



Free secondary education and the status of equity in public secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

Free secondary education was introduced in Kenya in 2008 to increase access and enhance equity in public secondary schools. Though student enrolment improved across the country after its introduction, the socio-economic composition of students remained undocumented. The problem of the study was; what was the socio economic composition of students in public secondary schools in Bungoma County? The population comprised of 115 public secondary schools and the 14,875 KCSE candidates of 2015. Simple and proportional random sampling techniques were used, while a student questionnaire was the research tool. The findings were: most of the enrolled students were from the middle and low-income households, while the gini coefficient was 0.14 by household incomes. Lastly, a statistically significant relationship existed between students' household incomes and fees arrears. In conclusion, students from the middle and low-income households benefitted most, while the current level of public subsidy was considered inadequate.

Keywords: equity, free secondary education, public subsidy, quintile, socio economic composition

1. Introduction

The declaration of Education for All (EFA) in 1990 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 set the pace for attaining Universal Primary Education (UPE) in most developing countries (UNESCO 2007) ^[14]. As a consequence of these two initiatives, pupil enrollment at the primary education level was enhanced in most developing countries. However, despite the high primary enrollments; transition to secondary education remained consistently low in many developing countries because of tuition fees (UNESCO, 2007) ^[14]. Available evidence shows that, tuition fees and other expenses incurred by the individual students and their families are barriers to accessing and completing secondary school education (Boyle *et al.*, 2002). The impact of these charges was, however, greater to the schooling of children from poor families. This is because poor families cannot afford to pay for them, thus raising equity implications.

A study carried out by Filmer and Pritchett (1998) ^[5] found out that there was a significant correlation between household income and primary school enrollment in a number of countries. For example, in India it was discovered that children from wealthy homes had a higher likelihood of enrolling in school than those from poor families by 30 percent. This difference, however, varied considerably from one Indian state to another. The scenario of school enrollment for the 6 to 14 year olds from rich families in Senegal was 52% higher than that from poor families. In Zambia, the children from the well to do families were 36 percent more enrolled in school than those from poor homes. The foregoing findings imply that the amount of fees levied on students has considerable equity implications on the student composition in schools.

UNESCO (2007) ^[14] notes that; for the poor, satisfying their

basic needs may be a greater priority than investing in education. Consequently, enrolling in school by one is not merely determined by the presence of a school in the neighborhood. Available evidence shows that although many governments have increased their budgetary allocation to basic education, many children from the poor and socially marginalized segments of the population still encounter obstacles with regard to accessing education (UNESCO, 2007) ^[14]. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) of 1997 showed that the low school attendance by both boys and girls in Kenya was attributed to the school fees burden. Another survey revealed that the household unit cost for primary education was about KES 3000 per annum, while the unit cost for secondary education was about eight times as much (KNBS, 2005). In this survey, the non-tuition expenditures averaged close to KES 10,000, thus accounting for over 40 percent of the average total cost of secondary school education. The foregoing two studies reveal that the amount of fees levied by schools has a strong bearing on enrollment, composition and progression of students in an education level.

According to the Ministry of Education Task force Report on Affordable Secondary Education of 2008, of the 3.12 million secondary school age population in 2006, only about 1.03million students were in the 4,257 secondary schools (MOE, 2008). This translated to a Gross and Net enrollment ratios of about 32% and 23% respectively. The report further observes that, equity in the provision of secondary education was yet to be achieved in Kenya. An analysis of the socio-economic composition of the enrolled students at the secondary school level noted that, secondary school students were drawn disproportionately from the upper-income groups. According to the available data then, 4% of the secondary

school students are drawn from the poorest income-group quintile, 7.3% from the lowest income group quintile, 11.4% from the middle income-group quintile, 16.2% from the upper-middle income quintile, while 28.2% are drawn from the richest quintile.

