



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE INFLUENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION ENTRY QUALIFICATION AND ECONOMICS' FOUNDATIONAL SUBJECTS IN KCSE ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 25 August 2014

Final Accepted: 29 September 2014

Published Online: October 2014

Key words:

Secondary school education, Entry qualification, Economics foundational subjects, Students' performance

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Abstract

Since the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985 in Kenya, the students' performance in economics over the years in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) has been relatively poor. As a result, many head-teachers who are always conscious of KCSE examination results have encouraged students to drop this subject for the fear that performance in economics may lower the school mean grades in KCSE (KNEC Reports, 1991 – 1999). This paper sought to identify the influence of Secondary school education entry Qualification and Economics' Foundational subjects in KCSE on students' performance. The study was carried out in Rift Valley Province in Kenya. The representative sample, constituted all the fourth form students of economics in all the secondary schools in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya, Inspectors of schools in districts where economics was being offered and teachers from the schools where the subject was offered. A total of 187 students, 32 teachers and 4 district inspectors took part. Data was collected from the sample using the questionnaires. The data collected was analysed using the Excel and Basic statistical techniques used to analyse various items in the questionnaire. These included calculating the averages, frequencies, percentages and totals. These statistical techniques were used to make comparisons in the various data collected. Conclusions on the variables analysed were finally drawn from these comparisons.

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Introduction

A student with poor Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) scores has a slim chance of doing well in KCSE examinations if he or she went to a district school where the learning environment is not as conducive as that of either a national or a Provincial secondary school. Considering the above position, the present study sought to establish the students' KCPE entry qualifications and how these qualifications based on Economics' foundational subjects affect students' performance.

Although the performance of candidates in Economics is showing progressive improvement, the overall mean mark is generally low. What, then, could have been the cause of this dismal performance in the subject? The present study was designed to establish the causes of the noted poor performance in Economics most especially in view of the entry qualifications of Economics' foundational subjects at KCPE level.

A comparison between performance of the subject and the other creative subjects in cluster 5 of the subject groupings is presented in Table 1. These are Commerce and Accounting. Commerce and Accounting were chosen for comparison because of their close relationship to economics in terms of the course content in the Form 1 and 2 business Education syllabuses. Economics is not only dismally performed, but also characterized by low student enrolment and registration in national examinations. While the enrolment in Commerce and Accounting was found to be rising, that of economics has been rapidly declining. Even with few students taking the subject, their mean mark as lower as compared to the two related subjects. Accounting has tended to record the highest mean score followed by Commerce while economics had the least mean score.

Regarding the enrollment, Commerce displayed the highest followed by Accounting while economics has the least just as in the performance trend. From the information given above, it is clear that there is a problem in economics that needed to be investigated in order to improve the performance in the subject and thus promote the teaching and learning of this subject. The present study aimed at addressing this problem by surveying the economics' foundational subjects as a factor that influences the performance of students in economics in KCSE.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in the Rift Valley and involved selected secondary schools. The representative sample, constituted all the fourth form students of economics in all the secondary schools, Inspectors of schools in districts where economics was being offered and teachers from the schools where the subject was offered. A total of 187 students, 32 teachers and 4 district inspectors took part.

Data was collected from the sample using the questionnaires. The collected data was then analysed using Excel software program. Basic statistical techniques were used to analyse various items in the questionnaire. These include calculating the averages, frequencies, percentages and totals. These statistical techniques were used to make comparisons in the various data collected. Conclusions on the variables analysed were finally drawn from these comparisons.

