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### Original Research Article

# Form one selection process, an encouragement or a discouragement: Examining parents' perceptions in Baringo County, Kenya

Andrew Makori<sup>\*1</sup>, Gladys Onyura<sup>2</sup>, Fredrick Cheboiwo<sup>3,</sup> Jane Yegon<sup>4</sup> and Joseph Kandie<sup>5</sup>

**Abstract** 

Kisii University, Kenya.

\*Corresponding Author's E-mail: andrewmakori@hotmail.co.uk

This article reports on the findings of a study that set out to investigate the views of parents in Baringo County in Kenya regarding the form one selection process. The study adopted a quantitative survey design and participants were purposefully selected. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Response rate was 83.3 per cent. The resulting data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package Social Science) resulting in descriptive data. The results shows that majority of the parents were dissatisfied with the form one selection process. For instance 90 per cent (n=150), reported strongly disagreed or disagree with the process, arguing that some of the students who performed well (with higher marks) were never selected to the best schools or even to schools of their choice. Instead they were selected to poor local harambee secondary schools. The conclusion is that such a selection process discourages students from working hard.

**Keywords:** Form one, selection, Baringo, County, parents, perception, encouragement, discouragement

#### INTRODUCTION

Kenya as many other countries in the world uses examination as means of placing successful students into various public secondary schools in the country. For instance, Kenya uses Kenya certificate primary education (KCPE); Malawi uses primary school leaving certificate examination (PSLCE) and Tanzania, primary school leaving certificate (PSLE) (De Hoop, 2010; Sigei, 2014; Ndalichako, 2009). These examinations are conducted annually at the end of the primary education period or cycle. In Kenya top performers join national schools, while the rest of the best ones join either county or district public schools depending how best they have scored or performed and the available spaces. However serious concerns have been raised by a number of stakeholders regarding the current form one selection process (Catholic News Agency for Africa, 2015). This study investigates and reports on views of parents regarding the form one selection process in 2015.

#### Literature review

#### Categories of public secondary schools in Kenya

Currently Kenya operates four levels or categories of public secondary schools, namely national schools, extracounty, county and district (Onderi and Makori, 2014). The four categories differ significantly in respect to teachers, facilities and other resources (Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti, Takavasha, The Abdul Latif Poverty Action Lab at MIT (J-PAL) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), 2011)). Admission to these schools is typically merit-based and determined on the basis of an examination (De Hoop, 2010). Review of literature reveals that public secondary schools in Malawi fall into two categories namely, conventional secondary schools and community day schools (De Hoop, 2010). Conventional schools are in away similar to Kenya's

national public schools are universally favoured by parents and pupils (De Hoop, 2010). Conventional schools are the elite secondary schools in Malawi. Both conventional and community day secondary school accommodate approximately 40 per cent of the 10.000 successfully complete the primary who examination annually (De Hoop, 2010). However, the disparities between conventional schools and community day schools in terms of physical and human resources are large (De Hoop, 2010). Top performers on the primary school leaving certificate examination (PSLCE) are admitted into conventional public secondary schools, while second tier performers on the PSLCE are selected into community day schools (De Hoop, 2010). Those who perform poorly in Malawi are considered third tier performer who either drop out or join private schools which are generally poorly equipped and scantly staffed institutions even in comparison to community day school Hoop, 2010), Kenva's four categories public secondary schools are discussed briefly here below.

#### National public secondary school

These are considered elite or prestigious government public secondary schools. They are also considered the most selective government schools. They draw their form one students country- wide (Onderi and Makori, 2014). They attract the best or top performing students. Compared to other categories of schools they have better facilities and offer a large variety of courses and also provide a higher quality peer group (Onderi and Makori, 2014). The resources are allocated to national public secondary schools at the expense of schools and this has been underscored by De Hoop (2010:2):

The education sectors of most Sub-Saharan countries face chronic shortages in physical and human resources. Rather than distributing the limited resources available for secondary education uniformly across schools, many governments allocate a relatively large share of the available resources to a select number of secondary schools.