The aforementioned equity indexes implied that students from the poorest, lowest and middle income groups in Kenya were by then grossly under-represented in secondary school education. While on the other hand, students from the richest income groups were disproportionately over-enrolled in secondary education. This in effect meant that students from the richest income group occupied school places that ideally should have been occupied by the other income groups. It was on the basis of the recommendations of this task force, that Free Secondary Education (FSE) was established in Kenya in 2008. Free Secondary Education was made up of a public subsidy of Ksh. 10,265 per student per calendar and the government to support the education of all students in public secondary schools established it. The subsidy is processed and allocated to the public secondary schools by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of meeting tuition expenses of the students (Malenya, 2008) ^[11]. After subsidizing secondary education in 2008, the total student enrolment in secondary schools increased from 1,180,267(638,690 Boys and 541,513 Girls) in 2007 to, 1,335,907 (746,513 Boys and 635,698 Girls) in 2008 and 1,507,546 (808,650 Boys and 698,896 Girls) in 2009 (KNBS, 2009). Although an increase in student enrollment was realized after the subsidization of education, more than half of the school age population was not accessing secondary education due to the high cost attributable to boarding expenses (KNBS, 2009). Ohba (2009) ^[13] established that the tuition waiver reduced the cost of schooling by 58 percent (from KES 11,628 in 2007 to KES.4,938 in 2008) during the first year of its inception, in a group of more than 20 district day schools. Unfortunately, the cost of education offered in both national and provincial schools did not change much. According to Ohba, when the cost of education reduces, the poor are more likely to enroll their children in school. At this juncture, the issue of concern was that; were the less privileged children in society attending this level of education more than they used to do before or not?

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Documentation at the County Education office showed that after the public subsidy was introduced, the student enrolment increased from 54,689 students in 2007 to 62,249 students in 2008 in public secondary schools in Bungoma County. However, despite this increase in student enrollment, student composition by socio economic status was not documented. Consequently, the question that remained unanswered was; which group (s) of students was benefitting most from the free secondary education in the County? It was important to answer this question because the government of Kenya is committed to ensuring that children from all household levels enroll and complete secondary school education. It has continuously demonstrated its commitment, by allocating money in the budget towards the subsidized education annually. According to Belio (2017) ^[2], the government of Kenya had so far spent Ksh.196 billion on financing free secondary education, since its inception in 2008.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the socio economic composition of students in the public secondary schools in Bungoma County.

1.3 Objective

To determine the student composition by household income in public secondary education in Bungoma County.

1.4 Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between a student's household income level and the level of school fees arrears.

1.5 Justification

Undertaking a study of this kind was justified because of the following: the results of the study would encourage further research in the subsidized public secondary education. The findings would prompt the Ministry of Education to come up with innovative ways of meeting the individual financial needs of the students in the public secondary education.

1.6 Limitation

The study did not use all the public secondary schools, and students from all the classes. This might in one way or another limit generalization of the findings. However, since the sampling units were constituted by applying the random sampling technique, it was possible to obtain data that was representative enough to counter biases that are associated with the size of a sample.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations

For the purpose of manageability, the study was delimited in the following ways:

1. The study used data from the public secondary schools that were in existence before introduction of free secondary education in 2008.
2. Data on the socio-economic status of students in the public secondary schools in the County was collected specifically from the form one cohort of 2012 (the form four class of 2015). This cohort represents the group of students, who sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination in 2015.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

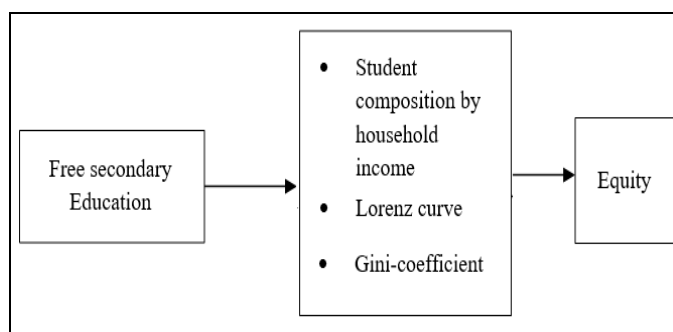


Fig 1: A conceptual framework showing the relationship between free secondary education and equity

