

Child friendly schools in kenya education essay



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The purpose of this essay is to explore the contribution of Comparative and International Research in the successful implementation of Child Friendly Schools (CFSs) in Kenya. Emphasis will be placed on the background of CFSs, current practices and emerging critics, success stories, problems and pitfalls and what CIR can do to subjugate some of these challenges. I will start by examining the rationale for exploring CFSs, based on literature and my professional experience. Following this background will be literature surrounding the concepts of CIR and CFS in relation to global agendas, exploring how CFS came into existence and the driving forces behind it. I then go on to focus on a case study of CFS in Kenya, discussing the role of CIR in the Kenya's CFS, arguing that CIR is used as a political tool in creating educational policy, rather than a research method or an intellectual inquiry. I will further critically analyze challenges facing CFS and how knowledge on CIR can contribute more effectively to successful implementation of CFS. A conclusion based on the literature and author's experience will then be drawn. Throughout the essay, I build a case in favour of CIR arguing that CIR stimulates critical reflections about our educational systems by investigating commonalities and differences across national borders.

Background and Rationale

Perhaps, one of the growing fields in education in the modern age is comparative and international education, judged by the volume of studies reported in the literature. Central to this is that many countries around the world have formulated some of their educational policies based on scholarship in CIR. With the current wave of globalization, researchers and experts, especially in the field of education, are always trying to find ways of

streamlining their educational policies with the global trends. According to Giddens (1990: 64), globalization is 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distance localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. Global forces therefore have an impact on shaping local practices at grass root levels. In order to do this tactically and critically, comparative and internal research remains cutting edge in informing people about the realities, the challenges and the possible effects of uncritical transfer of ideas.

Interestingly, global agendas in matters related to education are prioritized towards basic education as opposed to adult education or higher education. In Africa, this would be probably because, as Oketch (2004) points out, basic education yields higher rates of returns compared to higher education. This has subsequently caused government and non-governmental organizations to focus more on improving the quality of basic education. Child-friendly schools (CFSs) in Kenya is an example of a initiative sponsored by UNICEF with the aim of not just providing children right to education but the right to the " right" education. In other words, CFSs are more concerned with the quality of basic education in addition to its access. The emergence of CFSs in Kenya was catapulted by the forces of agendas 1 and 2 of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) which emphasizes on the provision of basic education. The World Education Forum (2000) agreed on six Education For All (EFA) goals. The sixth goal concerned Education quality, '...improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.' The term " quality"

in education is dynamic because of the social, political and economic context at which it is used. Because of differences in contexts, it is imperative that knowledge of comparative and international research be used in designing policies and pedagogy in CFS that fit that particular context.

Furthermore, with the fear that some countries may lag behind as others move forward, sub-Saharan countries are now engaging in various practices in order to achieve this goal, a race against the 2015 set deadline for attainment of EFA goals. As the clock ticks towards the year 2015, priority goals in education may change for post-2015 and the worry is further elevated. One of the efforts the government of Kenya is doing to improve the quality of education is by integrating CFS model into the basic education system. Two major questions arise here: First, how is CFS realistic considering myriad challenges facing the FPE policy in Kenya? Secondly, if CFS model is the 'best practice' to go by, what is the role of CIR in successful implementation of the CFSs? It is against this background that the purpose of the essay hinges.

Literature Review

In this section, I will look at the concepts of Comparative and International Research (CIR) and Child Friendly School (CFS) based on the literature and merge them with the global forces that catapulted the emergence of CFS with an attempt to unveil the voices behind the introduction of CFS in Kenya. In addition, I will use an example of PRISM experience in Kenya to reinforce the understanding as to the role of international bodies in promoting quality through well strategized and executed projects, arguing that lessons from PRISM experience can be used as insights to successful implantation of CFSs.