In terms of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) performance, national schools perform far better than schools in other categories, for instance, recent figures shows that on average students scored 9.6 out of 12, 90 per cent of the students scored at least a C+ and also there was nil gender gap (Glennerster, et al., (2011) as cited in Onderi and Makori, (2014). On average national schools offer sixteen subjects (Ayodo and Too, 2010). Also almost all national schools offer computer studies, French and German (Ayodo and Too, 2010). The current capacity of all national public secondary schools is about 17500 students (In2East Africa, 2013).

#### Extra-county public secondary school

This is new brands of public secondary schools that has been situated between national and county schools and are 27 in number (Onderi and Makori, 2014). However, they are at the same time included in the list of 105 national schools in the country (Onderi and Makori, 2014). It is not clear why they are called extra-county schools and yet counted among the national schools. Their selection of form one students is different from that of national public schools in theirs are based on 40:40:20 ratios. That is, they take 40 percent of their students nationally, 40 percent from the county and 20 per cent from the district hosting the school (Onderi and Makori, 2014). As discussed earlier national public secondary school selection is 100 percent country-wide.

#### County public secondary schools

These are former provincial secondary schools and recruit or select form one students from within the county hosting the individual primary school. In other words, they select the best remaining students from the county. Their examination performance is low compared to national and extra-county schools, for instance, in 2008 on average their KCSE performance score was 6.2 out of 12, only 43 percent of the students scored at least a C+ and gender gap was small but statistically significant (Glennerster et al., 2011; Onderi and Makori, 2014). There are about 1000 of them in number and admit students from within the county (Onderi and Makori, 2014). Compared to national and extra country public secondary, country schools have poor facilities and some of them could be using untrained teachers. They offer about twelve subjects and few may offer computer studies, French and German (Ayodo and Too, 2010).

#### District public secondary schools

This constitutes the lowest category or tier of the public secondary schools in Kenya. A majority of their form one students consist of those who could not gain admission extra-county into national. or county (Glennerster, et al., 2011; Onderi and Makori, 2014). In other words, they attract the best remaining students from the district. In terms of KCSE performance, the scores are appalling. For instance, in 2008, the average score was 4 point out of 12 and only 11 percent scored at least a C+. There was also a significant gender gap in the performance such that the proportion of boys achieving at least a C+ was almost twice that of girls (Glennerster, et al., 2011; Onderi and Makori, 2014). There are approximately 3000 public district schools in the country and compared to national, extra-county and county public secondary schools, a majority of district public schools

have very poor facilities and a significant number of them could be engaging the service of untrained teachers in the delivery of lessons. They offer about eleven subjects and some may offer computer studies, French and German (Ayodo and Too, 2010). Low quality schools can supress school enrolment and impede student progression and achievement.

#### Form one selection process in Kenya

The current education system of Kenya is that one takes examinations after eight years in primary education, which determines the type of school a candidate get admitted into at secondary level. In other words students' performance in the Kenya certificate of primary education (KCPE) which is examined at standard eight determines the transition into different types of secondary schools in the country (Kinyua, 2014), Priscillah (2011) recognises this and notes that KCPE is used to select form one students to various cadres of secondary schools on the premise that their sterling performance at KCPE will enable them to perform well at the Kenya certificate of secondary education (KCSE) which comes at the end of secondary education (four years later). Further, end stage national examinations are usually seen as predictive of performance at the next level of schooling (Priscillah, 2011). Therefore, examinations are an inevitable part and parcel of education process. Among other things, examinations are used to measure a candidate's levels of education, training and employment (Priscillah, 2011).

The Kenya Ministry of Education employs a meritbased selection system that uses performance on the KCPE as a selection criterion. With this system the ministry of education ensures that the top performers on the KCPE are able to attend the top secondary schools (National secondary school). Similarly, in Malawi, the selection criterion is merit-based and uses performance on the PSLCE and it is used by the ministry of education to ensure that the top performers on PSLCE are able to attend the top tier secondary school (Conventional secondary school) (De Hoop, 2010). In both Kenya and Malawi, selection into public secondary schools is based on merit and therefore there is a cut-off point. Besides in Kenya and Malawi, a majority of other countries in the world over use examinations as a means of placing students onto their next level of education including elite schools, however, the criteria for selection to form one may vary from one country to the next.