Table 1: Comparative analysis of performance and enrolment in Economics, Commerce and Accounting

Year	Subject	Candidate entry	Mean scores (%)	Standard deviation
	Economics	1987	42.59	14.64
	Accounting	8170	42.72	16.84
	Commerce	81034	37.56	15.79
1996	Economics	2258	37.57	13.74
	Accounting	9058	56.00	16.25
	Commerce	83,806	53.17	15.59
1997	Economics	2177	36.78	14.60

	Accounting	9307	45.73	15.56
1998	Commerce	90,266	37.48	13.89
	Economics	2107	41.87	13.45
	Accounting	10,069-	50.08	16.52
1999	Commerce	97,052	41.26	14.59

Source: KNEC Reports, 1996, 1998-9.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Influence of Secondary School Education Entry Qualification (KCPE results) to Students' Achievement

From the analysis conducted concerning the performance of students in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the type of school joined, the national Schools admit students with the best highest scores in KCPE examination followed by the Provincial schools and then the district schools. The latter categories of schools usually admit students with relatively low scores in KCPE. Table 2 shows the KCPE grades obtained by students of economics and secondary schools they were admitted to. Almost all 41(95.3%) of the students in the national schools obtained 70 points or better in the KCPE examinations while a large portion, 86(84%), of those joining Provincial schools had obtained 60-84 points. This is not expected since the number of national schools in the country cannot accommodate all the students with more than 70 points. However a big number, 20 (64.5%), of the students admitted in the district schools had obtained points ranging between 50 and 59 in KCPE. The purpose of collecting this information was to establish the number of students attending the three school categories. This is because entry qualifications in various school categories are thought to have an effect on student's achievements in public or national examinations. National schools and some Provincial schools are generally better equipped. That is, these institutions have adequate and better learning facilities and resources as compared to district schools and some Provincial schools, which, generally, are poorly equipped with these resources.

Table 2: Student admission in Kenya's school categories

School type /KCPE points	District School	Provincial School	National School	Grand Totals
50-59	20	17	0	37
60-69	9	76	2	87
70-84	2	20	41	63
Totals	31	113	43	187

The less attractive instructional conditions found in some Provincial schools and district schools, make students preparation for KCSE examinations difficult. This is to say, that the less equipped a school is with regard to teaching resources, the less prepared the students are for KCSE examinations, especially in economics. The observation is consistent with Maundu's (1986) findings that school head-teachers and teachers interviewed

indicated that entry qualifications are important determinants of student achievement in school work. The type of a secondary school a child joins was crucial to his/her success in KCSE examinations. A student with poorer scores had little chance of doing well in KCSE examinations if he or she went to a district school where learning environment was not as rich as that found in either the national or a good Provincial school. In conclusion, the differences in entry qualifications to various categories of secondary schools lead to the variation in students' performance in KCSE. National schools have higher entry qualifications followed by Provincial schools and then district schools.

However, the availability of the relevant learning resources has the influence on the development of students in KCSE economics education therefore, the richer the learning environment the better the performance of students in KCSE economics examinations. This is not withstanding other learning factors.

Influence of the Economics Foundational Subjects to Students' Performance in KCSE

Three economics foundational subjects analysed are English, Mathematics and Business education. These subjects are important for students' understanding of economics. They constitute a basis for comprehensibility of economics subject matter at secondary school level. Normally a student who is weak in these subjects at Primary school level may have a learning problem of comprehending economics at secondary school level. Table 3 presents the grades obtained by students in KCPE at Primary school level in English, Mathematics and Business Education.

Table 3: Students responses on the grades obtained in Mathematics, English and Business Education

Students grades			
Subject	Number of students (%)		
	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C
Mathematics	69(37)	90(49)	26(14)
English	56(30)	98(52)	33(18)
Business Education	61(33)	106(57)	20(10)

