  shortage  of  qualified  teachers, which negatively impacted on the quality of teaching and learning on one hand and contributed to indiscipline in schools on the other (Okwach & George, 1997). This paper therefore reviews the FPE policy highlighting its achievements and challenges. The paper also assesses the progress of the chosen schools towards achieving EFA goals.

**2.0 Challenges**

The introduction of free primary education in 2003 was received with mixed reactions across the country, UNESCO, (2005). The government’s task force reported that the implementation of  the  program  was  faced  with  a  number  of  glaring challenges that required to  be addressed.

**2.1 Delays in Funds Disbursement**

The road to true learning is thinking. Yet, children have no spare time to engage in this necessary practice, known for creation of knowledge, development of social skills and cognitive growth, UNESCO, (2005). In most schools, there is a widespread failure with respect to teachers and the teaching profession. The government controls the remuneration and may often see no urgency in encouraging seamless implementation of a progressive reward system, (Okwach & George, 1997). The failure on the part of the public to recognize the fact that teaching requires great skill and talent compounds the matter. Delays in disbursing funds to support free primary school education have frustrated many teachers, put pressure and on parents financial burdens.

**2.2 Teacher Shortages**

Teacher: pupil ratio, for instance, it emerged that in some schools the ratio was 1:70 which was far beyond the recommended maximum rate of 1:40. Such a high ratio has got its own challenges also, (Okwach & George, 1997). For instance, teachers find it impossible to pay attention to all learners, especially the slow ones.  Also teachers were not able to give adequate assignments to the pupils, as they could not cope with the marking and teaching workload (UNESCO, 2005).

**2.3 Teacher-Learning Facilities**

There was also an issue associated with teaching- learning materials as a major challenge facing the system, (Okwach & George, 1997).  Under the FPE programme, every pupil is entitled to free writing materials e.g. pencils, pens and exercise books. It emerged that textbooks were being shared in the ratio of one textbook to five pupils. Sharing of textbooks affected their accessibility to the books while at home and many have to do their homework early in the morning the next day when in school. This says something about the amount of work the teachers have to give to the pupils. Shortages of supplementary reading books were also identified in the study.

There was also the issue of inadequate physical facilities. It emerged that most schools did not have adequate classroom to accommodate the large number of pupils enrolled under the FPE programmes. For instance, classrooms appeared to be generally congested and there was hardly any space for free movement during lessons. Also a number of classroom conditions were poor, for instance, lighting depended only on sunlight, which was sometimes inadequate. Also in some schools they had introduced school mats for children to sit on since there were no sufficient desks. But a majority of the teachers felt that the sitting on the mats affected the children’s writing skills and general physical development.

**2.4 Managerial Skills**

An  effective  and  efficient  manager  must  possess  the technical,  human  and  conceptual  skills in  order  to  be  a good  organizer, (Ngaroga, 2001).  Technical knowledge and skill include understanding   and   being   proficient   in   using   specific activity such as a process, technique, or procedure. The school managers should be equipped with relevant know- ledge  and  skill  to  perform  administrative  duties  which include  planning  daily routine,  among  other  duties.  This implies that school managers need to be trained to equip them  with  the  relevant  skills  and  techniques  to  prepare them  to  be  effective  in  implementation  of  educational policies. A school manager, who accepts that people are the  key  to  successful  implementation  of  policies  and changes,  is  cognizant  of  the  barriers  that  people  place between themselves and the changes required (Ngaroga, 2001).

The implementation of free primary education in Kenya however, found school managers off guard; they had not been prepared for the change and so they found it challenging. Many schools had an overwhelming increase   in   enrollment while others witnessed mass exodus. Average class sizes rose from 40 to 70 while the facilities remained the same. It s notable that in Kenya today,   approximately   50%   of   all   the country’s primary schools are housed in temporary and/or semi-permanent buildings; others are on split sites. The declaration of free primary education witnessed the rise in student enrollment which in turn led to strain in the existing physical resources.

These changes required changes in the managerial skills of school managers. Orora (1997) points out that a change agent is a person who attempts to influence proposed change and its adoption as well as decisions in a direction which beneficiaries have indicated desirable. An   advisory committee on supply and education of teachers observe that education service has been operating in a climate of rapid change and that this climate is likely to continue to the foreseeable future (Glatter1988). Such a rapid change requires a continuous process of adjustment on the part of all those involved in the education system.

