Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to access how factors in social inequality impact on learning process among primary school children in Athi-River district. The objectives of the study were three fold, namely i) to identify types of social inequality and challenge,ii) document access to education by primary school pupils and iii) determine the state of retention of learners in schools. The study was premised on the Reference Theory by Matron (1936) which stipulates that people often identify with social and cultural group to which they belong. A descriptive survey design was adopted to guide the study. A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques were applied to select 256 subjects comprising of 48 parents, 72 teachers, 120 pupils and 2 quality assurance and standards officers (QASOs) to participate in the study. Questionnaires for teachers and pupils, focused group discussion for parents and interview guidelines for QASOs were the main research instruments used to collect data. The major findings were that poverty, family background (orphans) poor infrastructure, poor pupil-teacher ratio, level of parental education and poor housing were the major social inequality factors in the community. It was also evident that although accessibility to school was good, the schools were not enough for all school-age going children. The conclusion was that the negative impacts of social inequality on education of pupils include poor academic performance, lateness to school, dropping out of school, early marriages, early employment and drug abuse. The study recommended that employing more teachers, improving school feeding programs and infrastructure were some of the measures meant to reduce the negative impacts of social inequality in schooling in the study locale of Athi-River District, Machakos County, Kenya.