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Concepts of Comparative and International Research (CIR) and Child Friendly School (CFS)

CIR is a fusion of two broad areas of research: Comparative Research and International Research. To understand its full meaning, it is important we define the two areas of research separately. In his definition of comparative research, Mills et al (year) argue that:

'Comparative research is a broad term that includes both quantitative and qualitative comparison of social entities. Social entities may be based on many lines, such as geographical or political ones in the form of cross-national or regional comparisons'. (p. 621)

A similar perception was echoed by Noah and Eckstein (1969: 127), who described comparative education as " an intersection of the social sciences, education and cross-national study [which] attempts to use cross-national data to test propositions about the relationship between education and society and between teaching practices and learning outcomes".

In light of this definition, comparative research in the context of education can be defined as a study of two or more entities or events (Crossley & Watson 2003) with the underlying goal of searching for similarity and variance. Cross-national or regional comparisons may include comparing educational policies, pedagogy, educational leadership and so on. According to Mills et al (2006: 621), " the search for variance places more emphasis on context and difference in order to understand specificities".

International education, on the other hand, can be defined as " the application of descriptions, analyses and insights learned in one or more

nations to the problems of developing educational systems and institutions in other countries" (Wilson 2000a: 116). Thus, international research is concerned with research carried out across two or more countries, often with the purpose of comparing responses between them. This might be done in order to devise strategies that work well across both or all these cultures or to suggest local adjustments to a global strategy

There is a close relationship between comparative and international education. Epstein (1994: 918) points out, that international educators " use findings derived from comparative education to understand better the processes they examine, and thus, to enhance their ability to make policy". We can therefore draw from the above two definitions that CIR in education as a method of comparing both qualitative and quantitative entities in education across different countries, societies or cultures with the aim of identifying similarities and differences. It is however important to note that not all international research is comparative, and not all comparative research is international or cross-national.

According to UNICEF, a child-friendly school is both a child seeking school and a child-centred school: It is child seeking because it actively identifying excluded children to get them enrolled in school. It is a child-centred school because it acts in the best interests of the child leading to the realization of the child's full potential, is concerned about the " whole" child: her health, nutritional status, and well-being and concerned about what happens to children before they enter school and after they leave school. A CFS system recognizes and respects children's right and responsibilities; it provides the enabling environment to realize children's right not only in schools, but also

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in children's home and their communities. These include children from conflict zones, street children and children with disabilities. The Child-Friendly Schools model (see fig 1) is based on simple, rights-based concepts that would have all schools be:

Rights Based School: CFS proactively seeks out-of-school children and encourages them to enrol, irrespective of gender, race, ability, social status, etc.

Gender Sensitive School: CFS promotes equality and equity in enrolment and achievement among girls and boys.

Safe and Protective School: CFS ensures that all children can learn in a safe and inclusive environment.

Community Engaged School: CFS encourages partnership among schools, communities, parents and children in all aspects of the education process.

Academically Effective School: CFS provides children with relevant knowledge and skills for surviving and thriving in life.

Health Promoting School: CFS promotes the physical and emotional health of children by meeting key nutritional and health care needs within schools.

(UNICEF, 2007)

Fig 1: Model of the Child-Friendly School

Source: UNICEF(2007).

The CFS model provides a framework for planning (and monitoring the effectiveness of) strategies for increasing access to quality basic education with the specific focus on the development of strategies to include those children hitherto excluded from education (UNICEF, Global Education Strategy, 2007). It is important to note that there is no "one-way" to make a school child-friendly. The model may differ from country to country depending on the context.

International and Local Pressures and their influences to formation of CFS in Kenya

Education in sub-Saharan Africa, and indeed in Kenya, is crafted from both influences by global trends in education and the legacies of colonialism.

Chisholm and Leyenderker (2008) observe that:

" Since 1990, the goals and purpose of education in sub-Saharan Africa has been reshaped by four interconnected developments: globalisation, the changed focus of international aid agencies towards development assistance, the adaptation of sub-Saharan African countries to the new world order with its new political emphases, and the spilling over of new pedagogical ideas from the USA and Europe into sub-Saharan Africa". (p 198)

Kenya is a signatory to a number of conventions in education, including the Convention to the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), the Dakar accord and the Millenium Development Goals (2000). In achievement of education development goals, Kenya is bound to, among other things, quality education by MDGs. The Jomtien call for access for access, equity, quality and democracy in

education appeared to promise both social and economic development (Chisholm and Leyenderker, 2008). Social and economic development, and continues to be believed, requires educational change and educational change is necessary for social and economic development (ibid:).