According to figure 1, free secondary education was the independent variable, while equity was the dependent variable. Before the introduction of the subsidy in 2008, public secondary education was provided at the market rates; consequently, only those students who were able to pay for their educational costs enrolled at this level of education, thus raising issues of equity in the public secondary education sector. In this study the level of equity in education was measured through the following indicators; student composition by household incomes, quintile income share distributions, the Lorenz curve and the gini-coefficient. According to the findings of this study, the student composition in the public secondary schools by household incomes was as follows: poor income 1.6%, low income 33.6%, middle income 46.9%, middle upper income 15.5%, and the upper income 2.4%. This revealed that majority of the students in public secondary schools were from the low and middle income households, while those from the poor income households were the least represented at this level of education.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study used the descriptive survey research design. In a survey design, inferences are made about a large group of people, by collecting data from a relatively small number of individuals from the group. Allan (2001) observes that, a survey is a well-organized and reliable observation of what is going on in the world, and can be used to show the status, compare the different situations and identify the relationships between the variables. According to Kothari (2004) [9], in a survey the researcher does not manipulate the variable or arrange for such events to happen. That is to say, surveys are only concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, and the effects that are evident or the trends that are developing.

2.2 Locale

Bungoma County is one of the four Counties in the former Western Province of Kenya, and it occupies a total surface area of 3,032.4 Km². The County lies between latitude 00 28' and latitude 10 30' North of the Equator, and longitude 340 20' East and 350 15' East of the Greenwich Meridian. It borders the Republic of Uganda to the North West, Trans Nzoia County to the North East, Kakamega County to the East and South East, and Busia County to the West and South West (County Government of Bungoma, 2014).

The County had a total population of 1,378,224 persons (Male 673,133, Female 705,091) according to the Population and Housing Census Report of 2009 (KNBS, 2009). The population projection for 2015 at a growth rate of 3.1% gives the County a population of 1,655,281 (Male 808,449, Female 846,832). According to the County Government of Bungoma (CJOB, 2013), approximately 78.3% percent of the foregoing population lives in the rural area. In addition, the County has 275 public secondary schools with an eligible school age population of 150,738 children for this level. Although 72.8% of the population has primary education, only 11.0% of the population has secondary level of education (CJOB, 2013). This implied that there was need for more residents of the

county to access secondary education.

2.3 Study Population

The study population comprised of all the 115 public secondary schools that were in existence in the County before the introduction of free secondary education in 2008, and the 14,875 KCSE candidates in the year 2015. See table 1.

2.4 Sample Size

The sample sizes for the different categories of the population as shown in table 1 were determined on the basis of the sample determination formula as provided by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). The foregoing guidelines are based on the following formula:

$$1. \quad s = \chi^2 NP (1-P) \div d^2 (N-1) + \chi^2 P (1-P)$$

Where:

s = Sample size

χ^2 = The table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom for the desired confidence level

N= The population size

P = Population proportion (assumed to be 0.50)

d = The degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

Table 1: Population and sample of the study

Category	Population	Sample
Public Secondary Schools	115	90
Students	14,875	375

Source: County Education Office (2015)

2.5 Sampling procedure

This study used the simple random sampling, proportional and purposive sampling techniques to select the sampling units. First and foremost, the sampling frame for the 115 public secondary schools in the County was developed to facilitate the use of the simple random sampling technique to select the primary sample of 90 public secondary schools. Consequently, the proportional sampling and the simple random sampling techniques was applied to constitute the student sample from each of the selected schools. The proportional sampling technique was used to determine the student sample size for each of the 90 selected schools.

2.6 Research Instrument

This study used a questionnaire set to obtain data from students concerning their socio-economic status. The questionnaire was preferred for collecting data from students because, they are convenient to use when handling a large group of respondents (Kothari, 2004) [9]. This instrument had open and closed items that were divided into three sections. The first section had three items that elicited data on the students' demographic characteristics. The second section had eight items that collected information on the socio-economic status of the student. The third and last section of this instrument had four items that collected information on the fees payment ability of a student.

2.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

The raw data was appropriately coded, tabulated and subjected to analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were

used to analyze the data. In order to analyze objective one, the data on the socio-economic status of students was translated into income scores, which were then used to classify students into five different household income levels, namely; poor income, low income, middle income, middle upper income and the upper income.