The revised 2014 form one selection guidelines are contained in the figure 1 below:

Glewwe and Jacoby (1994) and Burrows (2015) add that students to public secondary schools are based on their scores of the KCPE, preference, affirmative action and district. According to a circular dated November, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and signed by the Ministry of Education principal

secretary Mr Kipsang, admission to all categories of public secondary schools will be based on merit, quotas, affirmative action and student choice (In2 East Africa, 2015). Each national school has a district quota (the number of students that will be offered a place from each district) (Glewwe, Kremer and Moulin, 2002). Prior to students sitting for the KCPE examination they choose and rank their national, county and district schools. Once the exam is scored, students are ranked within a district. The highest ranked student receives his first choice of schools and the selection continues down the ranked students, filling the district quota for each national school and other schools. If a student's preferred national schools are full, then he or she is admitted to preferred county school (if those schools still have space) even if other national schools had space remaining (Ayodo and Too, 2010). For instance, a student scoring 400 marks could be placed in either a national or county school depending on how many students with higher scores in his or her district expressed preferences for the same schools and his or her district's quotas for the national schools (Ayodo and Too, 2010). However, students who are unhappy with their placements can apply to an alternative school and their admission would depend on the head's discretion, provided that there are available places. Also a place in a school is open to a direct placement only if a student who was admitted to the same school fails to turn up at the start of the school vear.

## Issues and challenges associated with the selection process

However serious concerns have been registered in relation to the current form one selection criteria. For instance, the catholic Bishops in Kenya claim that the selection criteria and especially the quota system discriminated against pupils from private schools (Catholic News Agency for Africa, 2015). Also the Kenya private schools association (KPSA) claim that the selection process is not transparent, because it was done under the table (In2 East Africa, 2015). According to Standard Reporter, 25th January 2012 as cited in Alari, Migosi and Evusa (2013: 169), the current form one selection criterion could be described as "a distortion of merit, equity and fairness and unnecessarily punitive" and as a result the students are discouraged and frustrated when their aspirations are not met. Catholic News Agency for Africa (2015) also reports of an instance. where in one school the lowest student admitted had 183 marks and the highest 408 marks and wondered how the two students could learn in the same class. Also some sad incidents associated with form one selection process have been reported. For instance, a girl from Nakuru committed suicide after scoring 303 marks with the claims that she had not qualified for the school of her

Figure 1. Showing a revised 2014 form one selection guidelines

- Candidates who may not be picked to schools of choice despite their marks will be placed in the available slots in schools of comparable levels of performance or category;
- The selection is based on merit, equity and choice of schools made by the candidates;
- The top four candidates from every county, male and female will get places in national schools of their choice:
- Candidates who sat KCPE in the last two years and wish to re-join the system will be considered during replacement based on merit;
- The selection process will be done at four levels –national, extra-county, county or special schools and district:
- Admission to national schools will be 100 per cent national catchments;
- Every district will get slots in national schools through a quota system that will be arrived at by getting the district candidature multiplied by the available form one vacancies in schools. This will then be divided by the national KCPE candidature to get the district quota;
- Two separate formula based on the district quota will be used to determine the number of candidates from both public and private academies to be placed in national schools;
- Extra-county (high performing schools with mean score of 5.6 in KCSE) and county schools (former provincial boarding secondary schools) will select candidates after the national schools selection is completed;
- Extra-county schools will admit 40 per cent of candidates nationally; the next 40 per cent will be selected from the county and another 20 per cent from the district hosting the school.
- County schools will select candidates from within the county on the basis of KCPE candidature in each district within the county.

Source: (School Net Kenya Consultancy (SNK), 2014).

choice. Also in Mumias a pupil Booker academy with 392 marks committed suicide after discovering that he had not been selected to a secondary school of his choice, instead he has been selected to join St. Peters Boys, a public secondary school in the division (Alari et al., 2013). However, according to Education Cabinet Secretary Professor Jacob Kaimenyi, cases of high scoring students failing to secure slots in the national schools are to be expected as the competition for the best performing national school is high. Also it should be borne in mind that it is not all the time that the expectations of all the candidates will be met in terms of their preferred schools (Burrows, 2015).

