

**FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION POLICY AND EQUITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION
IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MARAKWET WEST SUB-COUNTY, KENYA.**

CHESEREK PERIS JERUTO

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ABSTRACT

Free primary education (FPE) in Kenya came into being in the year 2003. The introduction of the policy was aimed at realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) objectives before the year 2015. FPE was mooted with the idea of promoting equity and access to education by all children despite their economic background, gender, geographical location among other factors but its effect in promoting equity has been the subject for inquiry by many scholars although no study has been undertaken to look at the contribution of FPE on promotion of equity in primary in Marakwet Sub County, Elgeyo–Marakwet County, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of FPE policy in promoting equity in education access in schools. The objectives of the study were; to determine the effect of tuition fee capitation provision of educational facilities provision of free instructional resources on Equity in access to education in primary schools in Marakwet Sub County. The study was guided by Rawls Theory of Justice. The study was conducted in primary schools in Marakwet Sub County involving 99 schools. The study used crosssectional survey research design technique. The target population comprised of head teachers, Sub County Education Officer (DEO), Parents Teachers Representatives (PTA) and teachers of selected schools within the Sub County. The sample size comprised of 30 head teachers, 30 PTA officials, 1 DEO and 197 teachers. Purposive and systematic sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document checklists were instruments for data collection. Instruments were tested for validity and reliability before field data collection. Data collected was analysed using descriptive (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Multiple linear Regression) with the aid of SPSS (Version 20.0) computer programme. The findings were presented using tables, pie charts and graphs. The study findings showed that FPE has promoted equity in access to primary education to majority of pupils in Marakwet Sub County with the exception of disabled ones. The study findings further revealed that extra levies on school meals, payment of teachers and PTA fees affected learners' participation in schools. The study found out that both educational facilities and teacher shortage common across all primary schools in the Sub County. MLR result showed that 12.3% of the Equity in access to education in primary schools was accounted by the Capitation of tuition fees, provision of education facilities and availing of instructional resources. It was found out that not all pupils had access to primary education in the area. The study recommends that there be an increase in vote heads for tuition support, infrastructure and teacher recruitment to ensure equity in education access in primary schools in the study area. The findings of the study will help the Ministry of Education on proper management and implementation of FPE Policy towards promoting equity in primary schools. The children rights to participation in free primary education will also be supported through the study findings.