The total income score was used as a proxy for income. Besides grouping students into household income levels, the total household income scores were also used to divide students into five equal income distribution levels called quintiles. The quintiles also gave a measure of equality in student enrolment in the public secondary schools in the County. The quintile distributions were used to draw the Lorenz curve, whose dimensions were used to calculate the Gini-coefficient for the student composition in the public secondary schools, on the basis of the household income levels. The Lorenz curve and the Gini-coefficient are the

measures that were used to reveal the level of equity in student enrolment in the public secondary schools in the County. For the purpose of analyzing the null hypothesis, a cross table was drawn and the chi-square technique was applied to determine the relationship between a student’s household income level and the level of school fees arrears.

3. Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings and discussions for the study.

3.1 Student composition in public secondary schools by household incomes.

The analysis involved grouping students into household income levels, household income quintiles, drawing the Lorenz curve and calculation of the Gini coefficient. Details of the analyses are as shown and stated below:

Table 2: Student composition by household income levels in the County

Household income	Number of students	Percent
Poor income	6	1.6
Low income	126	33.6
Middle income	176	46.9
Middle upper income	58	15.5
Upper income	9	2.4
Total	375	100.0

Source: Field data

According to table 2, only 1.6% of the 2015 KCSE candidates in the public secondary schools in the County were from the poor income households. These findings imply that the very poor were still under represented at the secondary level of education, given that 52.17 % of the Bungoma County population was considered to be living in absolute poverty (CJOB, 2013).

The low student enrollment from this socio economic class could be attributed to the fact that although tuition is paid by the state, there are many other educational costs that are still paid by households. As a matter of fact, these other costs can be quite a hindrance to the education of children from poor households. According to the findings of the current study, majority (80.5%) of the students were from both the middle income households (46.9%) and the low income socio-

economic class (33.6%). The high enrollment of students from these two socio economic classes implied that the tuition waiver must have provided some form of financial relief to the middle and low-income households with regard to financing of secondary education.

Besides the foregoing information, it was also revealed that a mere 2.4% of the student enrolment was from the upper income class. This low percentage can be attributed to the fact that, generally the rich (upper income households) constitute a very small proportion of the population in the County and Kenya as a whole. Consequently, the low student enrollment from the upper income households should not be perceived to be under representation or inequality by this income class at the secondary school level. Further analyses of student composition by household income are displayed in table 3.

Table 3: Students’ household incomes by quintiles

Quintile	Cumulative % Student Enrolment	Percent of Income	Cumulative % Household Income Distribution	Cumulative % Perfect Household Income Distribution
I	20	13.09	13.09	20
II	40	16.99	30.08	40
III	60	19.52	49.6	60
IV	80	22.66	72.26	80
V	100	27.74	100.00	100

Source: Field data

Table 3, revealed that students from the first three quintiles were from households that owned 49.6% of the total household income. This was, however, less than what they rightly deserved (60%) by a margin of 10.4%. On the other hand, students from the fourth and fifth quintiles were from households that owned 50.4% of the total household income.

These households in the two richest quintiles owned more than what they rightly deserved (perfect income distribution) by 10.4%. The deviations from the ideal or perfect income distribution implied that some level of inequality existed in the student composition by household income in public secondary schools.

Despite the existence of some form of inequality, the findings of this study showed a marked improvement in student composition by household income when compared to the findings of a ministry of education taskforce report for a study conducted before the tuition waiver was introduced (MOE, 2008). According to the taskforce report, 4% of the secondary school students were drawn from the 1st quintile, 7.3% from the 2nd quintile, 11.4% from the 3rd quintile, 16.2% from the 4th quintile, while 28.2% come from the 5th quintile. A comparison between the two studies showed that the waiver helped a great deal to enhance student enrolment in the first four quintiles, except the fifth quintile. The improved enrolment could be attributed to the reduction in the education cost borne by households after the free secondary education was introduced. The findings of this study were in tandem with the position that was taken by Ohba (2009) [13]. After he conducted a study in a group of more than 20 district schools in Kenya. Ohba observed that the tuition waiver reduced the cost of schooling by 58% during the first year of inception. And according to him, when the cost of education falls, the low income households are naturally enabled to enroll their children in school.