Examination score distributions of the total students surveyed reveal that, 69 (37%) scored the 'A' grade in Mathematics, 90 (49%) scored the 'B' grade and 26(14%) scored the grade respectively. Even though the 'A' and 'B' grades obtained are good foundational grades in economics, majority of the students do not maintain or improve on these grades but they proceed with their studies to secondary school level. Specifically important is a good foundation in English language in comprehending economics concepts. It has been claimed by the students of economics that some text-books especially those originating from the Western Europe are too voluminous and use difficult terms that are comprehensible. One of those text-books mentioned by students included the *East African Economics by Livingstone and Ord*. For instance proper understanding of these difficult terms can greatly reduce students' misunderstanding and misconceptions of CSE economics. This seems to have been the case in the present study. English is very necessary to the students of economics at the classroom level and when doing the national examinations. Understanding the intended answer in a KCSE question is very important before a candidate can sensibly respond to an examination item. According to the KNEC reports, students in the past have had problems of misunderstanding the economics questions in KCSE. From this observation it would appear that English must be emphasized at school. This emphasis involves careful confirmation of the use of English language by students when answering economics questions. Table 3 shows that fifty six students 56 (30%) managed to score the 'A' grade, 98 (52%) scored the 'B' grade and 18% scored the 'C' grade. This is a good foundational grade for economics learning

at the secondary school. This shows that students performed well in KCPE English and so there is no reason why they should not do so in secondary economics. At the secondary school level, most students tend to score poorly in English, as opposed to what they scored at Primary school level. An explanation to this could be attributed to the fact that multiple choices at Primary level did not truly reflect the students' ability to grasp adequately English language. The teaching of English at the secondary school is different from how it is taught in primary. At the secondary level, a student is required to express his or her responses in clear sentences while at the Primary school level, it is mainly drilling, that is, it involves repeating words/sentences without analyzing and making sentence structures. Just as English, Mathematics is crucial in the understanding of economic principles, theories and concepts, Mathematical approach in economics is essential in the treatment and comprehension of economic principles, theories and concepts.

Many teachers have decried this declining trend in performance in Mathematics since the inception of 8-4-4 system of education. The problem of declining trend in mathematics was also echoed in the FEMSA seminar (2001). The deterioration in the performance of mathematics by students over the years poses a serious problem to the teaching and learning of economics. This is because the concepts, theories and principles of economics are mathematically oriented and cannot be easily understood by the secondary school learners of economics without good mathematical knowledge.

Consequently this leads to poor performance in economics at the secondary school level. A good foundation in mathematics is necessary for a student to understand presentations in economics text-books and consequently those in KCSE examinations. Lastly and more importantly is the students' performance in Business Education at Primary school level. The subject matter of this course at the secondary school level and especially in Forms one and two constitute a basis for learning economics, Commerce Accounting, Office Practice and Typing at forms three and four level of secondary education. Thus, good foundation in this subject is necessary for a student of economics at the secondary school level. Without this good foundation of business studies subject content, a student is likely to experience problems in understanding economics content in general. From table 3, 61 (33%) of the students scored the 'A' grade, 106 (57%) grade 'B' and 20 (10%) a grade 'C'. Similar grades may be maintained by students in KCSE because of the similar Business Education content taught in both school levels. The only difference in content is that in the secondary level, detailed explanations are given in preparation of students' choice of the Business studies subjects offered in the curriculum. These subjects are Commerce, Economics, Accounting, and Typing and Office practice. The conclusion that students at Secondary level may score same grades in Forms 1 and 2 in Business education as they were scoring at Primary school level implies that a good foundation in Business Education at this level of education enhances the understanding of economics subject at a later stage.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a student opting to take economics must have passed well in the three foundational subjects in Primary school education namely, Mathematics, English, and Business Education. A good KCPE grade in these subjects is a pointer to good foundation in learning economics. The students admitted in the national schools mostly obtained these good grades. The fact that students with good grades are being admitted to the national schools is limiting the chances of the other two (Provincial and District) school types of admitting equally good students who would do well in economics. That is to say, poor quality of the Form One in-take in the district and Provincial schools will make these schools perform poorly in KCSE economics.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that to encourage student performance in economics subject, the core/foundational subjects should be administered at the Primary level and high performances recorded.

Since this study was restricted to the Rift-Valley Province of Kenya, there is need to conduct a wider similar study to determine whether the observations made in this study are similar around the country.

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