#### **METHOD**

The study reported in this article was conducted to increase knowledge and understanding about the effect of the current form one selection process in Baringo County in Kenya. The findings will contribute to building a knowledge base for understanding of the issues, and challenges linked to form one selection process. The study adopted a quantitative research design and employed questionnaire survey to collect data. The questionnaire format consisted of closed, open-ended and rating scale. This was necessary to diversify responses as well as reduce what Watson and Coombes (2009) as cited in Makori and Onderi (2013) call 'question fatigue'. The open-ended sections of the guestionnaire

offered respondents opportunity to make a comment. expand or clarify some information on their responses and thus help researchers and readers gain some insight in their perspective regarding form one selection process in a county in Kenya. Study respondents consisted of parents who had taken their children to form one 2015 and were purposively selected for the study. Their recruitment was varied. Some of the parents were known to the research assistants and therefore were recruited for the study. Others were recruited through snowball sampling i.e. through parents, relatives and friends who were known to the research assistants (Kumar, 2005; Cohen, Manion, Morrison, Bell, Martin, McCulloch, and O'Sullivan, 2011) Research assistants also used various occasions such as academic day and fundraising drive, among others to recruit the study respondents. During the recruitment process, respondents were explained the purpose of the study and its implications to them, how to complete questionnaires and were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The respondents gave verbal consent and shortly after they all given questionnaires. Data collection exercise lasted for five months (February to May, 2015). A total of 150 questionnaires were returned representing in a response rate of 83.3 %. Closed-ended items were processed and analysed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) resulting in descriptive data, whereas openended data or comments were analysed into themes or categories and used to clarify or expand respective study findings reported in this article.

Table 1. Showing form one KCPE results

Marks scored	%(n=150)
101- 200	0.7
201- 300	33
301- 400	65
0ver 401	1.3
Total	100

Table 1 shows that just over two-thirds of the students scored within 301-400 range in their KCPE. Just a minority scored over 401.

**Table 2.** Showing the proportion of form ones and the category of school they joined

Category of public school	%(n=150)
National school	9
County school	58
District school	33
Total	100

Just fewer than two-thirds joined county schools and another one third joined county school. A small number of students joined national schools.

#### **RESULT**

#### Characteristics of respondents and form ones

Just over half (52.3%, n=150) of the respondents were female; just over half (52.7%, n=150) were teachers, while the rest were farmers (25%), civil servants (11.3%), business persons (5.3%), civil engineer (0.7%) and miners (0.7%).

Form one KCPE results and the category/type of schools they joined

Parents who are the respondents in this study were asked if they were happy with 2015 form one selection process. Just over half (54.7%, n=150) strongly disagree or disagreed, suggesting that more than half of the parents were not happy with the selection process at all. Further analysis of those who indicated strongly disagree or disagree gave the following reasons: the student joined a different school (13.3%; no admission letters were received from school of choice (43.6%); required marks not attained (4.7%) and there was bias in selection (20.3%). Some of the foregoing reasons are supported by the following selected comments:

- "Some pupils who scored A and A- didn't make to national school, some were not even selected to any school." [Respondent 1].
- "The process was bias" [Respondent 12]
- "Form1 selection was not excellent because many parents went looking for alternative schools for their children. Form1 did not get schools of their choice." [Respondent 3].
- "Most of the students who performed very well were

not considered in their correct type of schools according to their choices. They ended up in very low schools or county schools." [Respondent 14].

- "My son was placed in a school far much below his expectation and performance." [Respondent 25].
- "Most form one intake had not been done in a proper manner as previous years because most of the candidates with good marks missed good school and to be specific those from private schools." [Respondent 6].

Parents were asked to make comment on what they expected the government to do in relation to form one selection. Some of their comments are as follows:

- "Increase national schools especially in every county level and select school for students according to their choices and marks." (sic) [Respondent 47].
- "Government need to make adjustments so that students are selected accordingly and no needy students is left out to join form one class. More schools also needed to accommodate the ever rising number of students joining form one." (Sic)[Respondent8]
- "They should select the candidates according to their choices and performance ...." [Respondent 59]
- "The government should ensure that those students qualified are selected to their school of choice not to have students who do not qualify selected yet those not qualified selected thus discouraging the students." (Sic) [Respondent10].
- "Give candidates their rightful selection. Because they could worked for it. It is really discouraging when the could worked hard for a national school and eventually given a district school." (Sic) [Respondent131].