According to table 3, free secondary education did not have much effect on the student enrolment in the fifth quintile. In fact, there was a slight drop in enrolment from 28.2% to 27.92, when the findings of this study were compared with the

2008 report of the ministry of education taskforce report. The findings of the current study implied that students from the well to do households do not require government support to enroll in school. This is because they have the ability to pay for their own education. Consequently, awarding them the tuition waiver did not change much as far as their enrolment in public secondary school education was concerned.

3.1.1 Lorenz Curve

The Lorenz curve (sagging curve) was drawn so as to diagrammatically show the student composition in the public secondary schools in the County by their household income levels. The horizontal axis showed the student enrolment by cumulative percentages, while the vertical axis showed the cumulative percentage of the students' household incomes. Percentages on both axes were cumulative up to 100%. The household income data from table 3 was used to draw the Lorenz curve in figure 2. The diagonal line (line of perfect equality) was drawn from the lower left hand corner (origin) to the upper right hand corner. At every point on the diagonal, the percentage of enrolled students is exactly equal to their household percentage income. The Lorenz curve mirrored the actual or the existing level of resource distribution among the households. Any sagging by the Lorenz curve from the line of perfect equality implied some level of inequality.

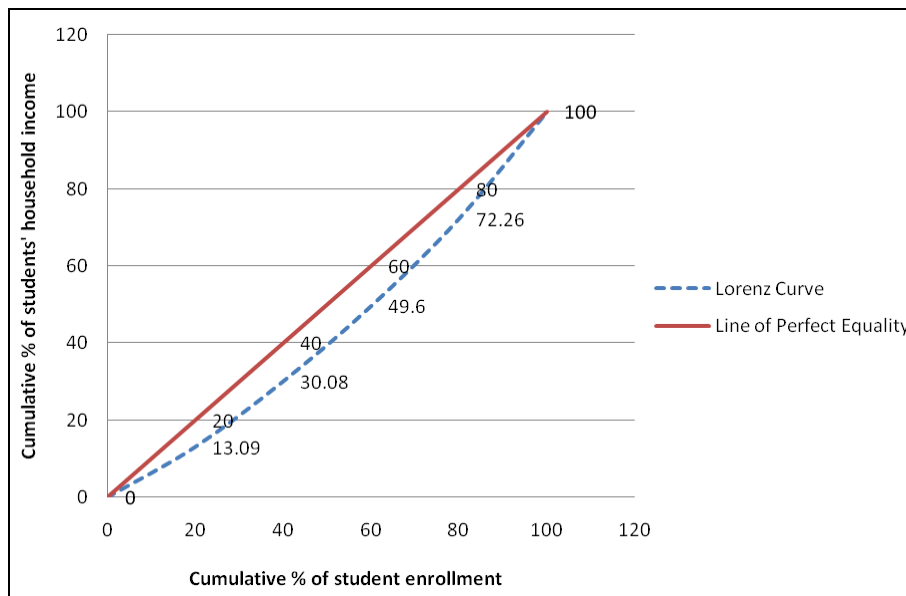


Fig 1: Lorenz curve of the 2015 KCSE candidates by household income in Bungoma County

The Lorenz curve in figure 2, showed the household income distribution that existed among the 2015 KCSE candidates in the public secondary schools in the County. According to this curve, the first cumulative 60% of the student population in the public secondary schools was from households whose income share was about 49.6 % of the total household income in the County. In addition, the last cumulative 40% of the student population was from the households that owned about 50.4% of the total income share. The foregoing income distributions implied that, the first cumulative 60% of the students were from households that owned less than what they

deserved by 10.4%, while the last cumulative 40% were from households that owned more than what they deserved by 10.4%. The Lorenz curve demonstrated the magnitude of deviations by household incomes from the perfect state of distribution, by sagging away from the line of perfect equality. In this study, the curve did not sag much from the diagonal line, implying that the student composition by household incomes in the public secondary schools in Bungoma County was only but slightly inequitable. However, the exact measure of inequality was determined by calculating the Gini coefficient.

3.1.2 Gini Coefficient

The gini coefficient is an aggregate measure of inequality and it varies from 0.0 (perfect equality) to 1.0 (perfect inequality). In this study, the coefficient was determined by calculating the ratio of the “area” between the diagonal and the Lorenz curve (C) as compared to the total area of the half square (A) in which the curve laid. The steps that were followed to calculate the gini coefficient were determined by using the general formula for establishing the area of a trapezium, which is given as; $Area = 1/2(b_1+b_2)*0.2$.