Educational change, in turn, is perceived to depend on, amongst other things, the input from relevant development assistance projects. These projects, in the arena of education, are typically formulated with reference to internationally negotiated development agendas (like the MDGs) and priority (Crossley & Watson, 2003). An example of these projects in Kenya is CFSs which are supported by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Education Section of UNICEF's Programme Division introduced the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) framework for schools that "serve the whole child" in 1999 (Chabbott, 2004).

Rationale for introducing CFS framework in Kenya

The increased reliance of foreign aid to support education reform in Kenya has been accompanied by a transition, from "understanding education as a human right and the general good to viewing it primarily in terms of its contribution to national growth and well-being through the development of the knowledge and skills societies are deemed to need". (Arnové & Torres 2007: 359). Occasional voices continue insisting that "education is liberating, that learning is inherently developmental" (ibid: 359).

With the global concern that Sub-sahara Africa countries may not achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015 unless the progress is accelerated (Carceles et al., 2001; Bennel, 2002), Kenya responded by introducing Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in 2003 with both local and

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global pressure. The rationale behind introducing FPE was (apart from the pressure from global and international agendas) to alleviate poverty attributed to lack of literacy skills. The success story behind implementation of FPE policy is the increased enrolment at primary schools by nearly 50%, from 5.9 million in 2003 to 9.38 million pupils according to the Kenya Economic Survey 2011. However, there are myriad challenges facing the implantation of FPE policy: there are not enough textbooks, classrooms are overcrowded and the infrastructure in many schools is inadequate for the numbers of pupils attending. Many of the schools do not have sanitation facilities. The teacher-pupil ratio is quite high: according to UNESCO there are more than 40 pupils per teacher, on average. All of these factors militate against the provision of quality teaching. There is no magic wand for fixing this problem of quality in education. In response to this CFS were introduced in Kenya by UNICEF. According to UNICEF (2006: 1):

The challenge in education is not simply to get children into school, but also to improve the overall quality of schooling and address threats to participation. If both quality and access are tackled, children who are enrolled in primary school are likely to continue, complete the full cycle, and achieve expected learning outcomes and successfully transition to secondary school.

The CFS framework (see appendix 3) aims at promoting child-seeking, child-centred, gender-sensitive, inclusive, community-involved, protective and healthy approaches to schooling and out-of-school education with a general goal of improving the quality of learning.

Since CFSs are concerned with the quality of learning, it is important we look at the meaning of " quality". The national examinations to obtain the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) at the end of primary cycle and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) at the end of secondary cycle are designed to evaluate the extent to which the primary and secondary graduates master the curriculum content. In other words, the national test scores are used as the indicators of quality. The limitation of this indicator is that it does not take into account the context at which learning takes place i. e. the learning environment, learners' unique characteristics etc. There are many definitions of quality but one of the descriptions of quality which emphasizes on the context was by Tikly (2011: 10) who argued that:

A good quality education is one that enables all learners to realise the capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance wellbeing. The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context but at the end of the basic education cycle must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy and life skills including awareness and prevention of disease.

In his description, Tikly believes that a good quality education arises from interactions between three overlapping environments, namely the policy, the school and the home/community environments. In his perception of quality education, Tikly puts context into consideration i. e. needs of the learner, cultural and political contexts. In addition, he emphasizes on the relevance of what is taught and learned and how it fits the nature of particular learners

in question. This 'encourages policy makers to take cognisance of changing national development needs, the kinds of schools that different learners attend and the forms of educational disadvantage faced by different groups of learners when considering policy options'(ibid: 11).

The fact that CFS emphasizes on learner-centered pedagogy and puts the child at the " centre" or " focal point" in the learning process raises the idea of " what is regarded as valuable knowledge" and " how this knowledge is acquired" in this particular context. This leads us to the inquiry on the school of thought or paradigm behind introducing a contextualized CFS framework. CFS as an approach to education is premised on constructivism, a theory of knowledge arguing that humans generate knowledge and meaning from interaction between ideas and real experiences. According to constructivists, the notions of reality and truth are socially constructed and in different context with the understanding that knowledge is subjective and embedded in multiple realities. Thus, quality of learning should be viewed in the context in which it is occurs.

