



Factors associated with Low Achievement among Pupils in Nairobi's Informal Neighborhoods

Introduction

Low academic achievement has been defined as failing to meet the average academic performance in test or examination scores, as determined by a set cut-off point. Pupil achievement in Kenya's primary schools can be compared using the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination which is standardized. Available statistics for 2006 indicate that while the national average mean was 263 out of a possible 500, the mean for girls and boys stood at 256 and 270 respectively. Nationally, only 24 out of the 138 pupils (17.4%) in the top 100 positions came from public schools. Nairobi province ranked fourth among the districts with a mean of 272, marginally higher than the national mean by 2 points. But these figures mask large disparities. For instance, there were only 4 schools from Nairobi province in the top 100 public schools nationally compared to 15 schools in the top 50 private schools nationally. The first ranked public and private school in Nairobi had a mean of 354 and 428, respectively, a very large difference between the two.

The study on which this policy brief is based explored the effect of residence in informal settlements, school type and location, gender and household socioeconomic status on the KCPE examination marks for 666



Pupils study in one of the informal schools in Nairobi's slums. Infrastructure in these schools is inadequate.

students who sat exams in 2005 and 2006 from Korogocho and Viwandani (informal settlements) and Harambee and Jericho (formal settlements) in Nairobi.

While students in the formal settlements of Harambee and Jericho had a mean of 291.7 marks, those residing in the informal settlements of Korogocho and Viwandani posted a much lower mean of 218.2 marks.

The Effect of Residence in particular Neighborhoods on Achievement

While students in the formal settlements of Harambee and Jericho had a mean of 291.7 marks, those residing in the informal settlements of Korogocho and Viwandani posted a much lower mean of 218.2 marks. This translates to a difference of 73 marks. Again, a large proportion of these students from the informal neighborhoods (69%) scored below the average mark of 250 marks compared to just about 27.3% from the formal neighborhoods.

Holding other factors constant, our results further suggest that a student in the informal neighborhoods of



Korogocho and Viwandani will score up to 77.4 marks less than that of a student in Harambee and Jericho in the KCPE examination.

The Effect of Gender on Achievement

Girls register lower marks than the boys irrespective of their residential area. Although at 49.4%, there is near gender parity between the girls and boys who sat the exam, only about 28.9% of the girls score 250 marks and above, compared to 50.7% of the boys. The mean of the girls is lower by up to 24.9 marks. The pattern is still the same for the informal neighborhoods of Korogocho and Viwandani with girls having a significantly lower mean of 203.2 marks compared to that of the boys at 233.

The Effect of School Type and Location on Achievement

Results show that majority of the students (79.4%) who sat the exams were enrolled in public schools. But their performance is much lower than that of their peers in private schools. For instance, the mean score of students in public schools is lower by up to 25.2 marks compared to that of their peers in private schools. Even in Korogocho and Viwandani, informal private schools have a significantly higher mean score of up to 36.5 marks above that of public schools. It is important to note here that the informal private schools in Korogocho and Viwandani are not registered with the Ministry of Education, and are low-quality schools, lacking trained teachers and essential teaching equipment and facilities. Holding all other factors constant, a student attending a public school irrespective of the type of neighborhood will score less by up to 49.5 marks than the student in a private school. Our results also show that almost one half of the

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students (46.4%) attended school outside their residential areas. These students had better KCPE performance than their peers who attended schools located in their residential areas by up to 21.3 marks. Of the four sites, Korogocho seems to be more disadvantaged. For instance, holding all other factors constant, a student from Viwandani will score up to 47.5 marks more than that of a student from Korogocho.

The Effect of Socioeconomic Status on Achievement

The socioeconomic status of the households is also important in explaining low academic achievement. When all sites are considered, children from the least poor households score 17.6 marks more than those from the poorest households.

Policy Implications from our Results

- We have found that students in informal private schools in Korogocho and Viwandani score better KCPE marks than their peers in public schools. In the spirit of public private partnerships, we suggest that the Ministry of Education register these informal private schools and supports them to excel through an appropriate policy framework and environment.
- With students in public schools not performing as well as expected, we suggest that the Free Primary Education policy should now begin to target the improvement of schooling outcomes. Its goals on widening participation have largely been successful and there is need to now focus on the quality of education.
- Although there is near gender parity between the girls and boys who sat KCPE in the four research sites, the performance of girls is much lower than that of the boys, suggesting that there is much more that needs to be done for girls. Improving schooling outcomes for girls certainly requires a multi-sectoral approach that includes households, schools, communities in the research sites, the policy making process at the Ministry of Education and other interested stakeholders.

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