<b>Table 3.</b> Showing the	e marks scored (k	(CPE)	and the category of	public schools they	ioined for form one
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		School category				
Marks (KCPE)	Scored	District School (%,n=150)	County School (%, n=150)	National School (%, n=150)		
101- 200		1(0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
201- 300		26(17.3%)	21(14%)	1(0.7%)		
301- 400		22(14.7%)	66(44%)	10(6.7%)		
Over 401		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2(1.3%)		
Total		49(32.7%)	87(58%)	13(8.7%)		

Just fewer than 15% of students who scored between 301 and 400 marks joined district schools, whereas just over half of the students with similar marks joined either county or national school. Regarding form one selection process one parent made the following comment: "The selection of form one was not fair as children with higher marks are sent to low grade schools and others with lower marks are sent to national schools. This lowers morale of student in putting more effort in schools."

Table 4. Showing the marks scored (KCPE) and gender

	Gend	der
Marks Scored (KCPE)	Male	Female
101- 200	1(0.7%)	0 (0%)
201- 300	18 (12%)	31(20.7%)
301- 400	57 (38%)	41(27.3%)
Over 401	0 (0%)	2 (1.3%)
Total	76 (50.7%)	74 (49.3%)

Just over half of the form one students whose parents took part in this study were males. Just fewer than two-thirds of males and just fewer than one of females scored over 301 marks. 2 females scored over 401 marks

Table 5. Showing Marks scored and type of school joined

		Type of school	
Marks Scored (KCPE)	Day School	Boarding School	Day and Boarding
101- 200	1(0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
201- 300	11(7.3%)	36 (24%)	2 (1.33%)
301- 400	3 (2%)	91(60.7%)	2 (1.33%)
Over 401	0 (0%)	2 (1.3%)	0 (0%)
Total	15 (10%)	129(86%)	4 (2.66%)

Table 5 shows that 10% of the form one students joined day secondary schools which are likely to be district schools. However 2% of them had scored between 301- 400 marks. It is also interesting to note that over two-thirds of the students with similar marks had joined boarding schools, likely to be either county or national schools.

• "Ensure that marks is proportional to the school admitted to the students. For all i.e. there should be a standard and limits e.g. from 400 and above to join national schools etc. (Sic) [Respondent 91]

#### DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate the views of parents regarding the current form one selection process in Baringo County. Evidence (see Table 3) indicate that students with 201-300 marks joined district school (17.3%, n=150), county school (14%, n=150) and national schools (0.7%, n=150). Also that students with

301- 400 marks also joined district schools (14.7%, n=150); county schools (44%, n=150) and national schools (6.7%, n=150). This is something that can be very discouraging to a majority of students, especially those that score higher marks only to find themselves selected to district schools. However, according to Cabinet Secretary, Professor Jacob Kaimenyi, cases of high scoring students failing to secure slots in national schools are to be expected as the competition for the best performing national school is high. Further, it should be borne in mind that it is not all the time that expectations of all the candidates will be met in terms of their preferred school (Burrows, 2015). Besides, the total capacity of all national public schools in the country is

17500 students (In2 East Africa, 2013). According to the selection criteria, based on the district ranking, the highest ranked student receives his first choice of schools and ranked schools fills district quotas for each national school and other schools as discussed earlier (Ayodo and Too, 2010). Further, if a student's preferred national school is full, then he or she is admitted to preferred county school (if those schools still have space) even if other national schools had space remaining (Ayodo and Too, 2010). For instance, a student scoring 400 marks could be placed in either a national or county school depending on how many students with higher score in his/her district expressed preference for the same schools and his/her district's quotas for national schools (Ayodo and Too, 2010). Students are placed in a public secondary school based on performance (marks scored), preference (choice), affirmative action and district (Burrows, 2015). This constitutes what is referred to as merit-based process and is expected to apply to all students across the country.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The current form one selection process, while regarded as fair can be a source of discouragement to many higher scoring students who get admitted into either county or district schools. The current selection process is competitive and it is possible that higher performing student may end up in either a national school or poor local harambee school. Some recommendations include: the government to improve the quality and capacity of national public schools in the country; to review the current selection process to ensure that it does not disadvantage high performing students and also to make the process as transparent as possible. Another recommendation is that the entire education stakeholders need to be educated on the practice of the current form one selection criteria/process.

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