Towards Quality Basic Education In Kenya: Developing Research Capacity and Evaluation

Before we acknowledge the contribution of CFS in providing quality education to the children at Primary school level, it will be prudent to review some of other contributions that has been made by international organizations in collaborations with the local governmet in promoting quality of education at grassroot levels by building research capacity.

Kenya has had a history of benefiting from international assistance in its education sector. One of the programmes is the Primary Schools Management (PRISM), an initiative of DfID through the Ministry of Education, which places a lot of emphasis on participatory approaches and emphasis on mobilising community support, resource management and utilisation, supporting learning of pupils and developing action plans. It targeted teacher training and management and the impact of this is overall effectiveness of an education system which has a direct bearing on quality of education. According to Otieno & Colclough (2009: 26), PRISM is regarded as 'one of donor-funded programmes which had most positive impact on quality' of basic education and CFS can learn from it. As Crossley et al notes, the main objective of PRISM was to improve the quality of primary education through the training and support of head teachers in practical management skills. Borrowing from the PRISM experience it is worthy learning that well planned and organized CFSs projects involving community participation at grass root level could help tap local voices and lead to successful implementation of educational policies not only in Kenya but also other parts of African contexts.

Challenges in implementing CFS in Kenya

In this section I will explore common challenges associated with the CFSs concept with an aim of illuminating and critiquing the gap between policy and practice in CFSs.

Access and Quality Dilemma: Which one should be first priority?

As I mentioned earlier, one of the role of CFS in Kenya is to improve the quality of learning. But the access to education is still a challenge in Kenya and there is fear that Kenya will not have achieved EFA goals 1 and 2 by the year 2015. As we near the 2015 set deadline for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, at a time when hopes should be high, universal access to primary education in Kenya seems to be slipping away. Many comparative researchers argue that different countries have different educational problems and it is the country's obligation to identify what should be the priority and why. Aksoy (2008: 218) observes that:

" While developed countries are mainly engaged in activities to increase the quality of education, or they practice and seek new techniques and methods of learning and teaching, developing countries struggle to provide equal opportunities for education, trying to increase the rate of participation of all citizens in basic education, which is actually compulsory. To deal with its educational problems, each country works out countrywide or local solutions, depending on the nature of the problem."

The tone of such statement is more closely allied to the question of priority. Priority in one country may not be a priority in another. In Kenya, the major problem basic education is facing is of access while higher education is facing the problem of quality. CFS focus more on quality, but in the Kenyan context, access to education is still a problem in basic education even after the introduction of FPE. The CFS concept of quality can however suit very well in small state commonwealth countries which have almost universal

access to basic education. It has been noted that small states have now shifted education priorities towards focus in school effectiveness, quality and inclusion (Crossley & Watson 2003) and CFS in Kenya should learn from small states that the priority should now be on access to basic education before shifting to quality.

" Atomizing" the child: is child-centred the solution to quality CFS?

A key feature of a right-based, CFS system is that it is linked tightly to the child-centred learning process. CFS advocates for child-centred learning where a child is treated as a single entity or an " atom" in learning processes. The idea of " atomizing" a child has its drawbacks derived from child-centred learning. First, there is an oversight on early year development behaviour of the child. Psychologists believe children undergo various levels of development and their learning behaviours are different at each level. For instant, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) implies that a child cannot ordinary create ZPD by himself; he needs the more expert individual to bridge the gap between his current development level and his proximal level of development. Secondly, a child-friendly, democratic learning environment may not work successful in overcrowded classrooms and school with limited resources like it is the case in Kenya. Thirdly, child-centred learning weakens the role of the teacher. The idea that a child must be active in construction of knowledge is often understood to imply a diminishing role for the teacher in learning process who now becomes a " coach" or a facilitator". A call for paradigm renovation, from an exclusively child-centred learning to a combination of both child-

centred learning and teacher-centred learning approach is important so that the weakness of one method is complemented by the other method.