This view is supported by Wideen (1987) who pointed out that teachers need continued professional growth and development in order to be competent to handle changes. School managers are judged with the responsibility of interpreting educational policies to the parents and other stakeholders; they are also   responsible for obtaining, directing and utilizing resources available for successful implementation of education policies and programs. This study was designed to explore management challenges facing implementation of FPE in Kenya, a case of Keiyo District.

**2.5 Students’ Mobility from Public to Private and within Public Schools**

Parents cite quality of school as their main reason for transferring their children from one school to another, (UNICEF & World Bank, 2009). But this is based on their perception of quality rather than an actual measure of quality. Unfortunately, unacceptably high numbers of transfers are still into private schools because of perceptions of poor quality in public schools following the implementation of free primary education, UNESCO, (2005). The number of transfers in the non-slums is fewer and the likely explanation for this is that there is sufficient supply of public schools to match demand and parents are able to make a choice between public and private schools depending on their disposable income (Oketch et al, 2008). Due to limited public investment in education in the slums (there are fewer public schools in the slums), room has been created for the ‘mushrooming’ of private informal schools which can operate in any structure, usually of unacceptable condition for a school. The quality of these slum informal private schools is likely to vary, itself a likely explanation of the transfers from one school to another in search of perceived school of better quality.

Teachers complain that pupils’ frequent transfers from one school to another at any point of the term and in any class affect content delivery, (Eldah et al 2005). They observe some pupils who joined a particular school may have missed out for a term or several months and were likely to find some topics that had already been covered in their new school, (Eldah et al 2005). This suggests that the teachers had to look for ways of providing them with remedial lessons but their efforts were hampered by the large workload due to overcrowded class.

A preference for free and cheaper education is evident, (Eldah et al 2005). School availability and its proximity as well as the highest grade offered in a school are other reasons why pupils transfer from one school to another, (Eldah et al 2005). Perceived teacher quality, discipline and overall school performances were the most frequently cited reasons for transfer into any given school. A lower fee was also a factor, and cheaper or free schools seemed to be an important motivation for school transfer. It can be argued that the movement between private schools was in search of a cheaper private school whereas those who managed to move into public schools are those who wanted to benefit from the free primary education policy. Moreover, movement to private schools was also in search of better performance. Another frequent reason for transfer was lack of appropriate grade in the school a pupil was presently enrolled in, although this was not a major factor.

**2.5 Embezzlement of Funds**

Some government officials are corrupt and hence they mismanage or misallocation of funds that are allocated to them, (UNESCO, 2005). For instance, the sponsor’s funds; this makes some children who are poor miss the opportune moments of schooling.

Senior officials in the Ministry of Education, in Kenya have been accused of protecting corrupt headmasters and members of PTA (Parents Teacher Association) suspected of embezzling funds because they are also indirectly benefiting from incentives that are being paid by parents, disgruntled senior education officials have revealed, (UNESCO, 2005).

They allege that several internal audit reports as well as complaints by parents and teachers to the ministry against certain school heads and PTAs have been swept under the carpet. Many officials say the payment of incentives to teachers had resulted in an upsurge of fraud by school heads who are now exposed to huge amounts of money which they were not used to handling.

**3.0 Conclusion**

The Kenya government policy to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) has to be seen within developments in the wider international context. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, declared that “everyone has a right to education.” The World Conference on Education for All (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, sparked off a new impetus towards basic education especially with its so-called vision and renewed commitment. It noted, that to serve the basic needs for all, requires more than a recommitment to basic education as now exists. What is needed is an expanded vision that surpasses resource levels, institutional structures, curricula and conventional delivery systems, while building on the best in the practices.

The Amman Mid-Decade Review of Education for All (1996) reaffirmed the commitment to the Jomtien resolutions. It observed that the provision of basic education, especially for girls, has remained elusive in many less industrialized countries. This was said to be particularly so in Africa, where ethnic tensions and conflicts have displaced many households, thus denying children opportunities of going to school. The Dakar Conference of 2000 reviewed developments in achieving UPE in the African continent. It set as one of the EFA goals eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015. This was further endorsed by the so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Among other things they set targets “to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

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