1. Total area below the line of equality (A)
 $= 1/2*(0+20)*0.2 + 1/2*(20+40)*0.2 + 1/2*(40+60)*0.2 + 1/2*(60+80)*0.2 + 1/2*(80+100)*0.2 = 50.00$
2. Area under the Lorenz curve (B)
 $= 1/2*(0+13.09)*0.2 + 1/2*(13.09+30.08)*0.2 + 1/2*(30.08+49.6)*0.2 + 1/2*(49.6+72.26)*0.2 + 1/2*(72.26+100)*0.2 = 43.08$
3. Area between line of equality and area under the Lorenz curve (C)
 $= A - B = 50.00 - 43.078 = 6.922$

4. Gini coefficient = Ratio C/A = $6.922/50.00 = 0.138$ or 14%

After doing the calculations as shown above, the gini coefficient was found to be 0.14 or a gini index of 14%. This coefficient or index implied that the student composition by household income in the public secondary schools in the county deviated from the line of perfect distribution by a margin of 14%. This meant that the student distribution by household income levels in public secondary schools in the County was inequitable by a small proportion of 14%.

3.2 The relationship between a student’s household income level and the level of school fees arrears.

In order to establish the relationship between the two parameters, a cross tabulation table showing the students’ school fees arrears by household income was drawn. In addition, a chi-square analysis was carried out to determine the relationship between the two parameters. Details of the analyses are as shown and stated below in table 4:

Table 4: Distribution of the 2015 KCSE candidates by household incomes and fees balances

School Fees Balance(KSH) Income level	Very low 0 – 5000	Low 5001-15000	Moderate 15001- 25000	High 25001-40000	Very High 40000 <	Total
Poor	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	42.9%	14.3%	100.0%
Low	36.0%	24.8%	21.6%	12.8%	4.8%	100.0%
Middle	51.9%	24.1%	13.4%	7.5%	3.2%	100.0%
Middle Upper	81.5%	13.0%	1.9%	3.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Upper	91.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	100.0%

Source: Field data

Table 4 shows the relationship that existed between the household income level of a student and the school fees balance. According to this table, 57.2% of the students from poor income households had school fees balances of above Ksh.25,000/=. These fees balances were in the range of what was categorized as high to very high. On the contrary, only 10.7% of the middle income, 3.7% of the middle upper income and 8.3% of the upper income households had school fees balances in the range of above Ksh.25,000/=. When only 14.3% of the students from poor income households had school fees of Ksh.5000/= and below (very low balances), the proportion of students with similar balances from the other

income levels were much higher. For example, 91.7% of the students from the upper income households, 81.5% from the middle upper income households, 51.9% from middle income and 36.0% from low income households had school fees balances of between Ksh.0 to 5000/=. This implied that, while students from the other income levels were finding it relatively easy to pay fees, majority of the students from the poor income households were struggling to settle their school fees obligations, despite benefitting from the tuition waiver. Further to these findings, a correlation test was done to determine the relationship between the household income and the level of school fees balance. Details are shown in table 5.

Table 5: The correlation between a student’s household income and the level of fees balance

	Value	DF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	58.624a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	63.192	16	.000
N of Valid Cases	375		

Source: SPSS cross table descriptive analysis

According to table 5, there was a very significant Pearson Chi-Square correlation between a student’s household income level and the school fees balance. This implied that the amount of school fees balance that a student had, was very much dependent on the level of income of the household. Consequently, students from lower income households generally had higher school fees arrears, while those from higher income households had lower school fees balances.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the results that were obtained, the following conclusions were drawn: Going by the socio economic data obtained from the 2015 KCSE candidates, it was concluded that students from the middle and low income households were the ones who were benefitting most from the free secondary education, while those from the poor income households were benefitting the least. Secondly, the amount of

the tuition waiver that the government was awarding to students was not adequate for the educational needs of a majority of the students; this is because most of the students still had school fees arrears even in the last academic term of their fourth and final grade of secondary school education.

5. Acknowledgements

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