What Lessons can Kenya learn from other Countries in Implementing CFS? A Review on the Contribution of Comparative Research

Kings (2007) emphasizes the need to explore the tension between the national and the international policy agendas in Kenya in order to make informed decisions when crafting educational policies. Clearly, this is a view that underscores the contribution of CIR researchers in bridging theories, policies and practices with both local and global minds (Crossley, 2000) in trying to identify better grounds to critically reflect and determine appropriate course of action.

Apparently, the term that is commonly used in Kenya and indeed many Africa countries in the initial processes of designing an educational policy is benchmarking. Essentially, this is usually a comparative study which is carried out either locally and/or internationally in trying to compare different models of policy framework with the aim of critical adaption or adoption. Lessons are well learnt when a comparisons are made, and this underscores the strength and significance of comparative research. Moreover, since problems transcend national borders, it is prudent to seek possible solutions from a similar experience in another country, and this explains why international research is important. Kenya can learn from other countries that are either progressing or failing to implement CFS because lessons can either identify opportunities or gaps, based on comparative analysis. In these

respect therefore, I have identified two key elements of CIR which could help implementation of CFS.

The first element is on identification of the gap between policy and practice. Documenting the emerging good practices and lessons learned within the regions is useful in informing evidence based programming and advocacy to enable us to achieve better results. For example, a Global Evaluation Report published by UNICEF in 2009 on comparative studies of how to six countries (Guyana, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand) with different experiences implementing CFS, demonstrated the following:

CFSs in varying contexts successfully apply the three key principles of CFS models-inclusiveness, child-centredness and democratic participation.

Schools operating in very different national contexts, with different levels of resources and serving populations with different needs have succeeded in being child-centred, promoting democratic participation, and being inclusive.

Schools that had high levels of family and community participation and use of child-centred pedagogical approaches had stronger conditions for learning, that is, students felt safer, supported and engaged, and believed that the adults in the school supported the inclusion and success of each student. (UNESCO, 2009)

Kenya can use this success report to assist in providing a broader perspective on the ways in which CFSs can contribute to quality in the country's unique context. The caution should however be that any steps

taken should have hindsight of the current context in the country to avoid uncritical transfer of practice which may end up opening a Pandora's box.

Secondly, through CIR, studies of educational systems that share similar problems can provide information for learning possible consequences. A recent comparative evaluation research conducted by UNESCO in Nigeria, Guyana, Thailand and the Philippines on CFS pedagogy gave different findings. While teachers in Nigeria and Guyana mainly focused on meeting basic instructional material needs (textbooks, paper), many teachers in Thailand and the Philippines focused on having greater access to information and communication technology (UNESCO 2009). Kenya experiences the same challenge as Nigeria and Guyana, and data from these countries can be used to learn how they coping with inadequate basic instructional material. The caution here should be, that " common problems may prevail in different countries, but 'common model' cannot be applied because each country has different culture/context" (Crossley & Watson, 2003: 39). This provides invaluable information of what to adopt, modify or avoid.

Conclusion

It is worthy reiterating Crossley'(2003) emphasis that " context matters" and different countries have different needs and priorities even if they are faced with the same challenges. The value of CIR is studying foreign systems of education in order to become 'better fitted to study and understand our own' (Sadler 1900, reprinted 1964: 310) and CIR can be used as a lense to focus on adaptable or adoptable practices. UNICEF repeatedly emphasises that CFS is a " pathway to educational quality" rather than a " blueprint" and that " it is counterproductive to regard the CFS model as rigid, with a present

number of defining characteristics or key components" (2009c, Ch. 1, p. 9). Thus, the essay sought to present an overview in favour of the contribution of CIR in improving successful implementation of CFSs in the Kenyan context. As such, the essay acknowledges the role of CIR in stimulating critical thinking and reflections about CFSs system by evaluating its success and failures, strengths and weaknesses. This critical reflection facilitates self evaluation in our own context and the basis for determining appropriate courses of action. The article also hints that CIR helps us understand global agendas and how they shape educational development projects from organizations and development agencies.